

Developing Independence

The child who is deaf-blind needs your help to explore the world through touch and movement. You may be afraid he will get hurt, but all children receive a few bumps and bruises as they grow up. He needs to get out and move around to increase development in all skill areas.

You can encourage independence in the child in the following ways:

1. Child-proof the home or classroom to allow the child to learn to avoid obstacles in a safe way. Remove dangerous or valuable objects which may be of concern. This strategy is no different than you would use with any other young child.
2. Teach the child new skills by doing activities together, with your hands on top of his. As he becomes more familiar with the activity, make your touch lighter and lighter until the child does it for himself.
3. It is important that you point out to the child the natural cues that are available in the environment which tell him what to do. For example, the child can be taught to feel his hands for stickiness or to smell his hands to determine if hand washing is needed. In this way, he will do it for himself when necessary, rather than waiting for someone to tell him to wash his hands.
4. The child should be encouraged to use his sense of touch in all activities to provide for greater independent movement and safety in exploration. The child should be taught to feel for the seat of his chair before sitting. He should search for dropped objects by touch. He should be allowed to touch his food and drink to locate them on the table and to determine when he is finished.

*Adapted from Sternberg-White, S., Chen, D., Watts, J., 1992,
Developing Social-Emotional Skills, INSITE, Utah State University, Logan, Utah*