

# Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student With Deaf-Blindness?

## An IEP Team Discussion Guide



If you have questions or comments, please contact:  
National Center on Deaf-Blindness  
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Intervener Services Discussion Guide January 2016

# Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student With Deaf-Blindness? An IEP Team Discussion Guide

## Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this discussion guide is to help IEP teams make informed decisions about whether intervener services are appropriate for a particular student.

## Why Intervener Services May Be Needed

Students who are deaf-blind have absent, partial, or distorted vision and hearing. Deaf-blindness severely limits access to visual and auditory information that forms the basis for learning and communication and creates challenges for educational systems mandated to provide a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. Intervener services are a way to meet the challenge of providing students who are deaf-blind with access to information they are unable to gather via vision and hearing and to help them compensate for the difficulties with communication and concept development that occur as a result of sensory deprivation.

## How the Need for Intervener Services Is Determined

There are currently no accepted or standardized criteria to determine if a student requires intervener services. The decision is highly individualized based on the needs of a particular student as determined by the student's IEP team. This guide should be used within the context of developing a student's IEP. Its specific intent is to determine if intervener services should be provided to a student as part of his or her "related services and supplementary aids and services" [34 CFR 300.320(a)(4)]. IEP teams may find, however, that it also informs broader IEP discussion and planning in a number of areas including: (a) review of evaluation data [CFR 300.324(a)(1)(iii)]; (b) consideration of the communication needs of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing [34 CFR 300.324(a)(2)(iv)]; and (c) present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, particularly related to how deaf-blindness affects the child's "involvement and progress in the general education curriculum" [34 CFR 300.320(a)(1)(i)].

In order to make an informed decision, the team must clearly understand:

1. How the student's deaf-blindness affects his or her access to information, communication, social relationships, and conceptual learning. Combined vision and hearing loss typically substantially limits access in each of these areas.
2. The supports and accommodations needed by the student to obtain access in those areas.

## Before You Begin

Before the IEP team considers whether an intervener is appropriate and needed for a particular student, the team members must:

- have a common understanding of what intervener services are and what interveners do,
- assure that someone on the student's IEP team has expertise in deaf-blindness, and
- assure that appropriate evaluation data, including data by evaluators with expertise in deaf-blindness, are available to the team.

# IEP Team Discussion Guide Flow Chart





## Preliminary Steps

Step 1: Assure that all involved in the discussion and decision-making have a common understanding of what intervener services are and what interveners do.

The following definition is from *Intervener Services and Intervenors in Educational Settings*:<sup>1</sup>

*Intervenors, through the provision of intervener services, provide access to information and communication and facilitate the development of social and emotional well-being for children who are deaf-blind. In educational environments, intervener services are provided by an individual, typically a paraeducator, who has received specialized training in deaf-blindness and the process of intervention. An intervener provides consistent one-to-one support to a student who is deaf-blind (age 3 through 21) throughout the instructional day. While working under the guidance and direction of a student's classroom teacher or another individual responsible for ensuring the implementation of the student's IEP, an intervener's primary roles are to:*

- *provide consistent access to instruction and environmental information that is usually gained by typical students through vision and hearing, but that is unavailable or incomplete to an individual who is deaf-blind;*<sup>2</sup>
- *provide access to and/or assist in the development and use of receptive and expressive communication skills;*<sup>2</sup>
- *facilitate the development and maintenance of trusting, interactive relationships that promote social and emotional well-being;*<sup>2</sup> and
- *provide support to help a student form relationships with others and increase social connections and participation in activities.*

*An intervener does not work in isolation. Instead, he or she:*

- *participates as an active member of the student's educational team,*
- *attends and participates in IEP meetings,*
- *attends regularly scheduled planning and feedback meetings with the teacher and other team members,*
- *is actively supervised and supported by the classroom teacher and other professionals responsible for the child's IEP, and*
- *receives ongoing support from professional educators with expertise in deaf-blindness.*

Step 2: Ensure that the student's IEP team has a member with expertise in the education of students who are deaf-blind.

