

Introduction :-

Each deafblind child is a unique individual, similar to all other children, yet different from all other children. Parents or educators working with deafblind child should know that each deafblind child need more individual support and care than a normal child. Ignorance and inability to understand the need of deafblind child make him isolated from the community. Through this booklet we have tried to provide information that most unwanted and difficult behaviour can be reduced or changed and replaced with useful and socially acceptable behaviour. This booklet will help you to find suggestions for developing deafblind child's behavior and attitude in a positive way. This booklet is a compilation of materials / literature which is already available and will be useful to teacher and parents as a basic self study guide.

This booklet is a small contribution from Sense International (India) to deafblind field.

For easy accessibility of information for people with sensory impairments this booklet is also available in Braille and Tape on request.

Difficult Behavior and How to Manage Them

Some individuals who are deafblind may engage in behavior, which troubles and challenges the people who care or interact with them. This behavior can possibly interfere with their inclusion in the society and become a barrier in forming close relationships. In severe instances it can put the health and safety of these individuals and those around them at risk. As a result, finding ways to minimize this behavior should be a top priority.

If a child becomes un-cooperative, self-abusive or aggressive, it is important to keep in mind that this behavior is often a direct result of issues related to deafblindness. Sensory impairments affect an individual's ability to understand what is happening and to communicate needs. Children with deafblindness may develop troubling behavior while trying to make sense of and cope with confusing situations that they don't know how to communicate about or change. The behavior may be an effective strategy the child has learned to use when he doesn't know a better way to communicate. In situations such as these, behavior problems may relate directly to deafblindness and associated problems with gathering information and communicating. As a result, intervention should be based on strategies that take into account the effects of deafblindness on the ability of an individual to gather information, understand the environment, communicate, and feel secure.

The effect of sensory loss on a child's ability to trust and bond with others is also a factor. When dealing with a child who is deafblind, it is important not to simply think of problems as "misbehaviors", and then react to them as such. When planning strategies for addressing behavior issues of children who are deafblind, everyone must keep in mind the links between sensory impairments, communication, and behavior.

Strategies for addressing behavior that do not resolve underlying issues of communication, security, and control may work in the short-term, but such solutions usually result in the return of the behavior or in replacement behaviors that may be even more troubling. Lasting change comes from providing more information, teaching new skills, modifying activities or environments, and finding new ways to give the child more choices and influence.

The most important consideration is not what to do in response to behavior problems when they occur, but what to do on a continuous basis to help prevent inappropriate behavior. If behavior is a continuing issue for an individual, those involved with him may need training in implementation of formal behavior plans and in emergency procedures for ensuring safety. In all cases, instances of behavior problems can be reduced by consistently using effective communication and support strategies while teaching new skills.

Finding out what behavior means :-

Decreasing challenging behavior begins by understanding why a child is behaving in a certain way. Behavior that is undesirable to others may be the way a child has learned to most effectively respond to a given situation or relationship. This behavior occurs because no other responses make sense to him. Those who care about the child may unknowingly even help bring about and encourage this behavior.

Because people who are deafblind are often not effective 'formal' communicators, they may communicate through their behavior. It is important to respect the message in the behavior, rather than focusing on simply eliminating or treating the behavior. Behavior problems usually occur for a reason. Behavior must be understood within a social and environmental context.

Understanding why behavior occur is the key to approaching them. It is essential to confront the causes for the challenging behavior before addressing the behavior itself. In order to do this, the first step is discovering the message in the behavior.

Is the behavior understandable?

In order to effectively develop strategies for decreasing behavior problems, it is necessary to have an outlook that isn't based on blaming the child for the problem. However, for children who are deafblind, one must consider communication, access to information, and all the other issues that figure into the situation. It is important to try and understand why the behavior is occurring, rather than just assuming that the child is trying to give you a hard time.

Searching for the underlying message is easier when those who are working with the child begin with the assumption that from the child's perspective, there may be a good reason for the behavior. Average people can easily understand the motivations behind behavior when examining their own actions. For example, most people would agree there have been times when they have failed to do something that was expected of them. This may have been something for work, family, or some kind of organisation. In this situation, the person involved knows there is something another person expects him to do, but he makes a conscious decision not to do it. In children, this is referred to as 'noncompliance', and it is often considered a behavior problem.

