



Facts about Deaf-Blind People

General Information

- The term “deaf-blind” refers to people with both hearing and vision loss.
- Deaf-blind people vary widely in the degree and type of vision and hearing loss they experience.
- People can become deaf-blind at any age, from birth to the end of life. Causes include illness, injury and family genetics.
- Deaf-blind people experience far greater adverse consequences than people with hearing loss only or vision loss only.
- Among the greatest difficulties deaf-blind people face are those related to communication and mobility; communication barriers in particular can lead to a profound sense of isolation and loneliness.

Facts about Deaf-Blind People

- Deaf-blind people can and do hold responsible jobs in challenging fields, but job opportunities remain limited. Many areas of employment are limited to deaf-blind people due to attitudinal barriers and the low expectations of employers.

Communication

- Deaf-blind people use a variety of communication methods, depending on the *age of onset, degree and type of hearing and vision loss and the communication environment.*
- Blind people who lose hearing after they have learned to speak may be able to continue to express themselves through speech, but often they must learn a new mode for receiving language.



Facts about Deaf-Blind People

- Deaf people who lose vision after learning American Sign Language can continue to express themselves through signing but must learn to receive sign language tactilely or in a modified form.
- Other methods of communication used by deaf-blind people include reading and writing in Braille, large print, and/or print-on-palm method (tracing the shapes of letters in a deaf-blind person's palm).
- Assistive technology allows deaf-blind people to use computers/telephones and to converse with people unfamiliar with more specialized methods of communication.
- Interpreting services can greatly expand deaf-blind people's access to social, recreational, educational, and cultural events, as well as community services such as counseling, medical care, and vocational training.

Facts about Deaf-Blind People

Mobility

- Deaf-blind people can increase their mobility through training in the use of canes for walking, special transportation services, guide dogs, and sight guide services if those services are available in the community.
- Transportation services provide deaf-blind people with a vital link to activities and services in their communities.
- With assistance, many deaf-blind people are able to use taxis, public transportation *such as taxis*, airplanes, and trains.

Interacting with Deaf-Blind People

- To get a deaf-blind person's attention, gently touch the person on the arm or shoulder, wait to be acknowledged, and identify yourself, do not assume that a deaf-blind person knows who you are.



Facts about Deaf-Blind People

- Learn to use whatever means of communication the deaf-blind person prefers. If you know another method that might be helpful, share that information.
- Express yourself in a natural way; softening or exaggerating your gestures may result in confusion.
- Express yourself clearly and make sure that your message is understood. Summarizing important points at the end of a conversation is often helpful.
- Always inform the deaf-blind person of your whereabouts. Also, let the deaf-blind person know if you intend to leave the immediate area.
- If others are present, let the deaf-blind person know their locations. Inform him or her of opportunities to enter the conversation without interrupting others.

Facts about Deaf-Blind People

- If you move an object (a glass of water, a chair) in the immediate environment, let the deaf-blind person know. Such information can prevent accidents and reduce confusion.
- When walking with a deaf-blind person, offer your elbow or shoulder as a guide. Hold your guiding arm close to your side to provide a stable area of contact and walk slightly ahead of the deaf-blind person. Pause slightly to indicate that you have arrived at stairs or a curb.
- You can learn more about interpreting and guiding by seeking the suggestions of deaf-blind people, observing their reactions in various situations, and consulting books on these subjects.

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