

Things to Remember When Requesting an Intervener for Your Child

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Although the use of interveners for children with deaf-blindness has a long history and there is a growing body of research and literature supporting the idea (for example see the DB-LINK website, and Alsop, Blaha, and Kloos, 2000), there can be considerable confusion when parents request that an intervener be provided for their child. Parents might not be clear about the precise reasons that an intervener is necessary, and few educational professionals will be familiar with the idea since deaf-blindness is a very low incidence disability. Experience shows that confusion is minimized if parents have a clear idea why an intervener is necessary for their child, some concept of what the intervener is meant to be doing and why, and an understanding of the most common misconceptions that arise when the idea of an intervener is first brought up.

Why does your child need an intervener? The concept of the intervener is specifically related to the nature of deaf-blindness as a disability that limits access to essential information for development. The decision to request an intervener should be based on discussion of three things:

1. General information about deaf-blindness including implications for development, teaching strategies, communication approaches, and the concept of the intervener.
2. An up-to-date, appropriate and comprehensive assessment of the individual student's current abilities, learning styles, and educational needs, preferably involving several different professionals and family members.
3. Consideration of the existing or proposed program for the student, including such aspects as the ratio of adults to students, curriculum, communication systems used, and the physical environment.

What are the common misconceptions when an intervener is requested for a student?

- a. People may think that the student is not yet ready—cognitively, developmentally, linguistically, or emotionally—for this level of support because they are thinking of the intervener as a sign language interpreter (see Morgan, 2001). If the case for providing an intervener is made well, then it should be obvious that there can be no such thing as a student with deaf-blindness who ‘...is not yet ready...’ for this kind of support, although there may be students within the population of children with deaf-blindness who do not need it, or do not need it any more.
- b. Sometimes there is a feeling that what the parents are asking for is something that would actually help every student in the class, and it is not fair for one child to have it if the others cannot. This suggests that the case for an intervener for the child with deaf-blindness has not been made clearly and precisely

Fact sheets from California Deaf-Blind Services are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals who are deaf-blind. The information applies to students 0–22 years of age. The purpose of the fact sheet is to give general information on a specific topic. More specific information for an individual student can be provided through individualized technical assistance available from CDBS. The fact sheet is a starting point for further information.

enough following the guidelines in Points 1 to 3 above. The request for support from an intervener should be made because, for that particular child, it represents the best—and in many cases the only—way to implement the child’s IEP.

- c. A frequent challenge is the absence of anyone in the district/county who could train and support an intervener to work with the student. There is now a body of useful literature on this topic, as on other aspects of deaf-blind education (see Belote, 2002). The state deaf-blind project will be able to make this information available, and may also offer other support such as contributing to the assessment process and providing training.
- d. Everyone wants the student to learn to relate to peers and to adults within the class and throughout the school, and sometimes it is thought that an intervener will block this development and keep the student isolated (see Hartmann It’s Only Natural in this edition of reSources). In fact, the intervener is not intended to act as a barrier between the student and other people except where these social contacts would be inappropriate, distracting, or counter-productive. For many students with deaf-blindness, the intervener is likely to be the key figure in facilitating social interactions with others, a process that might need to be planned and structured with great care over a considerable period of time.
- e. When people want a student with deaf-blindness to experience full or partial inclusion in general education settings, they sometimes oppose the idea of an intervener as they think that it will be counter-productive and stigmatizing in some way. Yet for many students with deaf-blindness there is no possibility of effective functioning in mainstream settings without this support as an essential prerequisite.
- f. Another common objection is that the student may become dependent upon the intervener, and that this will be a bad thing. In fact, the student will almost certainly need to become dependent upon the intervener as part of the process of developing trust and building a positive relationship, so that together they will then be in a position to work on whatever is necessary. Encouraging this dependence is a deliberate strategy, but it is a means to an end and not a goal in itself.

For any school district, providing an intervener to support a student with deaf-blindness undoubtedly represents a significant expense, and also a leap into the unknown which carries the likelihood of ongoing complications and challenges. However, there is growing evidence that an intervener, when used effectively and successfully, can be a powerful tool for implementing the IEP for a wide range of students with deaf-blindness. We owe it to the district administrators, and to the students themselves, to prepare the case for intervention with care and clarity, and to be ready and able to explain and educate when we meet with understandable concern and hesitancy.

Useful Reading

Alsop, L. (Ed.) (2002). *Understanding deafblindness: Issues, perspectives, and strategies*. Logan, Utah: SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University.

Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2000). Briefing paper: The intervener in early intervention and educational settings for children and youth with deafblindness. Retrieved from www.tr.wou.edu/ntac/documents/spotlight/intervener.htm.

Belote, M. (2002). Effective Use of One-on-Ones for Children who are Deaf-Blind. *reSources*, (10)12, Winter 2002 (www.sfsu.edu/~cadbs/News.html).

DB-LINK website has a Selected Topics section on ‘Interveners’ at www.tr.wou.edu/dblink/lib/topics/single_topic.cfm?topic=Interveners&d_topic=Interveners.

Morgan, S. (2001). “What’s My Role?” A comparison of the responsibilities of interpreters, interveners, and support service providers. *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*, (9)1, Fall 2001 (www.tr.wou.edu/tr/dbp).