However, when most people think back to similar situations in their own lives, they often feel their failure to carry through with an expectation was completely justified. People express justifications in many ways such as :

- "I wasn't given enough information about how or why to do the task".
- "no one asked for my input before deciding what I was going to do."
- "I was asked or told about this assignment in a rude or disrespectful way."
- "The assignment was too hard for me."
- "I didn't feel well at the time."
- "I didn't think the expectation seemed fair."
- "The physical working conditions were not acceptable".

In these instances, the connection between the situation and the behavior is clear when the cause is known and the solution is also clear. If the average person is noncompliant for the reasons listed above, aren't there obvious solutions for regaining the person's cooperation?

Sometimes children who are deafblind are resistant when asked to participate. Because a child may face large obstacles and have fewer coping strategies, he may engage in behavior that escalates beyond noncompliance. The principle, however, remains the same. Understanding why a child behaves in ways that appear inappropriate is an important first step in finding possible solutions. This process is referred to as a functional analysis of the behavior. When children cannot or will not tell others why they are behaving in troubling ways, it is up to the people who care about them to try to answer this question.

Doing a functional analysis :-

The function of behavior is sometimes obvious. In many cases, however, it is not easy to determine. The same behavior may mean different things in different situations; however, it is very important to speculate on why the behavior is occurring if there is not an obvious answer. Trial and error can test speculative answers as strategies are developed based on these speculations.

The function of a behavior is the purpose it serves for the individual. Asking the following questions can help determine what the child is trying to achieve with the behavior.

Is the individual trying to get something with the behavior?

During the individual's life, when he engaged in tantrums or other problem behaviors, others may have tried to calm the situation by providing a toy, game, or comforting attention. Because of this, he may have learned that the most effective way to get something he wants or needs is through these behaviors. If he does not know better ways to communicate these needs, these behaviors may be used.

Is the individual trying to avoid or escape something with the behavior?

If the child has experiences in which an unpleasant situation ends or is postponed after he exhibits a problem behavior, he may learn that this is an effective way to reject objects, activities, and other people. If he has no other ways to express rejection, the behavior will be repeated.

Is the individual trying to cope with a confusing or threatening situation?

If the child is anxious or perceives that there is some kind of danger or threat, he may engage in behavior for protection. Many situations can seem threatening to someone who misses important information due to sensory impairments and communication difficulties. When people are afraid, they have an instinct to fight or escape. Other behaviors, such as repetitive movements, may be calming for a child who is confused about the situation or the expectations of others.

Is the individual trying to gain some control or equalize power?

Everyone wants some influence over what happens in his life. If the child does not know how, or is not given opportunities to express choices, he may try to gain control through behavior.

Does the individual know the appropriate way to behave?

In some case, a child may not know how to behave in certain situation. Children who are deafblind may not be able to rely on modeling to see how others around them are acting. In other cases, the child may be engaging in a family or cultural norm that is not understood by others. For example, hugging strangers may be considered a behavior problem until it is discovered that it is expected in that child's family.

Is the behavior a way to cope with physical or medical problems?

Behaviors such as eye poking or head slapping may be ways to relieve physical discomfort. Other behaviors may serve as a release of frustration created by pain or fatigue. Children who are deafblind are at risk for many painful physical conditions such as glaucoma, headaches, and poor sleep patterns. Even common illnesses or the effects of medication become greater problems when children have no effective communication strategies to report their symptoms and seek treatment.

Is the behavior pleasurable?

Sometimes certain behaviors simply feel good. When an individual is deafblind, he is not receiving as much sensory stimulation as other people. In some cases, a child may seek sensory feedback through, for example, eye pressing, rocking, or hitting some part of his body. If the child does not receive stimulation through the activities in his life, these behaviors may be present.

More questions about the functions of behavior may need to be asked, depending on individual children and situations. By working as a team, everyone involved can help determine the motivation for the behavior.

In order to find answers, those who care about the child should gather information about when and where the behavior is most likely to occur. There are several areas that should always be considered in order to determine the message of the behavior.

