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California Deafblind Services

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Modifications and Accommodations while Virtual Learning

Kayla Coburn, Education Specialist

Picture from Pathway to Success

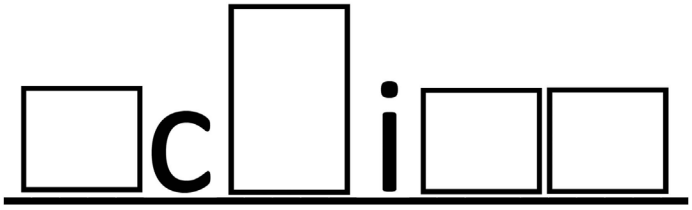
As someone who has been working in the classroom in a variety of ways for the last 9 years, I still have to remind myself what the difference is between a modification and an accommodation. They both give a child access to curriculum, but through different paths. In simpler terms, a modification is a change in WHAT your child is learning and an accommodation is changing HOW your child is learning.

Educators in the Special Education field are constantly modifying and accommodating the work for students in their classroom. Depending on the activity, disability, environment, child's preferences, and goals, there are a variety of ways to change the what and how of the task. Here are some examples for common school activities and how you can accommodate or modify them for your child.

Spelling Test

Accommodations	Modifications
• Typing the words instead of writing (without spell check)	• Only spelling half of the list
• More time to spell the words	• Having a different spelling list
• Bigger lines to write on	• Filling in the blanks i.e. d_g

Modifying a Spelling Test: If your child is in 5th grade, but has a goal on recognizing the first letter of a word, you could modify the spelling test by writing out all the words without the first letter, prompting the child to write the first letter only. For example, if the word is "*action*," you can write down _ction. Once the teacher, or you, prompt the word "*action*," the child will only write down the missing letter. This modification changes what the child is learning and focuses on their own academic goals. Does your child have a hard time writing? Have letter flashcards. Once they are prompted to choose the first letter, give them 2-4 options, "E, A, D, O." This is still pushing a child academically, but at their own rate. You can also add boxes to the spelling words and let your child fill in the blanks.



Math

Accommodations	Modifications
• Less problems per page (same amount of problems)	• Multiple choice
• Calculator (depending on the lesson)	• Materials simplified
• Visual/Simplified directions	• Alternate Assessment
• Large print ruler or worksheets	

Accommodating a Math Lesson: If your child needs a more tactile way to count numbers, you can use items such as counting bears or touch math. This is changing how they are learning the information, but having the same educational outcome as everyone else.

Touch math is another example of an accommodation that can help your child learn addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Touch math is a great example of a way to give your child a visual or touch cue to count independently. Once you take the dots away, children will still remember where they are mentally and can always use them.

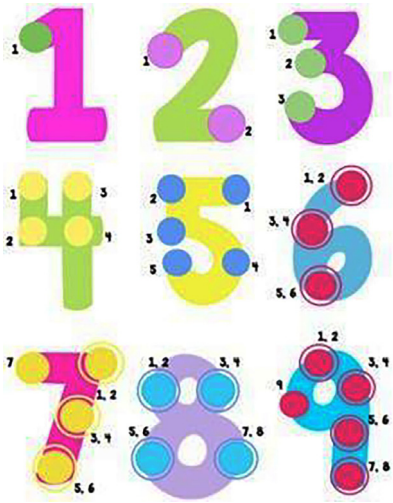


Image from teacherspayteachers.com

Reading

Accommodations	Modifications
• Large Print • Frequent breaks	• Require less of the assignment • Lower reading level

Accommodating a Reading Lesson: Try to give your child a couple of pages to read at a time, or make the font bigger, or double space the lines. Give them a pen or highlighter to mark important parts they may need to reference later.

Modifying a Reading Lesson: Use simpler terms. Changing a paragraph into one sentence or using images to help your child read. This is a way to modify the work to their own ability.