Due to the low incidence of deaf-blindness, many teachers and related service providers have little to no experience with students who are deaf-blind and a limited understanding of their unique needs. Therefore, the IEP team should include a member with expertise in the education of students who are deaf-blind. If the student's team does not currently include an individual with this specific knowledge or training, your state deaf-blind project may be able to provide or assist you in finding one. You can obtain contact information for your state deaf-blind project at:

<https://nationaldb.org/members/list?type=State+Project>

1. National Center on Deaf-Blindness. (2013). *Intervener services and intervenors in educational settings*. Available at <https://nationaldb.org/library/page/2266>

2. Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2000). *The intervener in early intervention and educational settings for children and youth with deaf-blindness*. Monmouth, OR: Western Oregon University, Teaching Research, National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind. Available at <https://nationaldb.org/library/page/1320>



## Preliminary Steps (Continued)

### Step 3: Review the student's evaluation data.

In order to have a knowledgeable discussion about a student's need for intervener services, the team must have the following information about the student. If it is not available from existing evaluation data, it should be gathered prior to the IEP meeting.

- Use of vision, hearing, and other senses to access information.
- Communication modes and skills.
- Analysis of the student's behavior as a form of communicative intent.
- Concept development and learning needs.
- Learning media and assistive technology needs.
- Daily living skills.
- Orientation and mobility needs.
- Opportunities to interact with others, including family members, peers, and service providers.

Additional information about assessment of children who are deaf-blind can be found at <https://nationaldb.org/library/list/32>

### Using this Discussion Guide

The remainder of this document is organized as a guide for the IEP team to address six specific topics:

1. The student's use of residual vision.
2. The student's use of residual hearing.
3. How the student accesses information.
4. The student's communication modes and needs.
5. The student's social interactions and relationships.
6. The student's understanding of concepts and concept development.

*The first two topics provide an opportunity to discuss the extent (if any) of a student's residual vision and hearing and the supports needed to maximize their use.*

*The remaining four topics address domains for which a student may need intervener services support.*

**Important: Download and save a copy of this form before completing.**



## Use of Residual Vision

**Does the student have residual vision?**

Yes

No

**How do you know this?**

Medical report

Functional vision evaluation

Other:

*(If you answered "no" above, continue to page 7)*

**Describe how he or she uses vision to access information**

Must be very close to objects and people

Must be a specific distance away from objects and people to accommodate for a narrow field of vision

Relies on particular visual fields (describe)

Relies on a combination of visual and tactual input

Other:



## Use of Residual Vision (Continued)

List supports and accommodations the student requires to maximize the use of vision (e.g., vision devices, alternative materials) and who is responsible for their use or delivery.

<i>Type of Support or Accommodation</i>	<i>Personnel Responsible</i>
Vision Devices (describe, e.g., eyeglasses, magnifier):	
Alternative Materials (describe, e.g., larger print, slant board):	
Environmental Accommodations (describe, e.g., preferential seating, supplemental light):	
Other:	



## Use of Residual Hearing

**Does the student have residual hearing?**

Yes

No

**How do you know this?**

Medical report

Functional hearing evaluation

Other:

*(If you answered "no" above, continue to page 9)*

**Describe how he or she uses vision to access information**

Requires other sensory input to make sense of auditory information

Must be very close to people and sound sources

Hears best when background noise is minimized

Other:





## Use of Residual Hearing (Continued)

List supports and accommodations the student requires to maximize the use of hearing and who is responsible for their use or delivery.

<i>Type of Support or Accommodation</i>	<i>Personnel Responsible</i>
Hearing Devices (describe, e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM system):	
Environmental Accommodations (describe, e.g., preferential seating, reduced background noise):	
Other:	



## Access to Information

The left-hand column lists characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each of these characteristics carefully and check those that apply to your student. In the right-hand column, for each checked item, describe the supports and accommodations the student requires and who is responsible for their delivery.

### *Student Characteristics*

### *Supports and Accommodations and Personnel Responsible*

Relies on close vision and/or hearing to obtain information	
Relies on touch to obtain information	
Requires support to locate and understand items in the environment	
Requires support when moving within environments	

Examples of these supports may include but are not limited to:

- Close-up instruction
- Tactile Learning
- Access to information presented during group instruction
- Assistance anticipating upcoming activities
- Assistance transitioning from one activity to another
- Orientation to and exploration of the environment



## Access to Information (Continued)

The left-hand column lists characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each of these characteristics carefully and check those that apply to your student. In the right-hand column, for each checked item, describe the supports and accommodations the student requires and who is responsible for their delivery.

