APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

NCDB Practice Guide

NCDB Practice Guides outline the essential components of instructional practices commonly used with children who are deaf-blind. For more information on assessment, go to nationaldb.org.

National Center on Deaf-Blindness

IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

Children and youth with deaf-blindness are a highly diverse population. They have different types and severities of visual impairments and hearing losses and different levels of communication, ranging from presymbolic to language fluency. Many have additional disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, and some have complex medical conditions.

Practice Rationale

Because of the diversity and complexity of deaf-blindness, the task of assessment is "best approached with the mindset that you are engaged in a process of discovery" (Rowland, 2009). It incorporates a variety of methods including observation, interviews with people who know a child well, evaluations by specialists, and direct interactions. This broad range of assessment activities takes considerable time, planning, and effort, but is achievable and essential in order to gather useful information about what a child knows, how they demonstrate what they know, and how they learn.

Assessment of children who are deaf-blind must go far beyond the use of assessment instruments (NCDB, 2010). Most were not designed for this population and thus are poor measures of what they can do. This is especially true of standardized tests.

Essential Components

Each bolded item below is an essential component of a high-quality assessment. The bullets are the skills a teacher or other person leading an assessment will display when conducting it correctly. The elements refer to a "child," but are applicable to both children and youth.

Welcoming Environment

- ❏ Assembles a transdisciplinary team to assist with the assessment—family and educational team members, specialists, and at least one individual with expertise in deaf-blindness
- ❏ Outlines roles for assessment team members that take advantage of their expertise and knowledge of the child
- ❏ Provides ongoing support for family involvement

Comprehensive Planning

- ❏ Clarifies assessment purposes (e.g., determine eligibility for services; guide early intervention, education, or transition planning; evaluate effectiveness of current program; assess progress)
- ❏ Develops a plan that includes observation, interviews, appropriate testing, and records review
- ❏ Creates a schedule that allows sufficient time to conduct multiple observations in a variety of environments
- ❏ Collaborates with assessment team members to develop a list of issues, concerns, and questions to guide information gathering
- ❏ Includes the family's desires and hopes for their child (and the child's, if appropriate)

- ❏ Develops interview questions for family and team members who know the child well
- ❏ Arranges for evaluations by specialists (e.g., speech-language pathologists, therapists, hearing and vision experts) as indicated by the assessment purpose
- ❏ Plans a holistic approach that considers the child's overall strengths and needs
- ❏ Ensures the assessment is appropriate for the child's cultural and linguistic background

Appropriate Use of Assessment Tools

- ❏ Evaluates available assessment tools to determine appropriateness for the child
- ❏ Selects tools or parts of tools likely to provide high-quality information about the child
- ❏ When using assessment tools, provides accommodations and modifications tailored to the child's needs
- ❏ Ensures any tools and assessment materials used are appropriate for the age of the child

Conditions for Best Performance

❑ Ensures that external conditions (e.g., lighting, ambient noise, time of day) best suited to the child's needs are in place

❑ Ensures that the child's hearing and vision are properly augmented (e.g., wearing glasses and hearing aids)

❑ Makes sure the child is in stable, comfortable positions

❑ Includes individuals who have established trusting relationships with the child and understand the child's expressive communication

❑ Communicates using the child's preferred communication modes

❑ Uses activities and materials that are interesting and meaningful to the child

❑ Frequently checks the child's state (e.g., awake, alert, overstimulated) and adjusts interactions or environmental conditions to help the child be engaged in assessment activities

❑ Postpones assessment if child is not ready to engage in assessment and adjustments are not successful

Observation

❑ Conducts multiple observations on different days

❑ Observes child during play and routine activities in a variety of familiar environments (e.g., school, home), with people they know

❑ Is quiet and focused during observations to make sure nothing is missed

❑ Interviews family members and professionals who know the child well to discover what they have learned through observation and time spent with the child

❑ Gathers information about the child's strengths, which serve as a foundation for learning

❑ In addition to observation of the child, gathers information about how environmental conditions (e.g., lighting, tactile characteristics, distractions) and people in the environment impact learning

❑ Gathers information about situations in which the child does best, as well as those that are challenging

COMMON ASSESSMENT AREAS

- Preferences and interests
- Sensory learning channels and use of sensory information
- Sensory regulation
- Functional vision and hearing
- Communication modes
- Expressive and receptive communication skills

- Cognitive abilities (e.g., ability to learn, remember, anticipate)
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Problem-solving skills
- Participation in activities
- Exploration skills
- Strengths and capabilities
- Ability to form social attachments
- Social and play skills

- Independent living skills
- Activities, places, people, and times of day in which child functions best
- Assistive technology needs
- Effectiveness of (or need for) accommodations
- Orientation and mobility
- Self-determination
- Career education needs (prevocational and vocational)

Direct Interactions

❏ Includes at least one person who knows the child well

❏ Includes at least one person who understands the child's communication and communicative behaviors

❏ Centers interactions on activities and objects that are interesting and motivating to the child

❏ Allows the child all the time they need to respond

❏ Uses appropriate accommodations that provide the child with access to assessment materials

Reporting Results

❏ Summarizes assessment results and their implications for instructional planning, services (including personnel), accommodations and modifications, and environmental characteristics that support the child's learning

❏ Discusses results with family, early intervention or educational team, and relevant specialists

❏ Addresses how the assessment results can be used to set educational goals and develop individualized learning programs

You'll know the practice is working if...

• **The child is engaged in assessment activities**

• **The team agrees that the results accurately describe the child**

• **The team learned new things about the child that can be used for instructional planning and delivery**

• **The results are used to develop a high-quality individualized education program**

Learn More

To learn more about assessment of children with deaf-blindness and specific assessment tools, visit the Assessment section of the NCDB website (https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/educational-practices/#assessment).

NCDB Practice Guides are created using a process adapted from the Practice Profile format developed by the National Implementation Research Network (Metz,

2016). Although NCDB Practice Guides do not provide extensive information about how to implement practices, they outline their essential components. This makes them a useful tool for state deaf-blind project personnel and practitioners to identify training and coaching needs related to specific practices for children with deaf-blindness. They also serve as quick reminders of the purpose and key elements of a practice.

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