

FACT SHEET

Awareness of Medical Issues in Relation to Changes in Behavior

Individuals with dual sensory impairments may demonstrate behaviors, which are frequently viewed as inappropriate. These behaviors can be interpreted as strange head movements, odd body postures, unexplained emotional reactions, self-stimulatory movements, noncompliance, tantrums, etc. Individuals with dual sensory impairments may be attempting to compensate for the loss of vision, hearing, and/or the physical impairments which may be related to their specific disability. Many of these behaviors are caused by reactions to medical issues and/or the effects of medications needed to manage the medical issues.

The behaviors are more important if there is a change from the individual's usual behavior. The change in behavior may indicate a change in the medical condition of the individual with dual sensory impairments. Prompt medical attention should be considered to rule out medical issues as a cause in behavior.

The following charts give an overview of some medical conditions frequently associated with deafblindness. The behavior should be thoroughly discussed with the personal physician to determine diagnosis and resulting medical treatment.

**The Project for New Mexico
Children & Youth Who Are
Deafblind**



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Fact sheets from the Project for NM Children & Youth Who Are Deafblind are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with dual sensory impairments. The information applies to students 0 – 21 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. The fact sheet is a starting point for further information. Information for this Fact Sheet kindly supplied by California Deaf-Blind Services and the Nevada Dual Sensory Impairment Project.

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
HEARING ISSUES	Conductive loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Congestion ◆ Fingers in ears ◆ "Not listening" ◆ Pulling on ears ◆ Talking too loud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam ◆ Allergies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Medication ◆ Tubes ◆ Surger ◆ Hearing aids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frustration ◆ Paranoia ◆ Withdrawal
	Sensorineural loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "Not listening" ◆ Not responding to particular/all sounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by ear-nose-throat specialist and audiologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Hearing aids ◆ Auditory training ◆ Surgery ◆ Augmentative communication systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frustration ◆ Confusion ◆ Social isolation ◆ Difficulty with self-concept
	Allergies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fluctuating inattention ◆ Congestion ◆ Pain ◆ Respiratory difficulties ◆ Rashes ◆ Sleepiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Sensitivities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by allergist or ear-nose-throat specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Medication ◆ Allergy shots ◆ Environmental modification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frustration ◆ Confusion

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
PHYSICAL ISSUES	Heart/endurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fatigue ◆ Shortness of breath ◆ Change in skin color/temperature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mediations ◆ Surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frustration ◆ Fear
	Asthma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Wheezing ◆ Tightness in chest ◆ Fatigue ◆ Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Limitations ◆ Cause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Medications ◆ Relaxation training ◆ Environmental modification ◆ Positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fear ◆ Frustration ◆ Embarrassment
	Diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frequent urination ◆ Volume of urination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician and ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Medication ◆ Diet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frustration ◆ Embarrassment
	PMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Emotional lability ◆ Irritability ◆ Food cravings ◆ Monthly behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Diet ◆ Vitamins ◆ Exercise ◆ Medications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician and dietician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Diet ◆ Vitamins ◆ Exercise ◆ Medications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Full range
	Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fatigue ◆ Difficulty attending ◆ Crying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Diet ◆ Vitamins ◆ Food allergies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician and/or dietician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Diet ◆ Vitamins ◆ Gastrointestinal tube 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Withdrawal ◆ Depression
	Psychomotor seizures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Pattern of "tantrum" ◆ Sleeping after "tantrum" ◆ Lack of responsiveness during "tantrum" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by neurologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Medication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Confusion ◆ Anger
	Medications ◆ Behavior ◆ Seizure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Small tremor-like movements ◆ Sleepiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Weighing side effects vs. benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician; re-evaluate during puberty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Close communication with physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Confusion ◆ Frustration
Puberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Change in behavior ◆ Change in vision ◆ Clumsiness ◆ Weight change ◆ Growth pain ◆ Odd sensations ◆ Skin and body sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Normal development and effects on medications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Laugh a lot ◆ Counseling ◆ Education ◆ Peer support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Confusion ◆ Embarrassment ◆ Withdrawal ◆ Anxiety ◆ Egocentrism 	

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
VISION ISSUES	Near and distance vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Holding close to face ◆ Inattention ◆ Squinting ◆ Responding to hear or far objects, not both 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cause ◆ Exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by eye specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Glasses ◆ Seating ◆ Positioning of objects and people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Withdrawal ◆ Social Isolation ◆ Fear
	Field loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Head turning/tilting ◆ Task avoidance ◆ Clumsiness ◆ Impaired mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Areas of field loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by eye specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Positioning of people and objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fear ◆ Frustration ◆ Withdrawal ◆ Refusal of specific activities requiring use of impaired field
	Glaucoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tantrums ◆ Eye-poking ◆ Head-hitting ◆ Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Eye drops ◆ Surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Anger ◆ Confusion
	Cataracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cloudy lens ◆ Eye-poking ◆ Lack of visual focus ◆ Seeking light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Adjustment to blindness
	Nystagmus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Small, rapid eye movements (horizontal or vertical) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cause ◆ Treatment ◆ Effect of visual field and focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Positioning of people and objects ◆ Allow time for processing visual information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Frustration
	Light Sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Avoiding light ◆ Head down ◆ Eyes closed ◆ Crying ◆ Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Visor, hat ◆ Sunglasses ◆ Classroom lighting ◆ Support for student as light changes in moving from one environment to another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fear ◆ Discomfort ◆ Anger

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
POSITIONING ISSUES	Cerebral Palsy	◆ Inattention	◆ Ways to inhibit reflexes	◆ Exam by therapist	◆ Positioning ◆ Therapy	◆ Excitement ◆ Fear
	Hypotonia	◆ Fatigue	◆ Limitations	◆ Exam by therapist	◆ Positioning	◆
	Dislocated hips	◆ Pain ◆ Crying ◆ Resisting movement	◆ Treatment ◆ Handling ◆ Limitations	◆ Exam by physician	◆ Braces ◆ Surgery ◆ Positioning	◆ Fear ◆ Discomfort
	Scoliosis	◆ Curvature of spine ◆ Pain ◆ Crying	◆ Treatment and therapy advisement	◆ Exam by physician	◆ Braces ◆ Surgery ◆ Positioning	◆ Discomfort