



Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

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Early Concept Development

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Language Concepts

Communication and human interaction as well as the use of tools for learning must have a solid foundation in concepts.

Children who do not have disabilities learn through **direct experience** with objects and people, and by **observing other people** interacting with objects and people. Later in their development, typical children can learn further concepts by viewing **pictures** and videos of objects, actions and events.

Children with visual impairments **cannot observe** the actions of others, cannot observe the objects and actions people talk about, and usually cannot learn from looking at pictures of objects and events.

To attach meaning to words, children with visual impairments must have **extensive and repeated experiences with real objects**, and how they are used. Adults teaching or interacting with young children who are blind and visually impaired must provide direct, **hands-on experience** with objects in their natural contexts, how they function, and ways to activate and use them.

Adults must not just teach kids the names of objects, but how they relate to activities and people.

Adults must make a point to include hands-on contact with objects and the actions of people by **bringing the objects to the child** or **bringing the child to the object** action or event (within reason, considering age appropriate issues, and safety)

Children who are very young or have additional disabilities and are not fluent communicators must have **repeated experiences with real objects in real situations**. Do not allow yourself to assume that because you have shown the child something once, or even several times, they understand what it is and how it is used. They may learn only part of the object or situation each time they are exposed.

Don't bombard kids with visual impairments with words. For young or developmentally disabled visually impaired kids,

- use short simple sentences
- think carefully about the literal meaning of commonly used phrases and slang, minimize meaningless or ambiguous words or phrases
- Use the child's name when you're talking to them.
- **Minimize extraneous noise** in the environment (music should be a meaningful part of an activity, otherwise don't have it on, the same with TV and videos. It's fine as a reward, or as a

down time activity.) Background noise, talk, and music teaches the child not to pay attention, or gives them too much complexity to attach meaning to.

When they are beginning to understand language, **tell them** simple easily understood information **about what is happening**:

Here comes your brother, he wants to play with your toy.

You don't want him to?

Don't hit him, say: "No, it's mine"

Can you give him something else to play with?

Pay attention! When you're in a structured learning situation with the child, minimize your talk with others.

Honor attempts at communication, you don't have to say yes, just say now it's -- time, you can do that during free time

Routines

Routines occur naturally in life at home, work and school.

Learning skills and concepts in their natural context attaches more meaning to the content of what is learned, and helps the learner to retain the skills and concepts, and helps kids with blindness and other disabilities generalize the skills and concepts to other situations.

Using routines for learning means we plan events so that they:

- occur **frequently** enough to facilitate learning
- occur at **predictable times** (after lunch)
- occur in a **predictable fashion** regardless of which adult is helping (brushing teeth, preparing morning snack at school)

Being predictable means:

- The adult can prepare the materials in advance
- The adult can prepare communication boards or other communication modes or assistive devices for use
- The child can learn to expect them, and so (eventually) minimize undesirable behavior (like crying or protesting or fixating only on the desired activity)
- The event (routine) can be "talked" about using symbols, sign language, objects or whatever the targeted mode of communication is, out of context - distant in time and place

Using a symbol for a routine helps build communication, and can be shaped into pre-literacy then literacy activities

Sometimes I hear people say:

"He knows he gets free time after lunch, why do they sit him down everyday and say 'next is free time'?"

We do this because we want him to attach meaning to symbols: words, pictures, object symbols, tactile symbols, natural gestures, simple sign language.

Meaning leads to language, language must be present before literacy can be learned.

Begin to Use Technology for Communication

When you have predictable routine occurring,
When you have established the use of object symbols or other symbols,
Then look for ways to introduce communication devices.

Voice output simple communication devices should be:

- Prepared in advance
- Easy to understand and use
- Accessible to blind and visually impaired students (objects, parts of objects, tactile symbols used as labels)
- Integrated into a variety of naturally occurring activities
- Modeled by the adult
- Used regularly and repeatedly



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