

# The Role of the Intervener for Children Who Are Deafblind

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Deafblindness involves a combined vision and hearing loss, to the extent that neither of these primary information-gathering senses (vision or hearing) compensates for the loss of the other sense. . Deafblindness creates a disability of access to the visual and auditory information about the environment (people, things, events) that is necessary for learning, communication, and overall development. Intervention for children who are deafblind must connect them to the world. It must provide access to clear and consistent visual and auditory information, support for the development and use of receptive and expressive communication, and support for social and emotional wellbeing. An intervener provides a bridge to the world for the student who is deafblind. The intervener is a support person who does with, not for the student. Intervention for children who are deafblind must connect them to the world.

Related to the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE, and the provision of the Least Restrictive Environment, or LRE, for children who are deafblind, interveners can play a critical role. FAPE mandates access to general education, the general curriculum, and activities and access to specialized educational services. The Least Restrictive Environment is also based upon "Access." LRE is not a place, but refers to the supports and services that provide access, participation, and progress in the general education curriculum. "Access" is a key term in the requirements of IDEA, and it is an especially critical issue for children who are deafblind, because of their lack of access to visual and auditory information. Without access to the information needed for learning and interaction, educational environments are restrictive. The intervener can be the individualized support that facilitates "access" to information, participation, and progress; facilitate LRE; and support the provision of FAPE.

Under the IEP process, interveners can be designated as "related services" or as "supplementary aids and services" (depending upon the individual state). As such, they can help children, who are deafblind advance appropriately to obtain goals, be involved in and

make progress in the general education curriculum, and be educated and participate with other children with and without disabilities. Whether or not your child needs an intervener is determined through the IEP process. Instead of asking for an intervener for your child first thing, you should use the IEP process to make this determination based on the needs of your child to have access to information, learning, and interaction in educational settings. There are critical components of the IEP process which are especially important in determining your child's need for an intervener.

These include:

- Evaluation
- Consideration of Special Factors
- Present Levels of Performance
- Annual Goals and Short Term Objectives
- Accommodations, Modifications, and Aids and Services
- Related Services

Consider the communication needs of your child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing and/or visually impaired, consider the child's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode. If the communication needs of your child are not being adequately addressed, this part of the IEP process can reinforce your child's needs to be able to communicate in his/her mode of communication and to have opportunities for direct instruction from professionals and direct communication with peers and others. By understanding the IEP process, parents can stay focused on the needs of their child to determine whether or not an intervener is appropriate for your child and, if so, to ensure that intervener services are part of his/her educational programming.

A skilled intervener has the potential to be such a powerful and positive model of support for children with combined vision and hearing loss. Finding a good match for your child is sometimes about training the right person, such as someone who is already working with your child or someone with whom your child has already formed a relationship. Interveners are different from general classroom aides because they must have training and specialized skills in deafblindness in order to be able to provide one-to-one effective intervention for children who are deafblind in educational settings. This person can be trained as your child's intervener and can provide rich, meaningful, and interactive learning opportunities for your child. Keep in mind, deafblind intervention is a process. The intervener facilitates that process, and the process is never static. An open mind and a willingness to keep learning are crucial to providing effective and productive intervention.