



California Deaf-Blind Services

Fact Sheet

How to Interact with Individuals with Dual Sensory Impairments

Individuals with dual sensory impairments need to use their senses of touch and smell to be aware of the people, places, and things in their environment. These individuals may have some remaining vision and/or hearing, yet still rely upon their senses of touch and smell to confirm what they saw/heard. This confirmation becomes even more important in new situations with new people.

It is important to ask family or staff familiar with the person with dual sensory impairments how the person likes to be approached. The following points are some general guidelines to provide a positive interaction.

1. Touch the shoulder of the person to signal an interaction is going to happen.
2. Introduce yourself by a name sign (fingerspelling the first letter of your name in a position relating to your unique characteristic, e.g., hair, watch, glasses, smile, etc.), by smelling your wrist to learn your distinctive scent/perfume/cologne or by a distinctive object (e.g., keychain, jewelry, belt buckle, etc.)
3. Touch the person with warm hands to avoid a startle response.
4. Touch the person with deep, firm touch on the bony areas (e.g., elbows, knees, shoulders) to avoid overstimulating the person. Many individuals with dual sensory impairments are very sensitive to touch and can be easily overstimulated.
5. If the person with dual sensory impairments has difficulty with seizure management, avoid light, brisk touch as this type of touch will overstimulate the person and could cause seizures. For individuals with cerebral palsy, light, brisk touch may cause inappropriate reflex movements. Deep, firm touch relaxes the nervous system and will allow the person to be responsive rather than overstimulated.

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