



FACT SHEET

Communication: What are they trying to tell me?

Some students who are deaf-blind cannot express some or all of what they want to communicate through speech, sign language, fingerspelling, or writing. When a student cannot express themselves in these symbolic ways, they often choose other modes of communication. The student will often choose the way that is easiest to get their message across. This expression is communication.

The student may communicate through facial expressions, body movements, posture, vocalizations, crying, tantrums, manipulating people and objects, etc. These communication attempts are frequently seen by families and/or professionals as behaviors that need to be eliminated, when in fact the student is trying to communicate and becomes more and more frustrated when their communication is misunderstood. If, instead, the student's attempt to communicate can be acknowledged and expanded, difficult behaviors may begin to decrease.

Points to Remember:

1. Look at the possible communicative intent of all of the student's behavior.
2. Be sure that the student's medical issues have been addressed as appropriately as possible.
3. Attempt to understand the student's communication effort.
4. Teach the student a more acceptable way to communicate what they want to express, after showing you understand the effort.

California Deaf-Blind Services
San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94132-4158
(415) 405-7560 VOICE/TTY
(415) 338-2845 FAX
www.cadbs.org