These accommodations and modifications are more advanced and may require a teacher's assistance but these are changes that would be regularly made in the classroom. Additionally, educators are prepared to make these modifications and accommodations for your child while virtually learning.

Other examples of accommodations and modifications are below.

Accommodations	Modifications
• Large Print • Interpreter • Visuals • Assistive Technology • Frequent breaks	• Require less of the assignment • Lower curriculum • Different grading system • Simplified materials • Alternate Assessment

Simple ways you can prepare yourself at home for on-the-spot modifications and accommodations for your child.

- Highlighter: If your learner needs help with writing, try having the child trace the words after you write them with a highlighter.
- Dotted lines: If you have a computer and printer at home, this website is free! You can print worksheets with whatever words or sentences you want and the website will convert the words into dotted lines for your child to trace. https://tools.atozteacherstuff.com/printable-handwriting-practice-worksheet-maker/
- Visuals: Adding images to words is always a helpful way for learners to obtain the same information.
- Flaticon or Freepik are free and both links can be found on our Wakelet page under teacher resources: www.wakelet.com/@CaliforniaDeafBlindServices
- Giving your child more time on an assignment (make sure to mark down the time if the teacher requires it)
- Changing the size of the assignment, to not overwhelm your child

Students, parents, and teachers were all thrown a major curve ball with their learning, schedules, and careers. By working together, we can find ways to make virtual learning successful and positive for the whole team. Simple modifications and accommodations done at home are great steps parents can take to benefit their learners. If you are struggling on how to adapt work for your child, reach out to any of the staff members from California Deafblind Services at http://www.cadbs.org/our-team/. Happy learning!

CDBS Annual Teacher Symposium in Deafblindness:

The Sigal Family Lecture Series — Julie Maier, Educational Specialist

This year our annual Symposium on Deafblindness went virtual and we're so pleased with continuation of one of our favorite annual events. Since our first symposium in 2012 we have invited a nationally recognized expert in the field of deafblindness to share their expertise and experiences on a specific topic. The current pandemic restrictions left us with two options—cancel for this year or go virtual.

Teachers across the state reported in our planning survey that they would prefer joining short virtual lectures over four Saturday mornings in October rather than a day-long virtual event. Each weekend we reviewed some of the history of the symposium, including past presenters and topics, and highlighted the importance of the role of the teacher of the deafblind. That was followed by a virtual presentation from one of our invited guest presenters which concluded with a short interactive discussion between the teachers and presenter.

The contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326T180015. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer: Susan Weigert.

This annual symposium also serves as an annual reunion for eight cohorts of graduates from the Extensive Support Needs Teacher Credential Program at San Francisco State who completed an additional specialization endorsement program in deafblindness. In addition to these SFSU graduates, several teachers holding Visual Impairments and Deaf/Hard of Hearing credentials who participate in our statewide Community of Practice for Teachers of the Deafblind joined the event. In 2019 the Sigal family, the family of one of our specialization program graduates, provided CDBS with a generous donation to support our efforts in providing training and professional development to California teachers serving students who are deafblind. In this family's honor, we were pleased to name the lecture(s) presented at our annual symposium the Sigal Family Lecture.

