

## What is Deaf-Blindness?

Most Deaf-blind people are not totally blind and are not totally deaf. Many have residual vision and/or hearing that they can use to some degree. In order to understand deaf blindness you must understand deafness and blindness separately. First you must know what it means to be deaf and second you must know what it means to be blind. Only then can you combine the two disabilities into an understanding of one disability, Deaf-Blindness. Many things that blind people do to adapt to their environment can be done by the deaf, and many things that the deaf do to adapt to their environment can be done by the blind.

## How do people become Deaf-blind?

One of the leading causes of deaf blindness is Usher's syndrome. People born with Usher's syndrome are born with a severe hearing impairment and lose their vision when they get older. Some people go Deaf-blind from Meningitis. Meningitis is a very serious illness and many people have died from it. The other causes of deaf blindness among them Maternal Rubella, brain damage, diabetes, Anoxia, cerebral mal-development, trauma, accident, cerebral palsy, and there are of course other causes and combinations of different things can lead to Deaf-blindness as well.

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# Information on Deaf- Blindness



**ORANGE COUNTY  
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## **How do Deaf-blind people get around?**

They can use sighted guide, a dog guide, a long white cane, or use their residual vision. Deaf-Blind people take the same types of transportation as everyone else such as: buses, trains, taxis, and cars. They just use different techniques to tell people where they are going. Some have cards that tell the bus or taxi driver where they are getting off others use print on Palm or a Print-Braille alphabet card to communicate with the driver.

## **How do Deaf-blind people communicate?**

Some deaf people use American Sign Language or manually coded English. They can use it either visually, tactilely, or both. When using it visually they may need to stand very close to the signer or farther away depending on their eye condition. If they use it tactilely then they would follow the signs by lightly touching the hands or wrists of the person signing to them. Sign language is most widely used by Deaf-blind people who were involved in the deaf community and learned to sign before going blind.

Some Deaf-blind people can speech read just as deaf people do if they have enough vision, if they don't they can use a method called Tadoma where they use their hands to feel the person's lips and jaw movements as well as any vibrations made by speaking. The most famous person to use this method was of course Helen Keller.

Some Deaf-blind people have enough vision that they can read and write in regular print. If they don't have enough vision to see what they are writing they can learn to write using a line guide that tactilely shows them where the line is. If they can not read regular print they may be able to read large print. People can write notes in large print or use large print typewriters to produce things in large print. Or they can use magnifiers or CCTVs to read things that are written in regular print.

If they cannot read print at all then they can learn Braille. Braille is the code that blind people use to read and write English. It is very different from print, it is not harder to learn, just different. A Braille slate and stylus or Braille writer can be used to write messages back-and-forth between two people who know Braille. Deaf-blind people may also use a machine called a Tellatouch. The Tellatouch has a regular QWERTY style keyboard with a Braille keyboard along the space bar. In the back it has a Braille cell that the Deaf-blind person can read as the person types at the front of the machine.

There are many alphabets that the Deaf-blind can use, among them are: the American Manual alphabet, the British deaf-blind alphabet, Print-on-Palm (where a person prints block letters of the alphabet into the Deaf-blind person's hand), a print/braille alphabet card or also known as a Braille Talk, Morse code, a raised line alphabet card, alphabet glove, Fishburne alphabet (for people that can not

learn Braille), Moon alphabet (Mostly used in the UK by people who go blind later in life and can't use Braille).

There is also the option of using communication boards. Communication boards can be visual or tactile and can use letters, symbols, or pictures. With Deaf-blind children it is common to use objects as communication tools. For example they are given a rubber ducky to tell them that it is bath time, or they are given a toothbrush to tell them it is time to brush their teeth.

Deaf-blind people can use a telephone with special equipment such as a TTY with a large print or braille display or equipment that helps them hear what the person on the other end of the line is saying.

With a computer and assistive technology they have access to the same computer applications as everyone else, such as Microsoft Word, Internet Explorer, and Outlook. They surf the internet, send email, use instant messenger, play games, write reports; basically the same things that everyone else can do.

Once Deaf-blind people learn the alternative techniques necessary to live independently they have no problem cooking, cleaning, or doing any of the other household chores that many of us dread. They are capable of living on their own, getting a job, and supporting their families. Deaf-blind people are just like anyone else except that they must learn the alternative techniques necessary for them to function without sight and hearing.