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Quarterly Newsletter

September 2025



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“Every child deserves a champion- an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be. ”

Rita Pierson

Letter From the Editor

Welcome back, dedicated educators! As we embark on this new school year, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your commitment to our deafblind students. Your expertise, patience, and creativity open worlds of connection for children who experience the world through different pathways. The specialized skills you bring to your classrooms create environments where these remarkable students can thrive, discover their potential, and build meaningful relationships. Though the journey may present unique challenges, remember that each breakthrough—whether small or significant—represents a profound victory. Your work transforms lives not just through education but through the dignity of understanding and inclusion.

The Alaska Deafblind Project is honored to support you in this vital mission and looks forward to celebrating your successes throughout the 2025-26 school year!

Angel Black, M.S.Ed., TSVI, COMS

Co-Director of the Alaska Deafblind Project

Supporting Social-Emotional Growth in Students with Deafblindness

By Angel Black, M.S.Ed., TSVI, COMS

The following are some evidence-based strategies and resources to help classroom teachers support the social-emotional development of their students with deafblindness.

Evidence-Based Strategies

Intensive Interaction

- Focus on developing reciprocal, enjoyable interactions using the student's own movements, vocalizations, and behaviors as a starting point
- Research shows this approach builds foundational communication and social connection skills
- Begin with close observation of the student's natural behaviors and gradually shape these into meaningful exchanges

Co-Active Movement and Touch Cues

- Consistent touch signals to communicate activities, transitions, or emotions
- Moving together through activities builds trust and shared understanding
- Establish a clear tactile vocabulary that remains consistent across environments

Calendar Systems

- Tangible symbol systems representing daily activities help students understand sequences and anticipate events
- Research shows this reduces anxiety and challenging behaviors while building emotional regulation
- Start with concrete representations and gradually move to more abstract symbols as appropriate

Social Stories and Scripts

- Tactile social stories with real objects or symbols help students understand social expectations
- Practice routines for greeting peers, requesting help, or managing emotions
- Evidence shows that these support emotional regulation and appropriate social interactions

Environmental Modifications

- Consistent classroom setup with clear tactile boundaries
- Sensory-considerate spaces that allow for both stimulation and calming
- Research indicates that predictable environments reduce anxiety and challenging behaviors

Educational Resources

Organizations and Websites

- National Center on Deafblindness (www.nationaldb.org): Offers practice guides, evidence-based intervention resources, and free webinars
- Perkins School for the Blind (www.perkins.org): Provides classroom strategies, assessment tools, and professional development
- DB-LINK (<https://nationaldb.org/library>): Comprehensive library of articles and research specific to deafblindness

Assessment Tools

- Communication Matrix: Evaluates early communication skills for individuals with complex needs
- Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM): Can be adapted for students with sensory impairments
- Callier-Azusa Scale: Specifically designed for assessing development in children with deafblindness

Professional Development

- Open Hands, Open Access modules: Free online training specific to deafblindness interventions
- Project SALUTE: Resources for tactile learning strategies
- OHOA Intervener Training Modules: Specific focus on supporting social-emotional needs

Classroom Materials

- Tactile emotion symbols and boards
 - Resonance boards for interactive play and communication
 - Experience books documenting shared activities with tactile elements
- And always remember that progress will look different for each student. Small gains represent significant achievements. Documentation of successful strategies is essential for consistency across educational teams and family members.

And always remember that progress will look different for each student. Small gains represent significant achievements. Documentation of successful strategies is essential for consistency across educational teams and family members.



Building Friendships and Social Skills for Students with Deafblindness

by Angel Black, M.S.Ed., TSVI, COMS

As we begin a new school year, I feel it is important that we truly begin to recognize the unique challenges and opportunities that our students with deafblindness face when it comes to building relationships and social skill development. It's crucial to understand the importance of building friendships and fostering social skills. While much of the focus in education tends to revolve around academic skills and functional independence, social interaction is foundational to a student's overall development, well-being, and quality of life. Friendships provide a sense of belonging, emotional support, and opportunities for meaningful communication, making them vital in the lives of students with deafblindness.

The Role of Social Skills in Development:

Social skills are essential for all children. They help students navigate their world, form connections, and understand social cues. For students with deafblindness, these skills are even more critical. Communication, which is often more challenging for them, becomes the primary tool through which they build relationships. By developing social skills, students with deafblindness can express themselves, interpret others' feelings, and engage in reciprocal interactions, all of which contribute to their emotional, social, and cognitive growth.

Research shows that students with disabilities, including those with deafblindness, are at increased risk of social isolation and loneliness, which can negatively impact their mental health and emotional well-being (Marschark, 2016). For students with dual sensory loss, access to opportunities for communication and socialization is sometimes limited by the barriers they face in both their immediate environment and social contexts. This makes it all the more important for families, educators, and service providers to intentionally create inclusive, supportive environments where students can practice and develop these skills.

[Read More](#)



Upcoming Events

The Low-Hanging Fruit of Assistive Technology (Webinar)

Presented by: Yue-Ting Siu, TVI/O&M, Ph.D

Description: Despite IEP recommendations for assistive (or access) technology (AT), many students with disabilities do not willingly embrace using technology that set them apart from peers. This can occur due to mismatches between recommended technology and what a student is ready for, or well-intentioned but misguided introductions to AT. As a result, students with limited "buy-in" do not use the AT they need to fully engage with information in the classroom and community. In order to mitigate students' resistance to using AT, readily (and often freely) available technologies for text-to-speech, magnification, and picture-based communication can be introduced first to develop students' confidence and access habits. By leveraging so-called "low-hanging fruit", students can be empowered to experiment with AT on their own terms while developing their sensory efficiency skills for more sophisticated AT usage.

This presentation is provided at no cost by the [**Alaska Center for Accessible Materials \(AKCAM\)**](#) and the [**Northwest Center for Assistive Technology Training \(CATT-NW\)**](#).

September 18, 2025

11:30AM - 1:00PM AKST

[REGISTER](#)

Save the Date

October 27 & 28, 2025 (2-Day Webinar)

Facilitating and Supporting the Social-Emotional Development of Learners Who Experience Deafblindness

Presented by Dr. Susan Bashinski

Session 1

This session will include foundational information regarding the domains of social and emotional development for learners who experience deafblindness. The presenter will discuss both the content central to the domains of social and emotional development, as well as strategies for facilitating learners' skill development in these areas.

Key content will include:

- Importance of emotional development and the role of social skills to both school and post-school success
- Criticality of trust when working with learners who experience deafblindness
- Interconnectedness of trust and social-emotional development
- Building a learner's positive self-image
- Connecting the identification and communication of one's own feelings to a positive self-image
- A close examination of social skill development: what, how, when, and where these skills can and should be introduced and practiced
- Ways in which to partner with families to facilitate social skill development

Session 2

Although this session could prove beneficial as a "stand-alone" session, it will likely be much more beneficial if the participants attend session #1, also. This second session will incorporate and build upon concepts presented in the first.

Key content will include:

- Elements important to building trusting relationships
- Ways in which to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of relationships with peers, family members, and educational team members
- Benefits of participating in group work in general education classrooms
- Strategies for supporting natural social interactions between learners who experience deafblindness and the groups named immediately above
- Strategies for teaching peers to meaningfully interact with a learner who experiences Deafblindness

Registration opening soon!

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