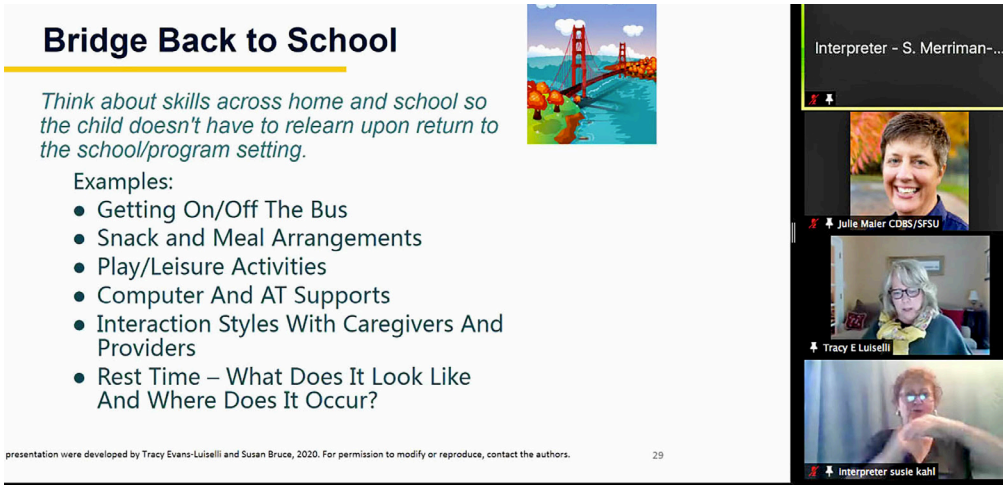
Each year we find it rather difficult to decide on a speaker and topic because there are so many interesting and relevant topics and amazing presenters within our national deafblind network. Holding a virtual multi-day symposium made this part of planning the symposium easier as we selected four interesting topics and several presenters from across the country. This year we were fortunate to learn from the following experts in our national network during the Sigal Family Lecture Series.

Dr. Tracy Luiselli, the Project Director from the New England Consortium on Deafblindness, presented Creating Home-Based Routines: A Framework for Collaborating with Families. This presentation was especially helpful during this period of distance learning as it provided a framework for collaborating with families to identify and build meaningful home routines that provide opportunities to learn and practice communication, concept development, independent living skills, and literacy and numeracy skills.

Chris Russell, Project Coordinator for the New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative, presented Supporting Students with Deafblindness and Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI), which provided an overview of CVI characteristics and phases and unique considerations for supporting students with CVI and deafblindness when planning intervention and assessment. The suggested practices and examples he shared will be immediately helpful for teachers supporting learners with CVI.

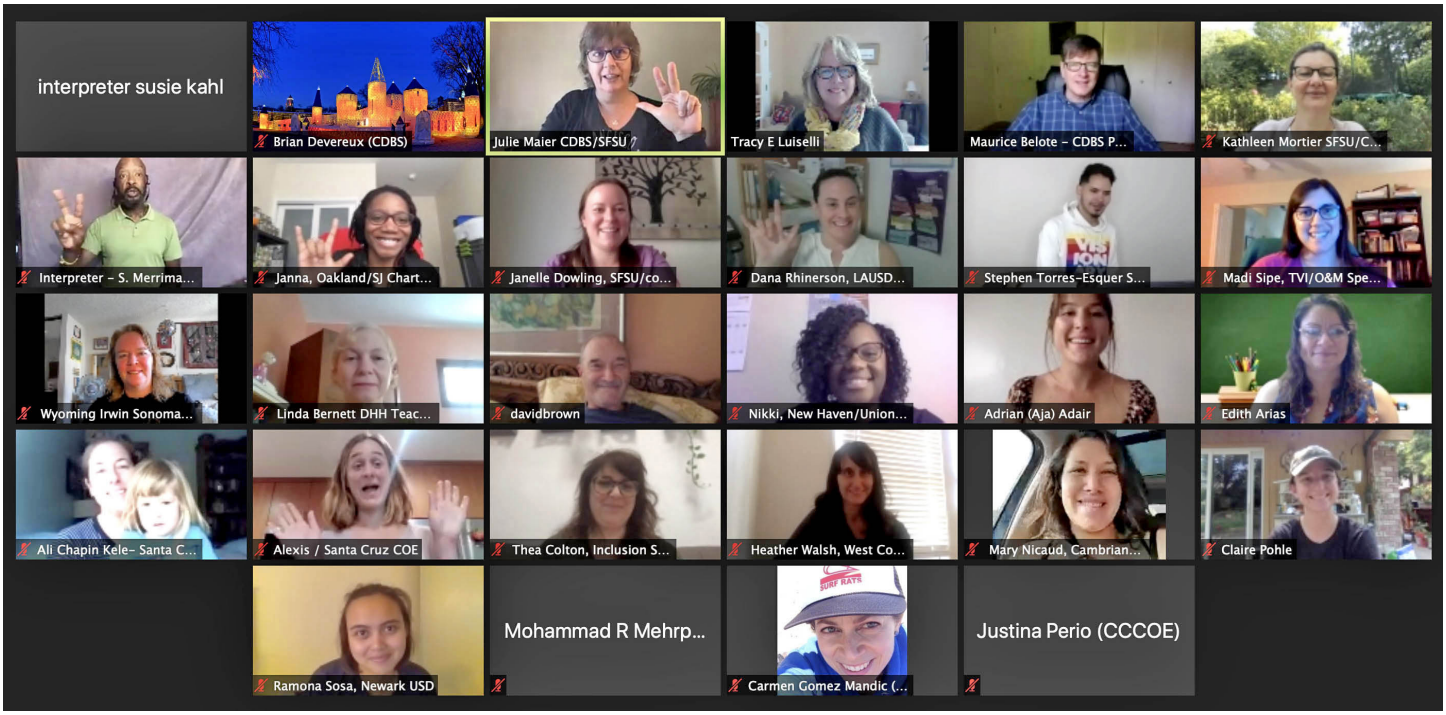
Adam Graves and Chris Montgomery, Educational Specialists for the Texas DeafBlind Outreach Program, presented Informal Functional Hearing Evaluation (IFHE) for Students who are Deafblind: Examining Issues of Access. The IFHE is a tool developed by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) to help educators gather and record data on how students use their hearing in a variety of settings and for a variety

