

## PED Intervener Training 2023

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This training is brought to you by the UNM Center for Development and Disability. My name is Airth McCourt, I am the education consultant for the project for New Mexico Children and Youth Who Are Deaf-Blind.

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Here is a message from New Mexico Public Education Department:

“Evidence-based interventions for individuals with deafblindness are not universal. Although these are evidence-based interventions, they should be individualized for a particular student. In the education setting, the IEP team will develop the plan for that student. The IEP team shall review an IEP at least on an annual basis.”

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Project for New Mexico Children and Youth Who Are Deafblind is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs and the New Mexico Public Education Department. Information in this presentation was provided by the deafblind network.

### Slide 4

The topic for this training is Interveners in Education, support for students who are Deaf-Blind. This training is beneficial for parents and caregivers of children who are deafblind, educators, therapists and early intervention providers.

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If you have any questions or would like information or training on deafblindness, please contact the project for New Mexico Children and Youth Who Are Deaf-Blind. Contact information will be shared again at the end of the training.

### Slide 6

After this training, you will be able to define deafblindness and how it impacts learning. You will be able to define what an intervener is and how they support the education of a student who is deafblind. You will learn about the national intervener movement to include interveners in schools. And you will be able to identify how to get support for children and youth who are deafblind in New Mexico.

### Slide 7

In this section, we will cover the definition of deafblindness and how to identify if an individual is deaf-blind.

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How do we define deafblindness? The federal definition of deafblindness is concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

This definition refers to students in early childhood special education ages 3-5 and school aged children ages 6-21.

For infants and toddlers receiving Early Intervention services ages 0-2, deafblindness is defined as combined hearing and vision impairments or delays, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and intervention needs that specialized early intervention services are needed.

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Deafblindness refers to individuals with varying degrees of vision and hearing impairments. Someone who is deafblind may have mild to moderate hearing loss and be legally blind. Another person may have progressive vision loss and be profoundly deaf. Yet another person may have cortical visual Impairment, commonly known as CVI, and a moderate hearing impairment. All of these individuals fit the definition of deafblind. In fact, most children and youth who are deafblind have some vision and some hearing.

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When hearing and vision is not a reliable source of information, the child must be provided with experiences in a manner that is specific to their strengths and abilities. 80-90% of children who are deaf-blind have one or more additional disabilities or health problems. Typically, students who are deafblind qualify for special education services under the “multiple disabilities” category. It is important for teams supporting the student to recognize the need for both vision and hearing to be addressed. Deafblindness is also considered a disability of access. Access to information, access to people, and access to the environment. Information must be presented to the child in a meaningful way. Families and educational teams can identify how to give the child access to their environment, their peers and curriculum through a system that is individualized to the child.

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Deafblindness impacts individuals in many different ways. Typical learners gather information primarily through senses of hearing and vision. It is estimated that more than 80% of learning happens through vision. Individuals with a visual impairment or blindness can use hearing to help compensate for loss of vision. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing can use sight to help compensate for their hearing impairment. Children and youth with deafblindness have a unique disability separate from only hearing impairment or only vision impairment and need specialized instruction.

Deafblindness is a major disruption to incidental learning. Incidental Learning is learning that occurs by observing our environment, people and activities repeatedly. When supporting individuals with deafblindness, it is important that teaching moments are deliberate to ensure that they have meaningful opportunities to learn. There are specific evidence-based interventions that are used to provide access for a child or student with deafblindness to learn during routines, activities, and lessons. These strategies ensure that the individual gets direct learning opportunities.

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When a student is deafblind, there are many obstacles that could impact their ability to fully participate in the classroom. Students may lack access to materials that have not been modified or individualized to the student's strengths and abilities. Students may miss information that is provided verbally or visually. Communication by the student may be missed or overlooked. Many students with deafblindness do not use speech to communicate. Communication often starts with body movements and gestures before it progresses to the use of tangible symbols, sign language or spoken word. Individuals with deafblindness may need significantly more time to process and respond to stimuli. People interacting with the child may not know to give the child more time to respond. Students may experience isolation from activities in the classroom when the student does not have a person to engage them. Educators may not have training/experience with students who are deafblind and may not know which evidence-based approaches they can use.