- **Consider problems with people.** Because behavior is usually rooted in communication, it is interactive. Think of 'behavior problems' as interaction problems. Everyone involved must share responsibility for improving the dynamics of situation. Problems with interactions may include failure of the child to understand the situation or the expectations of others, failure of others to understand what the child needs, or personality conflicts. Do problems occur more frequently with specific people? Why?
- **Consider problems with the activity and / or level of support.** Activities that are too hard can cause problems, as can those that are tedious and boring. The amount of help or encouragement may be too little or too much. Children have preferences about the type and level of activity. How does this affect the behavior?
- **Consider problem in the setting.** Lighting, noise, temperature, and the physical layout of an area are examples of environmental factors that can result in behavior problems. Additionally, some locations are associated with specific activities, such as a kitchen's association with eating. Where is the behavior most likely to occur, and what are the conditions, and expectations there? How does this affect the problem?
- **Consider problems with the time of day or day of the week.** If problems occur more frequently at a specific time, this may indicate the motivation of the behavior. How alert or fatigued a child feels may affect behavior. Also, like settings, certain times of the day or week may be associated with specific activities. Is there a pattern? If the problem occurs most frequently at certain times, why is this true?
- **Consider the conditions of the individual's lifestyle.** If the individual is dissatisfied with various aspects of his life and feels powerless to change them, inappropriate behavior may result. If no patterns can be found to explain the behavior, it may be necessary to take a wider view. Examine how the child views his world. Is he happy with the way things are? Are there things to look forward to? Does the child have the respect of self and others? These can have a profound affect on the way a child behaves.

Developing strategies for addressing Behavior :-

When children engage in troubling behavior, it often takes time for them to learn new patterns of behavior. Over time, working as a team to prevent problems, while at the same time teaching new skills, is necessary to reduce or eliminate problems. Combining strategies will provide both short term and long term solutions.

Prevention is better than reaction :-

It is best not to wait until a child is behaving inappropriately before considering behavior. People who care about a child often wait until after problems arise before addressing behavior; however, reducing inappropriate behavior through prevention is fairer for all. Once aggressive or self-abusive behavior starts, there are no good solutions other than maintaining everyone's safety while trying to diffuse the situation. If nothing changes, the situation is likely to occur again. To decrease the occurrence of problems, the best solutions is to address issue related to behavior at all times. Proactively addressing or working to prevent the occurrence of, behavior problems is better than simply reacting to these behaviors.

People can easily recognize this distinction in other situations. Suppose, for instance, you have a friend or relative who has a drinking problem, and you fear he may get behind the wheel while intoxicated. The strategies most people consider in this situation are proactive. For example, you may take the individual's car keys and offer to drive after a party. You may suggest doing activities that don't involve drinking, or you may help the individual find a counselor. In all of these cases, the focus is on preventing the individual from driving after drinking. It is much less common that the solutions considered would include letting the individual drive drunk and then reporting them so they can be punished, or letting them get into an accident to teach them a lesson. These strategies do not prevent behavior, but are simply reactions to it. For children who are deafblind, it is also better to prevent troubling behavior before it becomes an issue.

Manipulating situations :-

The most effective way to make lasting changes in behavior is by teaching new skills and improving childrens' views of themselves and those around them. These solutions often take time, so while waiting for more lasting changes to occur, some strategies can decrease the impact of behavior by manipulating situations to make behavior less likely to occur. There are several short-term solutions to decrease challenging behavior.

- Minimize contact with people, places, or things that trigger behavior problems. If a certain situation routinely leads to problems, do not continue to expose the child to that situation. This is a very simple solution, and is always a good first step for dealing with behavior issues.
For example, if a child gets upset whenever he confronts large crowds, develop strategies for avoiding them. This might involve changing routes or schedules for moving through the school, or finding a seat towards the back at assemblies. If noise upsets the child, create an alternative activity during loud activities.
- Alter materials or the environment to physically discourage inappropriate behaviors. Make it harder for the child to engage in the behavior by using safe materials or by physically blocking potential problem areas. For examples, strategies such as using plastic instead of glass cups, placing an extra chair between an aggressive student and classmates, or arranging the furniture so it is difficult to run out the door, can prevent recurring problems.
- Alter the activity schedule to reduce stress. For example, difficult activities can be alternated with enjoyable activities, and other activities can be changed entirely. It may be necessary to provide periods in the day to rest or have less stimulation. Keeping up with peers' activities may not be important if it causes problems for the child.
- Increase the level of support, so the child does not find difficult activities to be as frustrating. Extra help may be required to make sure the child is successful during some activities, or when he is going through a difficult time. This might mean having an additional person with the child all or part of the time.
- Be aware of signs that indicate potential problems, and make necessary modifications. Children usually show some sign that they are troubled or frustrated before more significant behavioral problem occur. People with the child should be able to recognize precursor behaviors and understand their meaning. They should remain flexible and make modifications or adjustments to avoid the problem behavior.