of activities, which is then used in IEP documentation and planning. This assessment tool could be very useful for many of our teachers.



Dr. Donna Carpenter, Project Director of the Kentucky Deaf-Blind Project, presented Virtual Stories: Experiences of Families Raising a Child Who is Deafblind and Teacher Response to Their Shared Experiences. This presentation provided a fascinating overview of her dissertation study that examined the effects of several families using photos and an audio recording to share stories about their child's journey with that child's teacher and the positive impact these "virtual stories" had on the teacher's perceptions of and expectations for that child. She then shared ways teachers could support families to use photos and stories in a variety of ways at team and IEP meetings or during progressions between schools and programs.

We are so grateful for the time, expertise, and resources each of these wonderful presenters shared with our California teachers. They gave us so much to consider and explore before we meet for our next symposium in Fall 2021. It was also heartwarming to see so many of these dedicated teachers again, even if only on a computer screen. The commitment and interest these teachers continue to demonstrate for advanced learning about deafblind individuals and effective intervention practices is very impressive.



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Three Simple Lessons Learned So Far During this Time of Distance Learning

By Maurice Belote, Project Coordinator, California Deafblind Services

[Submitted August 2020 for publication in the journal of
California Transcribers and Educators of the Blind and Visually Impaired]

ABSTRACT: We have anecdotal evidence to support three practices that are effective during this time of pandemic-related distance learning: 1) foster active engagement rather than focus solely on the amount of time devoted to instruction, 2) continue to maintain consistent routines and schedules to the maximum extent possible, and 3) make use of activities around the home that families are already engaged in to teach and reinforce basic concepts, literacy, numeracy, and communication skills.

For many students throughout California, the closure of school buildings this past spring upended traditional face-to-face instruction. The abrupt shift to distance learning required levels of patience and flexibility that would have been hard to muster, even under the best of circumstances. These past few months have been challenging for everyone: families, educators, agency staff and, most of all, children. These challenges are arguably the most pronounced for children who are deafblind and others who have extensive support needs because of the challenges they face in accessing distance learning. For students who are deafblind who require touch and proximity in order to learn, it has been a challenge to make instruction meaningful and accessible.

