



Tips for Home or School Awareness of Medical Issues in Relation to Changes in Behavior

By: California Deaf-Blind Services



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.

These 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 deaf-blindness. The behavior should be thoroughly discussed with the personal physician to determine diagnosis and resulting medical treatment.

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 ad- visement	Exam by physician	Braces Surgery Positioning	Discomfort

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
HEARING ISSUES	Conductive Loss	Congestion Fingers in ears "Not Listening" Pulling on ears Talking too loud	Exam Allergies	Exam by eye phy- sician	Medication Tubes Surgery Hearing aids	Frustration Paranoia Withdrawal
	Sensorineural loss	"Not listening" Not responding to par- ticular/all sounds	Exam	Exam by ear-nose- throat specialist and audiologist	Hearing aids Auditory training Surgery Augmentative commu- nication systems	Frustration Confusion Social isolation Difficulty with self- concept
	Allergies	Fluctuation inattention Congestion Pain Respiratory difficulties Rashes Sleepiness	Sensitivities	Exam by allergist or ear-nose- throat specialist	Medication Allergy shots Environmental modifi- cation	Frustration Confusion

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
VISION ISSUES	Near & Distance Vision	Holding close to face Inattention Squinting Responding to near or far objects, not both	Cause Exam	Exam by eye specialist	Classes Seating Positioning of objects & people	Withdrawal Social isolation Fear
	Field Loss	Head turning/tilting Task avoidance Clumsiness Impaired mobility	Areas of field loss	Exam by eye specialist	Positioning of people and objects	Fear Frustration Withdrawal Refusal of specific activities requiring use of impaired field
	Glaucoma	Tantrums Eye-poking Head-hitting Pain	Exam	Exam by ophthalmologist	Eye drops Surgery	Anger Confusion
	Cataracts	Cloudy lens Eye-poking Lack of visual focus Seeking light	Treatment	Exam by ophthalmologist	Surgery	Adjustment to blindness
	Nystagmus	Small, rapid eye movements (horizontal or vertical)	Cause Treatment Effect on visual field and focus	Exam by ophthalmologist	Positioning of people & objects Allow time for processing visual information	Frustration
	Light Sensitivity	Avoiding light Head down Eyes Closed Crying Pain	Cause	Exam by ophthalmologist	Visor, hat Sunglasses Classroom lighting Support for student as light changes in moving from one environment to another	Fear Discomfort Anger



Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
PHYSICAL ISSUES	Heart/endurance	Fatigue Shortness of breath Change in skin color/ temp.	Limitations	Exam by physician	Medication Surgery	Frustration Fear
	Asthma	Wheezing Tightness in chest Fatigue Pain	Limitations Cause	Exam by physician	Medications Relaxation training Environmental modification Positioning	Fear Frustration Embarrassment
	Diabetes	Frequent urination Volume of urination	Limitations	Exam by physician and ophthalmologist	Medication Diet	Frustration Embarrassment
	PMS	Emotional lability Irritability Food cravings Monthly behavior change	Diet Vitamins Exercise Medications	Exam by physician and dietician	Diet Vitamins Exercise Medications	Withdrawal Depression
	Nutrition	Fatigue Difficulty attending Crying	Diet Vitamins Food allergies	Exam by physician and/or dietician	Diet Vitamins Gastro-intestinal tube	Withdrawal Depression
	Psychomotor seizures	Pattern of "tantrum" Sleeping after "tantrum" Lack of responsiveness during "tantrum"	Exam	Exam by neurologist	Medication	Confusion Anger
	Medications --Behavior --Seizure	Small tremor-like movements Sleepiness	Weighing side effects vs. benefits	Exam by physician; re-evaluate during puberty	Close communication with physician	Confusion Frustration
	Puberty	Change in behavior Change in vision Clumsiness Weight change Growth pain Odd sensations Skin and body sensitivity	Normal development and effects on medications	Exam by physician	Laugh a lot Counseling Education Peer support groups	Confusion Embarrassment Withdrawal Anxiety Egocentrism