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Now that you know what deafblindness is and how it impacts learning, it's time to answer the big question. How do we give students who are deafblind consistent access to their environment and their peers?

### Slide 14

You guessed it, an intervener! In this section, you will learn what an intervener is and how interveners can positively impact learning for individuals who are deaf-blind.

### Slide 15

An intervener is a person who works consistently one-to-one with an individual who is deafblind to help them gather information, develop and use communication skills, and establish relationships. Intervenors are trained in evidence-based practice for individuals who are deafblind. They support young children and students until they graduate from school. This one-to-one support can occur in a classroom or at home. Intervenors give the student ACCESS to information.

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Let's go more detail about the role of the intervener. Intervenors provide consistent access to instruction and environmental information that is usually gained by typical students through vision and hearing, but that is unavailable or incomplete to an individual who is deaf-blind. They provide access to or assist in the development and use of receptive and expressive communication skills. Because many students may use non-conventional modes of communicating, their expressive communication may be missed or misinterpreted. When others are communicating with the student, an intervener can support the process to ensure that information is being given appropriately to that student or ensuring that the student is attending to the communication.

Intervenors facilitate the development and maintenance of trusting, interactive relationships that promote social and emotional well-being. Because they work closely with the student, they are very knowledgeable about that student and what is important to them. The intervener provides consistent interactions and responses to build this trust. By building a foundation of trusting

relationships, interveners provide support to help a student form relationship with others and increase social connections and participation in activities. They can ensure that when the students peers attempt to interact in ways that the student cannot access through vision and hearing, that the peers can be encouraged to use others ways of interacting that are more appropriate to the student.

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Interveners do not work by themselves with the student, they are part of the educational team. Everyone working with the student should be communicating to each other and the intervener. As a team member, the intervener participates in IEP meetings. It is important that the intervener fully understands and supports IEP goals, gives input on their knowledge and experience with the student, and is given information on any testing that the student receives.

The intervener also participates in all therapies and activities that the child is receiving in the school setting. The intervener is a team member and works closely with the teachers and therapists to identify the best ways the student can have access. This supports consistency across settings for the student. The intervener takes direction from the teacher to ensure the student has access to the classroom activities, curriculum and peers.

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Each child with deafblindness is unique and communicates differently. An intervener may need to be knowledgeable in different communication methods that are specific to that student. Here is a list of possible communication forms an intervener may use when working with a student with deafblindness: American Sign Language (ASL), Tactile Sign Language, Haptics, Tactile Fingerspelling, braille, Protactile Language, Vocal Language, Gestures, Touch Cues, Objects and Pictures. This is not a full list of communication modes. Communication is complex and unique to the individual. You may not recognize some of the methods of communication on this list.

Let's go over a few. One mode of communication for individuals with deafblindness is touch cues. Touch cues give information to the individual with deafblindness through specific touches to share information. For example, a teacher might pat a student on the shoulder to tell the student it is time to sit down for the activity. A father may kiss his son on the forehead to greet him and let him know it is dad who is interacting with him. Touch cues will likely be individual to the child and family, and then carried through to the classroom. Tangible objects are also a common mode of communication. Objects can be used to share information about upcoming activities or be used for an individual to request an activity. For example, a spoon or cup can represent an upcoming mealtime. Another way of communication for people who are deafblind is Protactile communication. It is a new language created by the deafblind community and separate from American Sign Language. This language gives information through touch that might otherwise be missed when using other modes of communication. It is used more commonly in cities with a large deaf-blind community.

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“Do with me, not for me.” This is the intervener motto. The intervener provides access by doing activities with a student and taking advantage of learning opportunities. So, what does it look like in a classroom when a student has an intervener providing access?

