

## **GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATING A DEAFBLIND CHILD: DEVELOPING AN INDIVIDUALIZED FAMILY SERVICE PLAN (IFSP)**

*DeafBlind South Africa – Professional Resource for Families and Educators*

### **Introduction**

This guideline document provides a structured and adaptable framework for educating DeafBlind children through the development of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Its primary objectives are:

- To ensure early identification and timely intervention to support healthy development.
- To create a personalized approach that respects each child's unique communication style and learning needs.
- To empower families with the training and resources necessary to support their child's development.
- To foster independence, inclusion, and lifelong participation in society.

Every DeafBlind child is different. Therefore, this plan must be flexible, responsive, and reviewed regularly to adapt to developmental changes and evolving family circumstances.

### **1. Early Identification and Assessment**

#### **Screening and Diagnosis**

- Secure accurate diagnoses for both hearing and vision impairments, including the severity and nature of each.
- Collaborate with pediatricians, audiologists, and ophthalmologists to explore assistive devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, or corrective lenses.
- Evaluate whether the child's condition is progressive or stable to inform long-term planning and adaptations.

#### **Developmental and Learning Style Assessment**

Identify the child's dominant learning modality to inform instructional strategies:

##### **Auditory Learner (Residual Hearing)**

- Responds to sound cues, voices, or music.
- Benefits from auditory reinforcement, hearing aids, or cochlear implants.
- Learns effectively through songs, spoken language, and rhythm.

##### **Visual Learner (Residual Vision)**

- Reacts to light, high contrast, and bold visuals.
- May require Braille, large print materials, or magnification tools.
- Learns best with visual aids, sign language (if visible), and picture-based communication.

### **Kinesthetic Learner (Tactile-Based)**

- Processes information through touch and movement.
- Benefits from tactile signing, object symbols, and hands-on learning.
- Requires physical guidance such as hand-over-hand or hands-under-hands modeling.

### **2. Developing the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**

- Design the IFSP around the child's specific developmental stage, strengths, and needs.
- Clearly define achievable short- and long-term goals.
- Address areas such as communication, orientation and mobility, sensory learning, and independent living skills.

### **3. Multidisciplinary Team Approach**

Form a coordinated support team including:

- Early intervention specialists
- Special education teachers
- Speech and language therapists
- Occupational and physical therapists
- Orientation and mobility specialists
- Family members and caregivers

Ensure consistent communication and collaboration to deliver integrated services.

### **4. Communication Strategies**

- Establish a communication system that suits the child's dominant learning style.
- Options may include tactile sign language, Braille, picture symbols, or Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools.
- Train all caregivers and family members to use the system consistently and effectively to reduce frustration and promote learning.

### **5. Orientation and Mobility Training**

- Evaluate the child's sensory and physical mobility levels.
- Begin early mobility training through guided exploration, play-based movement (e.g., sitting, crawling), and tactile object recognition.
- Introduce white cane skills once the child begins walking to promote independence in navigation.

## 6. Environmental Modifications

- Create accessible environments at home and in educational settings:
  - Install tactile markers and navigation paths.
  - Utilize soundproofing and optimal lighting.
  - Provide adaptable furniture and sensory-friendly materials.
- Integrate assistive technologies to enhance learning and communication.

## 7. Developmental and Educational Interventions

### Life Skills Instruction

- Introduce life skills incrementally to prevent sensory overload.
- Maintain routine and consistency.
- Break tasks into step-by-step processes and reinforce each step until mastery is achieved.

### Micro Creative Skills

- Use tactile and sensory play to develop cognitive and fine motor skills.
- Activities may include:
  - Texture tracing
  - Clay modeling
  - Crafting with varied materials
  - Sensory exploration exercises

## 8. Family Support and Training

- Provide access to family counseling, support groups, and respite services.
- Offer training on:
  - Communication methods
  - Assistive device usage
  - Advocacy strategies for educational and social inclusion

Equip families to confidently participate in and direct their child's developmental journey.

## 9. Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

- Schedule regular reviews of the IFSP.
- Adjust goals and strategies based on developmental progress, medical changes, or new challenges.
- Use observations and team input to track outcomes and make informed decisions.

## 10. Community Resources and Social Inclusion

- Connect families with:
  - Local disability services
  - Advocacy organizations
  - Inclusive educational and recreational programs

Encourage peer interaction and social development to prevent isolation and foster confidence.

## 11. Transition Planning

Prepare the child and family for key educational transitions:

- From early intervention to preschool
- From preschool to formal schooling

Transition strategies should include:

- Gradual orientation to new environments
- Collaboration between current and incoming educators and caregivers
- Consistent communication methods across settings
- Professional training for educators on the child's specific needs

Ensure the continuity of care and minimize disruption during these transitions.

## Conclusion

An IFSP is more than an educational plan—it is a roadmap to inclusion, independence, and opportunity. DeafBlind children require not only access but also individualized, responsive, and supportive environments that allow them to thrive. Through structured intervention, cross-disciplinary teamwork, and strong family partnerships, we can ensure that every DeafBlind child has the chance to live, learn, and participate meaningfully in the world around them.

DeafBlind South Africa remains committed to this mission and stands ready to support families, educators, and professionals in making it a reality.