With determination and creativity, however, we have witnessed some hard-earned successes. At the beginning of the pandemic, many school programs—unsure of how long the closure of school buildings would last—asked their educators to focus on maintaining students' skills. In some cases, enrichment activities were offered, but the introduction of new content and concepts was fairly limited. But now, as the 2020-2021 academic year begins with distance learning as the norm for most of California, educational teams are faced with the challenge of moving forward with instruction using established curricula aligned with common core state standards.

We have had a few months now of distance learning and have discovered what works and what doesn't. We will of course keep refining instructional practices this fall and winter, but there are three basic principles that seem to hold true so far.

Quality over Quantity, or Less is More

Simply put, less time in active engagement is preferable to more time in passive engagement. Many family members are telling us that they feel guilty about the time they have to devote to distance learning with their children. They are feeling the need to fill school days with an unsustainable amount of time spent on instruction. While it is true that a typical school day might include 5-6 hours of time in the classroom, the amount of time each student spends

actively engaged in instructional activities is typically less than that. In school, children experience 'down time' for many reasons, including when team members are focused on other students, students are allowed breaktime, and/or the time between activities is longer because of the complexity of student needs.

So, what does active engagement for a child or young adult look like? Active engagement might include all or some of the following components:

- Instruction that is designed to be at or slightly above the student's current level of performance.
- Full participation in every step of the activity, from the beginning to the middle to the end.
- A communication partner who knows the student's communication modes and is responsive to the student's communication attempts.
- Instruction that is scheduled at times when the student is most alert and available for learning.
- Clearly defined end-goals and outcomes.
- Multi-sensory instruction that supports the student to utilize all available senses.

Unlike passive engagement, which does not include the student to the degree necessary for true understanding, active engagement offers more—and better—opportunities for learning.

Maintain Consistent Routines

As a technical assistance provider, I routinely ask educational program staff to follow clearly defined schedules and establish predictable routines. Clearly defined schedules and predictable routines help reduce the student's stress and anxiety by decreasing ambiguity and confusion. Consistent routines also serve other important functions such as encouraging communication interactions. While we expect educational programs to follow schedules, we haven't expected families to do the same because home and school are—and should be—different. But during this time of distance learning, we are now asking families to try, as much as possible, to follow a predictable routine on school days. This includes instructional activities at set times of the day, in specific locations if appropriate, and using motivators specific to the child's interests.

For more information on routines, check out:
https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/educational-practices/routines/
and also this excellent article from California Deafblind Services about routine-based learning:
http://files.cadbs.org/200001020-a077da171a/RoutineBased.pdf.

Daily Activities Around the Home as Opportunities for Learning

Daily activities around the home provide valuable opportunities for learning. These are indoor and outdoor activities that family members would be doing, regardless of the pandemic.

Examples of these activities include:

- sorting laundry
- food prep and cooking
- cleaning the home
- washing and drying dishes
- making shopping lists
- putting away groceries
- putting away toys and books
- caring for pets
- checking the mailbox
- sweeping, weeding and watering in the garden.

These language-rich activities provide excellent opportunities for teaching basic concepts and developing expressive and receptive communication skills. Think about an activity like putting away groceries from the store. Why do some purchases go into the refrigerator? Freezer? Kitchen cupboard? Bathroom cupboard? Garden shed? Actively engaging children in a process such as this is a great time to teach concepts that can, with planning, align with the content the child would have been learning in traditional face-to-face school.

The National Center on Deaf-Blindness recently conducted an excellent 90-minute webinar on home routines that can be accessed in archival form at:
https://www.nationaldb.org/updates/establishing-routines-at-home/
and a corresponding fact sheet can be downloaded at:
https://www.nationaldb.org/media/doc/Fact_Sheet_Establishing_Routines_at_Home_a.pdf.

I welcome your comments and ideas and can be reached at mbelote@sfsu.edu.

My Distance Learning Diary

Julie Maier, Educational Specialist

Since last spring when schools closed and moved to a distance learning format our staff has been attempting to keep pace with dozens upon dozens of digital resources available for supporting learners with deafblindness and their families and school teams. We created a Wakelet site to organize these resources and materials under specific topics with hopes that centralizing these resources would make locating and using the resources more manageable. If you check out our CDBS Wakelet, you'll find plenty of resources on a variety of topics for a range of ages, communication and support needs.