A student with deafblindness may interact with playdough for the first time, an intervener uses an evidence-based intervention such as hand under hand to explore playdough with student. Touching a new texture may be uncomfortable initially, the intervener can explore the playdough while the student uses their hands to feel what the intervener is doing before they decided to touch and play with the playdough. Let’s talk about a student who is completely deaf with limited vision: An intervener can sit with the student and use sign within the student’s field of vision to ensure they get the teachers instructions for an upcoming assignment. Some students may not use traditional communication, but use subtle gestures and behaviors to communicate their needs. An intervener is in close proximity of the student and responds to communication of the student consistently. When a student’s unique communication is understood and reinforced, a strong foundation is built and can be used to expand and increase different modes of communication.

A student with deafblindness may miss the opportunity to interact with a peer who asks them if they want to play. An intervener can encourage the peer to use touch to communicate and student now has the chance to interact, share and communicate to make a friend.

An intervener can take advantage of a routine such as supporting a student to put on their jacket and use this opportunity to sign “jacket.” When they go outside, the intervener can sign “cold” to teach the concept of why we put our jackets on. Interveners are important to an educational team and as a direct support to someone with deafblindness.

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YouTube Video: ASL Intervener

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeh6juL9HmM&list=PL-Mj2Xvt7yJiaWfvmSGu\\_TW9b3C1WXxUM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeh6juL9HmM&list=PL-Mj2Xvt7yJiaWfvmSGu_TW9b3C1WXxUM)

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Evidence shows that when a Student or Child receives consistent auditory, visual and tactile stimulation, they develop interactive behaviors with adults and peers. Using an intervener increases the number of hours a student communicates. Students with interveners make statistically and educationally significant gains in all developmental domains. Students with interveners tend to move from early use of signals and cues to use of formal language. Students with interveners are less isolated in a classroom setting.

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Interveners should not be confused with other supports a student with deafblindness might have, for example there are support service providers. Support service providers work with youth and adults to give them access to their environment by guiding them and providing visual and environmental information. This service empowers people with deafblindness to live independently by enabling them to do their own banking, shopping, and other essentials. Interveners are also not interpreters. Interpreters work with all age groups to interpret visual and spoken information. They may use a combination of sign language, haptics, tactile sign

language, Protactile communication, or any other mode that the individual communicates through or receives information. Interveners are a unique service provided to students in the classroom or at home. When a student graduates, they will no longer need the services of the intervener. If they continue to need support to receive access to their environment, they may use the services of the Support Service Provider or Interpreter.

### Slide 23

Now you know the importance of interveners for students who are deafblind. In this next section, you will learn about the national intervener movement, where interveners are recognized in the united states, and where to find information on how to be trained as an intervener in New Mexico.

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Interveners have been a developing practice in the United States for over twenty years. There are many national groups advocating for interveners to be available to students with deafblindness in public education. The National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) is leading the initiative to have interveners and qualified personnel trained to work with students with deafblindness. The National Intervener & Advocate Association (NIAA) believes that because all children with deafblindness have the right to access information, they have right to an intervener. They are advocating for interveners to be recognized nationally. The National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB) advocates for interveners for students who are deafblind by empowering families. Because of this movement, there are many states who train interveners to be provided to students who are deafblind. There is currently a strong push for interveners to be recognized nationally in schools.

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The Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan may act is definitely worth paying attention to. It is Named for the first deaf student to be formally educated in the U.S. and for Helen Keller's beloved teacher, respectively. The Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act will strengthen the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to improve results for deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind children, including those with additional disabilities. Of the many amazing things this act proposes, it is working to improve outcomes of students who are deafblind by updating relevant terminology, including adding intervener services as a *related service for schools*, and ensuring the availability of trained and qualified personnel.

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At this time, there are many states that have intervener programs, recognize the role of an intervener, or offer trainings to support intervener services. Some states that have interveners or offer intervener training are Texas, Colorado, Illinois, California, Minnesota, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Arizona, Oregon, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio and Washington. The list is not exhaustive, but includes states that participate in promoting and training interveners. For example, even if an intervener is not recognized in the state, some states offer support to individuals to independently complete the Open Hands Open Access training modules. Some states offer Intervener cohorts that train groups to become interveners in the schools. There are some states that are working on requiring that interveners be provided for those who qualify for one through the determination of an IEP team.

