

Appropriate Touch

Sometimes the enthusiastic attempts of children with deaf-blindness to begin introductions to and friendships with other people are seen as frightening if the touch is too rough. The child may also approach people very closely in order to use her senses of touch and smell or limited vision. The child must be taught as young as possible how to touch others properly for her own safety and to develop friendships with others.

1. Teach the child to approach others by gently tapping others on the shoulder. When the person turns towards her, she can then ask for what she wants or can show someone what she wants to do. It is very important to help her touch appropriately before she has a chance to scare or hurt anyone. You may need to prompt this gentle touch for a while until the child does it independently.
2. Teach the child to remain an acceptable distance from others (e.g., generally the distance of an outstretched arm, although this varies in different cultures) until she has permission (from family or teachers) to explore people further. She can then move in closer to touch the person to identify familiar things about that person (e.g., cologne, ring, watch, hair, beard, etc.). The child should not be allowed to explore strangers.
3. The child should be taught that she can decide who she allows to touch her, including parents, other relatives, close friends, etc. You must also respect that any part of the child's body is private if she so chooses. The child should also be taught to move away or make some noise if she feels uncomfortable in a situation.

*Adapted from Sternberg-White, S., Chen D., Watts, J., 1992,
Developing Social-Emotional Skills, INSITE, Utah State University, Logan, Utah*