Teaching new skills :-

While working to reduce behavior through short-term prevention, it is equally important to make more lasting changes. This can be achieved by teaching the child new skills to replace or

eliminate challenging behavior. Many skills can help improve the child's ability to avoid alienating and potentially dangerous behavior.

Receptive communication and access to information :-

Troubling behavior may be a way for a child to cope with unpredictable events and situations. The world can be a very confusing place for children with deafblindness. Limited visual and auditory information reduces their knowledge about the world around them. Without this knowledge, they may have difficulty anticipating and understanding events.

For example, a child who is deafblind may not see or hear adults preparing a meal or notice when the table is set. When an adult attempts to bring the child to the meal, he has no way to anticipate the situation. Even if the child enjoys mealtime, he may resist or lash out due to fear and anxiety about the unexpected. The behavior is a way of coping with unpredictability and confusion.

When someone gets incomplete or inaccurate information about the world, events in his life may seem like a continuous series of surprise. As a result, it is easy to feel isolated, frustrated, threatened, or confused. Some children's aggressive behaviors may be an effort to protect themselves when they are unsure of a situation. Some self-abusive behaviors may be expressions of anxiety or frustration. Actions that on the surface seem to suggest a lack of cooperation, may instead be due to incomplete information about what is expected and why. In unpredictable situations, some children may develop patterns of repetitive behavior such as finger flicking or rocking. These behaviors can be comforting because they are familiar. When caregivers develop strategies for giving more meaningful information about the world to an individual who is deafblind, troubling behaviors should decrease.

Many strategies help children learn to gather information and use it to anticipate events and behave according to expectations. Introducing structure, routine, and predictability into their lives is one way to supply this information. Predictable routines and familiar activities help them know what to expect. Routines should be designed with clear, consistent beginnings and endings and have other aspects that also remain constant. These include the location of an activity, the sequence of steps, the materials used, the people involved and their actions, and the child's expected role. This consistency helps the child develop anticipation and expectations about what will happen and when. New information is more easily learned when presented in the context of familiar routines.

Using consistent communication strategies that are based on the ability of the person to understand is also important. Children should learn to understand concrete communication forms, such as objects, pictures, tactile symbols, and calendars, as well as formal language such as sign language and speech. Learning to get information through more than one communication form makes messages more clear and understandable. Strategies found in the chapter on communication can help children learn these skills. The strategies also help children with deafblindness know what to anticipate. Knowing what to expect often decreases anxiety and behavior problems as the children develop more trust.

Expressive communication :-

Some children may have learned that troubling behavior is an effective way to communicate expressively. This behavior is their most effective way to cause changes in situations they find unacceptable. Teaching other ways for children to communicate can reduce frustration and allow them to express ideas in more acceptable ways.

Children who are deafblind often have limited ways to spontaneously communicate with others. Communication forms that most people use such as speech, signs, gestures, or signals, may be difficult for young children with deafblindness. As a result, people who interact with them have fewer opportunities to respond to and reinforce these more socially acceptable forms of communication. Responses to undesired communications, such as self-abuse or throwing objects, often only strengthen these behaviors.

As an alternative to troubling behavior, a child who is deafblind can learn communication that is more acceptable and understandable to others. When the child learns to appropriately seek assistance, make requests, and indicate rejection, he can decrease reliance on more inappropriate ways of communication. Improved communication can assist the child to make and express choices and help him have a greater sense of control over the activities of his life.

Choice making :-

Another important communication skill is indicating choices. Allowing a child who is deafblind to make choices and decisions is an important way to decrease the likelihood that troubling behavior will occur. Children who are deafblind frequently have choices made for them. They may not know how to choose the clothes they wear or the food they eat, and they may not have ways to select their daily activities or friends. This lack of choice decreases child's power to control his own life. As he attempts to gain some control, socially inappropriate behavior may result.