### *Student Characteristics*

### *Supports and Accommodations and Personnel Responsible*

Requires support to know what will happen next	
Requires support to participate in group instruction	
Requires support to transition between activities (this refers to the cognitive and emotional aspects of transitions as well as physical support)	
Requires support to explore and understand his or her surroundings	

Examples of these supports may include but are not limited to:

- Close-up instruction
- Tactile Learning
- Access to information presented during group instruction
- Assistance anticipating upcoming activities
- Assistance transitioning from one activity to another
- Orientation to and exploration of the environment



## Access to Information (Continued)

### Summarize Your Responses

With your responses to the questions about student characteristics and required supports in mind, discuss the following questions:

Yes      No      Are current supports meeting the student's needs for appropriate access to information?

Yes      No      Do current personnel have the specialized skills needed to provide what the student requires? If not, is an intervener needed to deliver the supports? If the team decides an intervener is not needed, a plan to provide appropriate access to information should be specified.

### Documentation

List the sources of information that helped you respond to the questions above (e.g., specific evaluation reports, staff or family knowledge).



## Access to Communication

The left-hand column lists characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each of these characteristics carefully and check those that apply to your student. In the right-hand column, for each checked item, describe the supports and accommodations the student requires and who is responsible for their delivery.

<i>Student Characteristics</i>	<i>Supports and Accommodations and Personnel Responsible</i>
Uses sign language or signed communication	
Uses <i>tactile</i> sign language or signed communication	
Uses other tactile communication methods (e.g., informal touch systems, touch cues, tactile symbols, object cues)	
Requires a slow pace of communication	
Requires support to get someone's attention	

Examples of these supports may include but are not limited to:

- Instruction in the student's preferred mode of communication
- Facilitation of direct communication between the student and others (including peers)
- Ensuring that supplemental communication aids are functioning and being used
- Hand under hand instructional techniques
- Consistent use of communication systems
- Calendar systems
- Consistent use of supplemental communication aids
- Altered pacing of instructional and other activities
- Providing extended time for the student to respond
- Multiple communication partners proficient in primary communication mode



## Access to Communication (Continued)

The left-hand column lists characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each of these characteristics carefully and check those that apply to your student. In the right-hand column, for each checked item, describe the supports and accommodations the student requires and who is responsible for their delivery.

<i>Student Characteristics</i>	<i>Supports and Accommodations and Personnel Responsible</i>
Requires support to express needs	
Requires support to make requests	
Requires support to understand what others are communicating	
Requires support to understand curricular content	
Requires others to be in close proximity to communicate	

Examples of these supports may include but are not limited to:

- Instruction in the student's preferred mode of communication
- Facilitation of direct communication between the student and others (including peers)
- Ensuring that supplemental communication aids are functioning and being used
- Hand under hand instructional techniques
- Consistent use of communication systems
- Calendar systems
- Consistent use of supplemental communication aids
- Altered pacing of instructional and other activities
- Providing extended time for the student to respond
- Multiple communication partners proficient in primary communication mode



## Access to Communication (Continued)

### Summarize Your Responses

With your responses to the questions about student characteristics and required supports in mind, discuss the following questions:

Yes      No      Are current supports meeting the student's needs for appropriate access to communication?

Yes      No      Do current personnel have the specialized skills needed to provide what the student requires? If not, is an intervener needed to deliver the supports? If the team decides an intervener is not needed, a plan to provide appropriate access to communication should be specified.

### Documentation

List the sources of information that helped you respond to the questions above (e.g., specific evaluation reports, staff or family knowledge).



## Access to Trusting Relationships and Social Interactions

The left-hand column lists characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each of these characteristics carefully and check those that apply to your student. In the right-hand column, for each checked item, describe the supports and accommodations the student requires and who is responsible for their delivery.

### *Student Characteristics*

### *Supports and Accommodations and Personnel Responsible*

Needs support to interact with peers (this includes providing information and support to peers)	
Often expresses emotions in socially inappropriate ways	
Has difficulty establishing trusting relationships with educators and peers	
Becomes frustrated or confused when interacting with educators and peers	

Examples of these supports may include but are not limited to:

- Functional analysis of communicative intent and perceived inappropriate behavior
- Formal or informal social skills training
- Teaching initiation and interaction strategies to peers and staff
- Facilitating social interactions with staff and peers using the student's primary modes of communication
- Assistance locating and identifying staff members and peers
- Assistance orienting to new people
- Provision of additional information when transitioning between individuals and activities





## Access to Trusting Relationships and Social Interactions (Continued)

### Summarize Your Responses

With your responses to the questions about student characteristics and required supports in mind, discuss the following questions:

Yes      No      Are current supports meeting the student's needs for appropriate access to relationships?

