



FACT SHEET

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Appropriate Touch

Sometimes the enthusiastic attempts of children with deafblindness when communicating with other people are seen as frightening if the touch is too rough. The child may also approach people very closely in order to use their senses of touch and smell or limited vision. The child must be taught as young as possible how to touch others properly for their own safety and to develop friendships with others.

1. Teach the child to approach others by **gently tapping others on the shoulder**. When the person turns towards them, they can then ask for what they want or can show someone what they want to do. You may need to prompt this gentle touch for a while until the child does it independently.
2. Teach the child **to remain an acceptable distance from others** (e.g., generally the distance of an outstretched arm, although this varies in different cultures) until they have permission (from family or teachers) to explore people further. They can then move in closer to touch the person to identify familiar things about that person (e.g., cologne, ring, watch, hair, beard, etc.). The child should not be allowed to explore strangers.
3. The child should be taught that they can decide **who is allowed to touch them**, including parents, other relatives, close friends, etc. You must also respect that any part of the child's body is private. The child should also be taught to move away or make some noise if they feel uncomfortable in a situation.

Adapted from Sternberg-White, S., Chen D., Watts, J., 1992, Developing Social-Emotional Skills, INSITE, Utah State University, Logan, Utah