



FACT SHEET

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Things to Remember When Requesting an Intervener for Your Child

By David Brown

Although the use of interveners for children with deafblindness has a long history and there is a growing body of research and literature supporting the idea, there can be considerable confusion when parents request that an intervener be provided for their child. Parents might not be clear about the precise reasons that an intervener is necessary, and limited educational professionals will be familiar with the idea since deafblindness is a very low incidence disability. Experience shows that confusion is minimized if parents have a clear idea why an intervener is necessary for their child, some concept of what the intervener is meant to be doing and why, and an understanding of the most common misconceptions that arise when the idea of an intervener is first brought up.

Why does your child need an intervener? The concept of the intervener is specifically related to the nature of deafblindness as a disability that limits access to essential information for development. The decision to request an intervener should be based on discussion of three things:

1. General information about deafblindness including implications for development, teaching strategies, communication approaches, and the concept of the intervener.
2. An up-to-date, appropriate, and comprehensive assessment of the individual student's current abilities, learning styles, and educational needs, preferably involving several different professionals and family members.
3. Consideration of the existing or proposed program for the student, including such aspects as the ratio of adults to students, curriculum, communication systems used, and the physical environment.

What are the common misconceptions when an intervener is requested for a student?

- People may think that the student is not yet ready—cognitively, developmentally, linguistically, or emotionally—for this level of support because they are thinking of the intervener as a sign language interpreter (see Kennedy, 2016). If the case for providing an intervener is made well, then it should be obvious that there can be no such thing as a student with deafblindness who ‘...is not yet ready...’ for this kind of support, although there may be students within the population of children with deafblindness who do not need it, or do not need it any longer.

- Sometimes there is a feeling that what the parents are asking for is something that would actually help every student in the class, and it is not fair for one child to have it if the others cannot. This suggests that the case for an intervener for the child with deafblindness has not been made clearly and precisely enough following the guidelines in Points 1-3 above. The request for support from an intervener should be made because, for that particular child, it represents the best—and in many cases the only—way to implement the child’s IEP. A resource like *The IEP Discussion Guide: Are Intervener Services Appropriate For My Student Who is Deafblind* is very a useful and effective tool (in Useful Additional Resources below).
- A frequent challenge is the absence of anyone in the district/county who could train and support an intervener to work with the student. There is now a body of useful literature on this topic, as on other aspects of deafblind education (Parker, A. T., & Nelson, C. 2016). The state deafblind project will be able to make this information available and may also offer other support such as contributing to the assessment process and providing training.
- Everyone wants the student to learn to relate to peers and to adults within the class and throughout the school, and sometimes it is thought that an intervener will block this development and keep the student isolated. In fact, the intervener is not intended to act as a barrier between the student and other people except where these social contacts would be inappropriate, distracting, or counter-productive. For many students with deafblindness, the intervener is likely to be the key figure in facilitating social interactions with others, a process that might need to be planned and structured with great care over a considerable period of time.
- When people want a student with deafblindness to experience full or partial inclusion in general education settings, they sometimes oppose the idea of an intervener as they think that it will be counter-productive and stigmatizing in some way. Yet for many students with deafblindness there is no possibility of effective functioning in mainstream settings without this support as an essential prerequisite.
- Another common objection is that the student may become dependent upon the intervener, and that this will be a bad thing. In fact, the student will almost certainly need to become dependent upon the intervener as part of the process of developing trust and building a positive relationship, so that together they will then be in a position to work on whatever is necessary. Encouraging this dependence is a deliberate strategy, but it is a means to an end and not a goal in itself.

For any school district, providing an intervener to support a student with deafblindness undoubtedly represents a significant expense, and a leap into the unknown which carries the likelihood of ongoing complications and challenges. However, there is strong evidence that an intervener, when used effectively and successfully, can be a powerful tool for implementing the IEP for a wide range of students with deafblindness. We owe it to the district administrators, and to the students themselves, to prepare the case for intervention with care and clarity, and to be ready and able to explain and educate when we meet with understandable concern and hesitancy.

Useful Additional Resources:

Videos: National Center on Deaf-Blindness. Parent Perspectives on Interveners.

<https://www.nationaldb.org/national-initiatives/iqp/parent-perspectives-on-interveners/>

Briefing Paper: Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2000). The intervener in early intervention and educational settings for children and youth with deafblindness.

<https://www.nationaldb.org/media/doc/intervener-early-intervention.pdf>

Alsop, L. et al.(2012). A family's guide to intervners for children with combined vision and hearing loss.

<http://www.sparkle.usu.edu/images/A%20Family's%20Guide%20to%20Interveners.pdf>

Kennedy, B. (2016). A comparison of possible supports for students who are deafblind.

https://www.cmich.edu/docs/default-source/colleges/college-of-liberal-arts-and-social-sciences/deafblind-central/20160622-comparison-of-supports-students-deafblind.pdf?sfvrsn=2db6f73b_4

National Center on Deaf-Blindness. (2020). Intervener services and interveners in educational settings: Definition.

https://www.nationaldb.org/media/doc/NCDB_Intervener_Services_Definition.pdf

National Center on Deaf-Blindness. (2016). IEP Discussion Guide: Are intervener services appropriate for your student with deafblindness?

https://www.nationaldb.org/media/doc/Intervener_Services_IEP_Team_Discussion_Guide.pdf

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Letter on Interveners as a Related Service (2018).

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/osep-letter-aug-2-2018-letter-to-linda-mcdowell-ph-d/>

Parker, A. T., & Nelson, C. (2016). Toward a comprehensive system of personnel development in deafblind education. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 161, 486-501.