Yes      No      Do current personnel have the specialized skills needed to provide what the student requires? If not, is an intervener needed to deliver the supports? If the team decides an intervener is not needed, a plan to provide appropriate access to relationships should be specified.

### Documentation

List the sources of information that helped you respond to the questions above (e.g., specific evaluation reports, staff or family knowledge).



## Access to Conceptual Learning

The left-hand column lists characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each of these characteristics carefully and check those that apply to your student. In the right-hand column, for each checked item, describe the supports and accommodations the student requires and who is responsible for their delivery.

<i>Student Characteristics</i>	<i>Supports and Accommodations and Personnel Responsible</i>
Does not understand concepts used in instruction or conversation (e.g., up, down, over, below, stop, go)	
Does not understand concepts used in grade-level standards work	
Lacks understanding of the concepts of time (minute, hour, month, year, today, tomorrow)	
Lacks understanding of concepts associated with objects (e.g., function, use)	
Does not understand concepts used in daily routines	

Examples of these supports may include but are not limited to:

- Pre-teaching, review, and repetition
- Hands-on experiences to build concepts
- Direct and incidental teaching
- Generalization training
- Activity-based instruction
- Meaningful and relevant activities
- Attaching language to all experiences



## Access to Conceptual Learning (Continued)

### Summarize Your Responses

With your responses to the questions about student characteristics and required supports in mind, discuss the following questions:

Yes      No      Are current supports meeting the student's needs for appropriate access to conceptual learning?

Yes      No      Do current personnel have the specialized skills needed to provide what the student requires? If not, is an intervener needed to deliver the supports? If the team decides an intervener is not needed, a plan to provide appropriate access to conceptual learning should be specified.

### Documentation

List the sources of information that helped you respond to the questions above (e.g., specific evaluation reports, staff or family knowledge).



## Final Steps

### Putting It All Together

The information generated by the discussion above should inform the team's development of the statement of “special education and related services and supplementary aids and services” required as part of the student’s IEP. **On the next page, you will record your conclusions.** As you summarize what you have learned from the preceding discussion and make a determination about the student’s need for intervener services, consider the following questions.

1. Are current supports and accommodations sufficient to provide appropriate access in all of the areas above—information, communication, trusting relationships/social interactions, and conceptual learning?
2. Do current personnel have the knowledge and skills needed to consistently deliver those supports and accommodations?
3. Are the supports, accommodations, and associated personnel adequate for access across all school environments?
4. Is the current system for providing supports, accommodations, and associated personnel sustainable for the school year?
5. Finally, as you determine the related services and supplementary aids and services that will be provided to the child, consider whether intervener services are appropriate in order to enable the child to meet the following requirements as specified in 34 CFR 300.320(a)(4):
  - To advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals;
  - To be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum . . . and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and
  - To be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children.



## Final Steps (Continued)

### Team Conclusions

The team has determined that the student's deaf-blindness affects his or her access to information, communication, trust and social relationships, and/or concept development in the following ways:

Based on discussion, the team has determined that the student needs the following supports and adaptations:

Is an intervener recommended to provide the identified supports and accommodations?  
(If yes, describe the rationale and include information about this decision on the student's IEP. If no, describe why.)

## Guide Development Process

This guide was developed from draft and internal documents on determining the need for an intervener that were developed by the following state deaf-blind projects:

- Texas Deafblind Project (primary source)
- Utah Deaf-Blind Project
- DB Central: Michigan's Training & Resource Project
- Georgia Sensory Assistance Project
- Arizona Deafblind Project

We also reviewed the following manual and structured the present guide to align with its categories of access related to information, communication, and social and emotional well-being: Alsop, L., Berg, C., Hartman, V., Knapp, M., Lauger, K., Levasseur, C., Prouty, M., & Prouty, S. (2012). *A Family's Guide to Interveners for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss*. Logan, UT: SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University. Available at <http://intervener.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/A-Familys-Guide-to-Interveners.pdf>

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### **Evaluation**

If you would like to provide feedback after using the guide, please go to this survey: [www.surveymzmo.com/s3/1950701/IEP-Guidelines-Evaluation](http://www.surveymzmo.com/s3/1950701/IEP-Guidelines-Evaluation)  
Your input will help us improve future versions.