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What impacts students who are deafblind from being provided with an intervener? In 2021, 9,809 children and youth were identified with deafblindness (ages 3-21). it is very low incidence disability. Because it is low incidence, schools and educational teams may not even know about interveners and deafblind training options. There is no national requirement for interveners to support students with deafblindness in an educational setting. In addition, parents and caregivers of children who are deafblind may not be aware that the child could benefit from an intervener and may not ask for one to be provided.

### Slide 28

In this training, you have learned about deafblindness and how it impacts learning. You have learned about interveners and how they support students by creating access to the student's classroom and peers. You have learned about the national intervener movement to add this position to a related service so that interveners are recognized in schools nationally. In the next section, you will learn how to support students in New Mexico who are deaf-blind.

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In New Mexico, there are currently 149 children and youth ages 0-21 who are identified as being deafblind. It is important that children and youth with deafblindness in New Mexico have support from qualified personnel.

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Like many other states, interveners are not currently listed as a related service for Individualized Education Plans (IEP) in New Mexico. That does not mean that students in New Mexico cannot benefit from intervener training or deafblind training. Where can you get support for intervener training and deafblind training in New Mexico?

### Slide 31

The Project for New Mexico Children and Youth Who are deafblind! This project can help identify intervener training for anyone interested in pursuing this credential. Intervener training is beneficial for anyone working directly with a student or child with deafblindness. Intervener training can also benefit parents or caregivers of children with deafblindness. The training teaches skills and tools to support the child in the home and in the classroom. If there are educational teams working with an intervener, training for the staff on the role an intervener is important. Training is offered through universities as well as online. In fact, there are many FREE online trainings available on deafblindness through the open hands open access modules through the national center on deafblindness

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The project for New Mexico children and youth who are deafblind promotes evidence-based interventions for students who are deafblind to ensure they have access to their classroom, their peers and the curriculum. The project can support you to identify trainings for anyone working with a child or student between the ages of 0-21. The project also provides technical assistance to families and educational teams. If you have any questions about intervener training, deafblind training, or would like support for a child or student with deafblindness in New Mexico, please contact us!

### Slide 33

Now that you know where to get information on intervener training, let's talk about how each parent, caregiver, educator, therapist and early intervention provider can use this information to support a child or student in New Mexico with deaf-blindness.

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Parents/caregivers can complete intervener training or deaf-blind training if they want to expand their skills and knowledge about deafblindness. Parents can advocate for intervener training for one-on-one paraprofessionals for their child. Parents can discuss with IEP teams to identify if deaf-blind training or intervener training would benefit staff working directly with the student.

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Early intervention providers can benefit from early intervention training on deafblindness to expand knowledge on this low incidence disability. EI teams benefit from knowing about interveners and sharing that knowledge with parents and caregivers. As the children transition into special education programs, the early intervention team and parents can discuss interveners and to identify if it would be an appropriate service for the child to best access their classroom and the curriculum.

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Educational teams can complete deafblind training or intervener training to ensure they are using evidence-based interventions to support their students who are deaf-blind. Educators and therapists benefit from knowledge of the interveners role and can best support them as a team member. Intervenors and educational teams can work together to ensure the student has access to the curriculum, their classroom and their peers.

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Reference

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To contact the Project for New Mexico Children and Youth Who Are Deaf-Blind, please call 505-272-0321 or toll free 877-614-4051.

Or you can send an email to [hsc-NMDB@salud.unm.edu](mailto:hsc-NMDB@salud.unm.edu). The UNM Center for Development and Disability has many resources available through the CDD Library and the CDD Information Network.

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For information or support for deafblindness, please visit the project for New Mexico Children and Youth Who are Deaf-Blind website. <https://unmhealth.org/services/development-disabilities/programs/other-disability-programs/deafblind/>

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