

## Strategies for Identifying Deaf-Blindness

### What is Deaf-Blindness?

The term “deaf-blindness” refers to any combination of hearing and vision losses that impacts an individual’s communication, interaction, learning, and /or participation. “Multiple disabilities” can include impacts on hearing and vision that are caused by conditions of the eye, ear, or neurological conditions such as cortical vision impairment (CVI) or auditory processing disorder. Children and adults affected by deaf-blindness often have other diagnoses or disabilities. Since multiple disabilities and complex medical conditions can manifest in a variety of ways, possible impacts on hearing and vision must be considered.

### Hearing Loss Behavioral Indicators

Can the individual use hearing effectively?

- Does the child startle in response to loud noises?
- Does s/he respond to familiar sounds when s/he cannot see the source?
- Does s/he alert, fuss or quiet, or orient in response to speech?
- At about 4-7 months, does the child turn to sounds and voices or give any indication of detecting a sound source?
- Does s/he babble, coo, grunt, or vocalize?
- Can s/he answer spoken questions or follow spoken prompts/instructions?
- Does the child begin to progress to speech?
- Can the child use his/her hearing to participate in a conversation successfully?

### Vision Loss Behavioral Indicators

Can the individual use vision effectively?

- Does the child have eyes and eyelids that look typical?
- Does her/his eye motor function (fix and follow) seem effective?
- Does s/he turn or tilt her/his head in unusual positions to look at something?
- Does s/he hold things very close to her/his eyes?
- Does the child notice items in the top/bottom, and left/right of visual field?
- Does s/he seem to favor one eye over the other?
- Does s/he over-reach or under-reach for objects (ages 7+ months)?
- Does the child recognize caregivers and other familiar faces?
- Does s/he smile in response to a smile?
- Does s/he get excited at sight of a bottle or a preferred object or person?

Referral: <https://deafblind.ufl.edu/welcome/make-a-referral-or-request-assistance>

## Vision & Hearing Loss Risk Factors

- Hereditary Chromosomal disorders and syndromes (CHARGE syndrome, Trisomy including Down syndrome, Usher syndrome, etc.)
- Family history of hearing and/or vision loss
- Malformation of eyes, ears, nose, throat
- Rh incompatibility
- Prematurity, Low birth weight, Apgar score 0-3, Neonatal infections
- Hospitalization in NICU / PICU
- Albinism
- Retinoblastoma, tumors, cancer treatment
- Hyperthyroidism
- Hyperbilirubinemia
- Neurodegenerative disorder
- Maternal infection(s) during pregnancy
- Congenital viral or bacterial infections (Rubella, CMV, Group B Streptococcus, Toxoplasmosis, Varicella, HIV, Syphilis, Zika, neonatal Herpes Simplex, etc.)
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Maternal drug use
- Birth trauma
- Childhood infections (measles, chicken pox, meningitis/encephalitis, etc.)
- Microcephaly, Hydrocephalus
- Eye/Ear/Head trauma
- Neurosurgical interventions
- Seizures
- Anoxia, Asphyxia
- Respiratory distress, prolonged mechanical ventilation
- Ototoxic medications
- Chemical exposures
- Neurological disorders and injuries (cerebral palsy, stroke, TBI)

**If you suspect that a child may not be able to use her/his hearing and vision effectively, please refer the family to the Florida & Virgin Islands Deaf-Blind Collaborative ([www.deafblind.ufl.edu](http://www.deafblind.ufl.edu))**

**Shelly Voelker, Ed.D., 352-275-9505, [shellyv@ufl.edu](mailto:shellyv@ufl.edu)**