I've tried to keep a personal journal of sorts during the pandemic with the idea that it could be interesting to me, my children, or future generations of my family years from now. Though I haven't kept a professional journal (my work calendar and emails probably are the best artifacts of my professional pandemic life), I've noticed over the past four months that there are several online resources I continue to recommend or share with families and professionals. These resources all relate to meaningful distance learning activities and supports for children who are emerging communicators and cannot easily engage with or participate in typical Zoom class lessons.

Here's a peek into what I'm calling my "Fall 2020 Distance Learning Diary." Each resource includes a digital link; just click on the resource title.

Establishing Routines at Home: Our staff, and many others in the deafblind field, have suggested focusing on participation in home routines as an appropriate curriculum to build new skills and support concept development during distance learning. Last spring Dr. Tracy Evans-Luiselli and her staff with the New England Consortium on Deafblindness began implementing a process that assisted families and educational teams in identifying home routines to teach relevant goals and creating easy-to-follow guides for family to use to teach new skills and track their child's progress. Tracy and Dr. Susan Bruce from Boston College provided a wonderful webinar as part of the National Center on Deaf-Blindness Professional Development Series that explains this process and what was learned last spring. The Establishing Routines at Home webinar recording and resources provide a good framework for working with families to support the development and implementation of home-based routines for children who are deafblind. It also addresses how to use individualized daily schedules and experience stories and books.

Active Learning Space: This website was created to provide information about Dr. Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning approach in educating individuals with developmental delays. I'm a big fan of this approach and of active learning equipment for children who are deafblind with additional physical disabilities and mobility issues. The website includes very clear and useful written information and video training about this approach and photo and video examples of active learning equipment and activities. Active Learning Space is useful for those just learning about the active learning approach as well as for those who are familiar with the approach and looking for more new ideas or answers. It includes several sections including a section for Families. One page on the site called Home Hacks includes multiple creative examples of materials and activities at home, including daily routines, that support the active learning approach quite well.

Paths to Literacy: I love this website! This website, developed and maintained by a cadre of talented teachers and parents, holds resources on so many topics that you can find information, ideas, and examples of activities for just about any student. I primarily use and suggest the resources and activities under the these specific topics: Deafblind, Emergent Literacy, Experience Books and Multiple Disabilities. However, there are dozens more topics to check out. The descriptions and instructions about activities, adapting materials, and instructional practices are clearly written and easy to follow and are usually supported by photos. I think you'll find a lot of inspiration for meaningful activities and materials on this site.

ASL Story Time: Michigan's state deafblind project, DeafBlind Central, and the Central Michigan University CHARGE Syndrome Research Lab, created a collection of picture book read-aloud stories with excellent ASL interpretation and accompanying vocabulary activities to promote sign language practice and literacy development. You can find the read-aloud stories on DB Central's literacy page. There are plenty of choices of books for preschool children and students in the younger grades.

CDBS Mini-Trainings: In September our staff began leading weekly 30-minute training activities on a variety of deafblind topics during distance learning and home instruction. Topics included establishing home routines, object cues and calendars, assessment, behavior, literacy, modifying and adapting lessons, supporting conversations, and creating social connections. Recordings of each training and any related resources are archived on our website and useful for families and professionals. A local special education teacher shared that she's been using the recordings for staff training with paraeducators in her program. Our Tuesday mini-training will continue in the new year.

To learn more about or discuss any of these resources, feel free to contact me at jmaier@sfsu.edu. If there are any go-to resources for distance learning and home instruction you'd like to recommend, contact anyone on our staff to share.

