

# Deaf-Blindness (DB)

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The term “deaf-blind” seems to indicate the sum of deafness + blindness. However, the combination of these two sensory losses is much more like deafness multiplied by blindness = Deaf-blindness. The combined loss is profound! Children who are deaf-blind have unique challenges, especially with independence, accessing information, communication with others, and moving around in their world.

Deaf-blindness sounds like a condition of having NO vision and NO hearing. This is rarely the case, as most children who are deaf-blind have some vision and some hearing. Educationally, children are considered to be deaf-blind when the combination of their hearing and sight loss causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they require significant and unique adaptations in their educational programs. Nearly 10,000 children, birth to 21, have been identified as “deaf-blind” through the National Center on Deaf-Blindness.

## Deaf-Blindness

IDEA and AAC have defined Deaf-Blindness as:

Concomitant (simultaneous) hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

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## HOW CHILDREN LEARN

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A person who is deaf-blind has a unique perspective of the world. For people who can see and hear, the world extends outward as far as his or her eyes and ears can reach. For the young child who is deaf-blind, the world is initially much narrower. If the child is profoundly deaf and totally blind, his or her experience of the world extends only as far as the fingertips can reach. Such children are effectively alone if no one is touching them. Their concepts of the world depend upon what or whom they have had the opportunity to physically contact. The majority of children who are deaf-blind also have additional physical or cognitive disabilities or health problems.

Children who are deaf-blind require specialized teaching methods and intensive individualized education and accommodations from infancy through young adulthood. National Deaf-Blind Child Count data shows that although children who are deaf-blind are educated in a variety of settings, most are educated separately from students who do not have disabilities. Seventy percent of toddlers, birth-age 2, receive intervention services at home. Seventy-two percent of preschool children ages 3-5 are in special education classrooms, separate schools, or residential facilities. Most school-age children and youth with deaf-blindness ages 6-21 are also educated apart from students who do not have a disability, with 39% in separate classrooms, 16% in separate public schools, 10% in residential facilities. Only 15% are educated in regular classrooms and resource rooms. Parents will need knowledge and support in addressing the educational, emotional, and physical challenges associated with their child’s deaf-blindness.



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## HELP IS AVAILABLE

There is a lot of help available from IDEA, beginning with a free evaluation of your child. According to IDEA, the nation's special education law, all children suspected of having a disability can be evaluated without cost to their parents to determine if they have a disability, and because of that disability, need special education services under IDEA. It is important to understand that a medical diagnosis does not mean the same as having a disability in education. Those special services are:

**Early Intervention**-a system of services to support infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth through 2) and their families. If a child is found eligible for Early Intervention services, staff work with you to develop what is known as an Individualized Family Services Plan or IFSP, which will describe your child's unique needs as well as the services he will receive to address those needs. Contact Alabama Early Intervention Services at 1-800-543-3098.

**Special Education and Related Services**-Services available through the public school system for school-aged children, including preschoolers (ages 3-21). The federal special education law called IDEA, and corresponding state law called Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), require that special education and related services be made available free of charge to every eligible child with a disability, including preschoolers. These services are designed to address the child's individual needs in the classroom resulting from the disability.

## REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

If you feel your child is in need of special education and related services, the first step is to make a referral to your child's school indicating the challenges you've noticed, and request that he be evaluated for a disability. The team will review all data and reports and parental concerns to determine if evaluation is necessary. If the referral is accepted, a formal referral form is completed, and you must give written consent for the evaluation to be done. The school has 60 calendar days from written consent to complete the evaluation process. If the referral is not accepted, written notice is given to the parent, and the child is referred to the problem-solving team.



Keep in mind that a child does not have to fail school to be eligible for special education services. A referral for special education should never be denied based solely on the student having passing grades.

An evaluation is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of



Alabama Parent Education Center 

PO Box 118 \* Wetumpka AL, 36092 \* 334-567-2252 \* 866-532-7660 \* [www.alabamaparentcenter.com](http://www.alabamaparentcenter.com)

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need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs. The initial evaluation will serve to answer these questions:

1. Does my child have a disability?
2. Does his disability affect his educational performance?
3. Does my child need special education and related services?

Just the mere presence of a disability does not automatically qualify your child as "a child with a disability" under special education laws. Your child must meet the criteria listed for Deaf-Blindness using certain minimum evaluative components. The evaluative components include Audiological evaluation data indicating that the student has a hearing impairment. There must be optometric and/or ophthalmic data indicating that the individual has a visual impairment. There must be performance measures such as developmental scores, diagnostic tests, observations, communication evaluations, orientation and mobility (OM) assessments that document how the impairment adversely affects the educational performance of the child. Children with vision and hearing impairments must be given assessments appropriately developed and/or modified to meet their needs.

## DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

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When the evaluation process has been completed, the team has 30 days to review all the assessment data and scores, meet with all the other team members, including parents, and make an eligibility decision.

The team will collaborate and create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare to others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what individualized instruction and related services are recommended to help your child. If you disagree with the report, you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation or IEE, paid for by the school. The school is also allowed to deny your request for IEE, but it must take additional steps to prove its evaluation is appropriate.

If your child is identified as "a child with a disability" determined to be eligible, a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 calendar days of the initial eligibility determination. The data obtained during the evaluation is used to determine what services are required for the child to make educational progress. An IEP must be developed and in effect before special education and related services are provided. The school must obtain written informed consent from the parent before the initial provision of services to the child.



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Sometimes the test scores and data do not meet the qualifying criteria for disability, and your child is denied eligibility for services. If you disagree with the ineligibility decision, you have the right to appeal this decision and should inform the school. You will receive a written copy of your Special Education Rights from the school, which contains information on due process procedures to follow. You can also contact our staff for assistance.

## RESOURCES

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Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services [www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/](http://www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/)

Children's Rehabilitation Services  
[www.rehab.alabama.gov/crs](http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/crs)

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind  
<https://www.aidb.org/>

American Foundation for the Blind  
<https://www.afb.org/default.aspx>

Family Connect <https://www.familyconnect.org/>

Alabama Early Intervention Service  
<http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/individuals-and-families/early-intervention>

National Center on Accessible Educational Materials <http://aem.cast.org/>

Alabama Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped  
<http://aplsws1.apls.state.al.us/aplsnew/content/bphmain>

Eye Foundation Hospital Resource Directory  
<http://www.eyesightfoundation.org/resources/>

National Center on Deaf-Blindness  
<https://nationaldb.org/families>

Perkins School for the Blind  
<http://www.perkins.org/>

## YOUR OPINION MATTERS

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**Stakeholder opinion** is very important to our center. We invite you tell us what you think and make suggestions for trainings and publications. Complete a brief survey, call our center, or join our advisory committee. Your input is always welcome. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPTI>



## APEC IS HERE TO HELP

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