

Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student Who Is Deafblind?

An IEP Team Discussion Guide



**National Center
on Deafblindness**

Introduction

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 deafblind have absent, partial, or distorted vision and hearing. Deafblindness 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 deafblind with access to information they are unable to gather via vision and hearing and to support their communication and concept development.

How the Need for Intervener Services Is Determined

There are currently no nationally 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 their "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 deafblindness affects the child's "involvement and progress in the general education curriculum" [34 CFR 300.320(a)(1)(i)].

To make an informed decision, the team must clearly understand

1. How the student's deafblindness affects their 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
- Ensure that someone on the student's IEP team has expertise in deafblindness
- Ensure that appropriate evaluation data, including data by evaluators with expertise in deafblindness, are available to the team

Order of Topics for IEP Team Discussion

PRELIMINARY STEPS:

1. Understand what an intervener does
2. Identify team member with deafblind expertise
3. Review student evaluation data



Use of
Residual
Vision



Use of
Residual
Hearing



Access to
Information



Access to
Communication



Access to
Trusting
Relationships
and Social
Interactions



Access to
Conceptual
Learning

FINAL STEPS:

1. Summarize discussion
2. Make decision
3. Record rationale



Preliminary Steps

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

The following is from *Intervener Services and Intervenors in Educational Settings: Definition* (National Center on Deafblindness, 2021):

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 deafblind. In educational environments, intervener services are provided by an individual, typically a paraeducator, who has received specialized training in deafblindness and the process of intervention. An intervener provides consistent one-to-one support to a student who is deafblind (age 3 through 21 or as mandated by state regulations) throughout the instructional day. Working under the 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 usually gained by students through vision and hearing but unavailable or incomplete to an individual who is deafblind
- Facilitate concept development
- Provide access to and/or assist in the development and use of receptive and expressive communication skills
- Facilitate the development and maintenance of trusting, interactive relationships that promote social and emotional well-being
- Provide support to form relationships with others and increase social connections and participation in activities

An intervener does not work in isolation. Instead they

- Participate as an active member of the student's educational team
- Participate in IEP meetings
- Attend regularly scheduled planning and feedback meetings with the student's teacher and other team members
- Are actively supervised and supported by the classroom teacher and other professionals responsible for a student's IEP
- Receive ongoing support from professional educators with expertise in deafblindness

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

Due to the low incidence of deafblindness, many teachers and related service providers have little to no experience with students who are deafblind 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 deafblind. If the student's team does not currently include an individual with this specific knowledge or training, your [state deafblind project](#) may be able to provide or assist you in finding one.



Preliminary Steps (Continued)

Step 3:

Review the student's evaluation data.

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

[Learn more about assessment](#)

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.

IMPORTANT:

Download and save a copy of this form before completing it.



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 the student 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.

Type of Support or Accommodation

Personnel Responsible

Vision Devices (e.g., eyeglasses, magnifier)	
Alternative Materials (e.g., large print, slant board)	
Environmental Accommodations (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 the student uses hearing 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.

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



Access to Information

List characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each carefully and check those that apply to your student.

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 <i>within</i> environments	

Examples of 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)

List characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each carefully and check those that apply to your student.

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 <i>between</i> 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 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 (summarize your discussion in the space provided).

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 input, family knowledge).



Access to Communication

List characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each carefully and check those that apply to your student.

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

Uses sign language or signed communication	
Uses tactile 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 supports may include but are not limited to

- Instruction in the student's preferred modes 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
- Consistent use of calendar systems
- Consistent use of supplemental communication aids
- Altered pacing of instructional and other activities
- Extended time for the student to respond
- Multiple communication partners proficient in the student's preferred communication modes



Access to Communication (Continued)

List characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each carefully and check those that apply to your student.

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 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 supports may include but are not limited to

- Instruction in the student's preferred modes 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
- Consistent use of calendar systems
- Consistent use of supplemental communication aids
- Altered pacing of instructional and other activities
- Extended time for the student to respond
- Multiple communication partners proficient in the student's preferred communication modes



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 (summarize your discussion in the space provided).

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 input, family knowledge).



Access to Trusting Relationships and Social Interactions

List characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each carefully and check those that apply to your student.

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 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 preferred 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 (summarize your discussion in the space provided).

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 input, family knowledge).



Access to Conceptual Learning

List characteristics a student may have as a result of combined vision and hearing loss. Read each carefully and check those that apply to your student.

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

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 activities	
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 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 (summarize your discussion in the space provided).

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 input, 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 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 educational 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 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
 - 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 deafblindness affects his or her access to information, communication, trust and social relationships, and/or concept development in the following ways:

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 not, 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 deafblind projects:

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

We also reviewed *A Family’s Guide to Interveners for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss* (Alsop, et al., 2012) and structured the present guide to align with its categories of access related to information, communication, and social and emotional well-being.

2023 update: This guide was initially published in 2016. In 2023, the definition at the beginning of the guide was updated, minor changes were made to wording throughout the document, and it was redesigned.

References

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*. SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University.

National Center on Deafblindness. (2021). *Intervener services and interveners in educational settings: Definition*.

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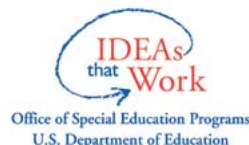
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