DeafBlind Central: Michigan’s Training and Resource Project

Distance Mentorship:
A Bridge to Better Collaboration

Using technology to improve supports for people who are DeafBlind

Our consultants are offering support via distance technologies to select teams working with individuals who are DeafBlind (0-21). This unique approach will afford teams the opportunity to increase their competency and implement promising practices with the support of experienced, trained professionals at no cost.

- Even the best teachers can be unprepared to instruct children who are DeafBlind, as they often present unique challenges for service providers and family.
- In these situations, service providers benefit from access to experienced practitioners who can help them understand the disability and suggest pragmatic strategies to address individualized needs.
- Technology allows us the ability to provide ongoing, responsive, and targeted consultation beyond traditional on-site visits.
- Research has shown that communication via interactive videoconferencing can increase the likelihood that knowledge will transfer to the settings in which it will be relevant. It creates new learning opportunities and increases communication between consultants and teachers.

Overview

- DB Central specialists provide consultation, with occasional help from external consultants who have expertise in the field.
- Teams participating in distance mentorship must at least include the person’s primary teacher, parent/guardian, and an administrator. Ideally, all active members of a student’s team will participate. Each team will appoint a contact person for purposes of communication and consistency.
- Distance mentorship typically begins with an on-site visit to meet the team to: establish expectations, assess technology and training needs, and gather permissions and consent.
- Local teams agree to collect video of child interactions in his/her customary environments and share this with the consultants. Outcomes are selected in advance and measured over time.
- A confidential wiki site serves as an electronic repository for the team to post video samples, pictures, action plans, best-practice resources, and a discussion forum.

Benefits

- Teachers and teams of professionals receive timely assistance and immediate feedback on suggested best-practice interventions.
- Interactivity between the consultants and providers is markedly increased.
- Children, service providers, and families build their own capacity to improve child outcomes.
- Teams build an electronic portfolio that can assist in transitions, document progress, and demonstrate child competency.
- Providers learn new skills and strategies that can be generalized to other populations/settings.

Contact DB Central

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(Interactive Videoconferencing as a Medium for Special Education: Knowledge Acquisition in PreService Teacher Education; Angie Dal Bello, Earle Knowlton, Jerry Chaffin; Intervention in School and Clinic, Vol 43, No. 1, Sept. 2007).

Adapted from: Washington DeafBlind Project