



Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Texas Deafblind Project

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Usher Syndrome Screener for use by the Teacher of Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

With the most common types of Usher Syndrome, the student is typically born Deaf or hard of hearing and begins to show signs of a progressive visual condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa in their pre-teen or teenage years. Early identification of Usher Syndrome is crucial to ensure the student and their family receive support. This screener is meant to bring awareness of the signs of Retinitis Pigmentosa to teachers of students who are deaf/hard of hearing so students might be identified earlier.

If, in using this screener, you identify any visual concerns as noted with a “Y”, share this information with the family and the IEP committee to consider further evaluation by a teacher of students who are blind or have low vision and an ophthalmologist.

Place a Y for “yes” next to any item that you feel applies to your student and an N for “no” in any item that does not apply.

Difficulty in Low Light

Night blindness is often the first stage in the progression of Retinitis Pigmentosa and can begin in younger children.

- Does the student bump into things in low light situations?
- Does the student trip over backpacks or other items on the floor when the lights are dim?
- Does the student struggle to safely travel outdoors in the dark without holding on to something, someone, or shuffling their feet?
- Does the student tend to avoid low light situations?
- Does the student walk slower in lower light than they do in standard or bright lighting?
- Does the student have difficulty or is the student more cautious on dimly lit stairs?

Restricted Visual Fields

Retinitis Pigmentosa affects peripheral vision. Upper, lower, left, right, or all visual fields can be reduced. This can be especially impactful for students who are using manual forms of communication, like sign language.

- _____ If a communication partner is signing outside of the student's central vision, do they seem to miss it?
- _____ If someone waves to get their attention prior to signing, does this have to take place in the central field or with a tactile component, such as a tap for the student to shift their attention?
- _____ Does the student seem to get startled by touch, as if they didn't see you coming from the side?
- _____ Does the student tend to walk with their head down to put the ground into their central field of vision?
- _____ Does the student tend to bump into things or stumble over curbs or changes in elevation?
- _____ If a group is communicating, does the student have trouble following the group discussion due to scanning to visually find the speaker/signer?
- _____ Does the student seem anxious when in a new area?
- _____ Does the student seem to move their head around more than their peers?
- _____ When signing to the student from a near distance, do they tend to back up?
- _____ Does the student tend to hold large materials further away from their face than their peers?

Balance

The vestibular system is impacted in some forms of Usher Syndrome. Balance concerns in a student who is Deaf or hard of hearing could be an early indicator of Usher Syndrome.

- _____ Does the student seem to have a unique walk, which might include a wide stance or shuffling feet?
- _____ Does the student seem to lose their balance often?
- _____ Does the student tend to avoid, or have falls, during activities such as hopping or skipping?
- _____ Did the student have delayed motor milestones, such as delayed independent walking?

References

- Tarver, P. (1996). Vision Screening: Staff/Parent/Student Questionnaire. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Usher Syndrome Coalition. (n.d.). *What is Usher Syndrome?* <https://www.usher-syndrome.org/resources/>



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