Creating a Photo Story of Your Child to Share with the Educational Team

Julie Maier, Educational Specialist

Introduction: In October during our annual Symposium on Deafblindness we learned from Dr. Donna Carpenter about the power of sharing stories through photos and anecdotes. This is a practice the Kentucky DeafBlind Project uses with families of children with deafblindness to support and empower them as they introduce their child to a new school team. This photovoice practice was developed and researched by Dr. Carpenter during her dissertation study, *Experiences of families raising a child who is deafblind and teacher response to those shared experiences (2016)*. The results and some key takeaways of her study were described and discussed in a recent *reSources* article written by Adrian Adair, a former intern in the SFSU-CDBS Specialization Program for Learners with Deafblindness, entitled *Reflections on Donna Snyder's "Experiences of Families Raising A Child Who is Deafblind and Teacher Response to Those Shared Experiences"* (pages 14-15).

Below is a how-to factsheet with some suggestions for families or educators interested in using this practice to share information about a child or youth between the family and school team. Huge thanks to Donna for her inspiring presentation and practical tips.

Creating the Photo Story

- Select 10-20 **meaningful** photos of the child. These might be favorite photos, photos of milestones, photos of the child with important people in their life or doing their favorite activity.
- Think of the order in which you'd like to share the photos. (Note: It doesn't necessarily need to be chronological.)
- Decide on a short story or description you'd like to share about each photo.

Ways to present the photo story

- Short narrated video using iMovie or similar app.
- PowerPoint or Google slideshow with text or audio narration.
- Pictello, an app to easily create stories with personal photos or videos.
- Bring photos to an IFSP or IEP meeting or team planning meeting and share descriptions in the moment.

When can photo stories be useful?
• When a child starts in a new class or program. • At the beginning of an IFSP or IEP meeting to remind everyone about the uniqueness of the child at the center of meeting. • During progression planning or a person-centered planning process. The student can present the information in many cases. • As an orientation activity when developing new peer connections or supports. • To share information with new staff members or service providers. • To promote and practice self-advocacy.
When using Photo Stories start to look for and discuss this important information:
• Child's preferences • Sensory information • Interests • Important life experiences • Individualized supports and accommodations

If you'd like help creating a visual story for your child, the CDBS staff would be excited and happy to assist you. Feel free to contact anyone on our staff to get started.

References:

Snyder, D. (2016). *Experiences of families raising a child who is deafblind and teacher response to those shared experiences.* Doctoral Dissertation. Northern Kentucky University.

Adair, A. (2018). Reflections on Donna Snyder's "Experiences of Families Raising A Child Who is Deafblind and Teacher Response to Those Shared Experiences". *reSources, California Deafblind Services Newsletter, 23* (1), 14-15.

This hand-under-hand information sheet was developed by Robin Greenfield, Ph.D. of the Idaho Center on Disabilities and Human Development and adapted by California Deafblind Services.

Hand-under-Hand Guidance

Hands are very important for a learner who is deafblind. They provide a means of gathering information and interacting with the world. They help a learner participate in activities, stimulate curiosity, and independence.

Using a hand-under-hand approach is a non-intrusive way to support a learner to explore and use their hands rather than taking the learner's hands and moving them through an action or activity.

Supporting a learner using a hand-under-hand approach includes:

- Inviting a learner to put their hands on top of your hands to feel what you are doing or to grasp an object. Slowly rotate your hands so the learner is introduced to the object or activity.
- Exploring objects by bringing objects up and under a learner's hands. Gradually withdraw your hands until the learner's fingers touch the object being explored.
- Modeling the hand skills within routines and activities you wish the child to acquire (e.g., reaching, pointing, exploring an object, handwashing).
- Continuing to do what you are doing if the learner withdraws their hands, and then reinviting the learner to participate.

For more information, please contact anyone at:
California Deafblind Services — http://www.cadbs.org/
San Francisco State University
Department of Special Education
1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132
Phone: 415-405-7558 • Email: mbelote@sfsu.edu

Companion video about Hand-Under-Hand:

https://youtu.be/DcERQWPnc2Y

IDEAs that Work
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