When a child has difficulty expressing choices, he should be taught how. Opportunities for making choices should be provided throughout the day. As a child becomes more accustomed to making choices, he may be able to do it more independently.

Other skills :-

In addition to teaching more communication skills, teaching a child more daily living, leisure, and community skills can have a positive impact on behavior. For example, if a child becomes abusive when he is thirsty, one solution is to teach him how to express this need or how to ask for a drink. Another solution is to teach the child how to get a drink independently. This might involve rearranging the environment to make the skill easier to learn such as consistently storing cups in an accessible location.

Of equal importance is the teaching of skills that an individual can use during independent leisure time. These skills can help prevent behavior problems associated with boredom and inactivity. Sometimes, unstructured time is very difficult for children with deafblindness. They may know of few leisure activities because of reduced opportunities to observe others and learn through modeling. Due to sensory loss, some common activities such as watching TV and listening to music may not be meaningful. Some children may not be able to think of activities, because they do not receive cues by observing materials and activity areas in the environment. As a result of these factors, unstructured leisure time can become tedious and frustrating and can lead to problem behavior.

Teaching skills to help the child participate in a number of independent leisure activities, and teaching methods for remembering and choosing from the options, can have a positive effect on behavior during unstructured time. Furthermore, teaching a wide variety of skills including work, social and community skills can help boost an individual's self-esteem and satisfaction with his life.

These positive feelings should decrease the incidence of troubling behavior.

Improving quality of life :-

People sometimes become depressed, frustrated, or angry when they are not satisfied with their lifestyles, for instance, when they are troubled about problems with their homes, relationships, jobs or health. Loneliness, loss of a loved one, or lack of enjoyment can also cause feelings of depression or frustration. Often these feelings are difficult to express, even for people without communication problems. When children with deafblindness have no strategies to discuss abstract issues, they may find it impossible to clearly express what they think is wrong in their lives and how it affects the way they feel. As a result, the appearance of behaviors, like biting or hitting, may be the only way for others to find out they are unhappy.

For example, children who are deafblind may communicate about the pain of a middle ear infection by banging their heads. They may spit out food to communicate frustration at having little or no control over what they are eating. They may bite adults in situations they perceive to be very unfair. Children with multiple disabilities are more likely than other children to have physical problems such as poor digestion, disturbed sleep, and chronic pain. They are also less likely to have friendships, control, and access to their favorite things. All of this influences the way they respond to people and daily activities.

If a child with deafblindness is behaving in troubling ways, it is important for those who care to examine and work to improve the quality of his life. People want to be physically comfortable, safe, and secure. They want to be surrounded by people they like and trust. They want to do a variety of meaningful and enjoyable activities and to have influence over what happens in their lives. Caregivers should consider how a child feels about the circumstances of his own life and not how the caregiver thinks the child ought to feel. Everyone makes a personal decision about what is important, what brings joy, and what causes unhappiness. Helping children have what they consider to be safe, comfortable and satisfying lifestyles is essential for reducing problem behaviors related to negative feelings about the quality of life.

Reacting to troubling behavior :-

Preventing troubling behavior should always be the first goal for people involved with children who are deafblind; however, when problems do arise, the reaction of others to the behavior becomes important. Reacting strongly to a behavior often gives it power. If the behavior causes a big reaction, it may be reinforced because the response can inadvertently teach the child that the behavior is an effective way to make things happen. For example, if the child engages in troubling behavior in order to escape a confusing or unpleasant activity, and the response is to quickly remove him from the situation, it is likely the behavior will occur again.

When undesired behaviors don't produce the expected results, the child's power of communication is decreased. By modeling, shaping, prompting, and reinforcing, a child learns preferred ways to communicate. For example, a child who throws unwanted materials may not know another way to reject them. He can be systematically taught to gently push the materials to one side. If he begins throwing, that action can be redirected to a push. It is important to reinforce the push and not the throw.

Whenever possible, it is also important to honor a child's communication instead of punishing it. Children should learn appropriate ways to communicate "I want" and "I don't want" and should receive feedback when they use those messages. Communication is measured by an individual's ability to clearly and successfully express needs, preferences, and desires. If the child's communication attempts never produce the desired results, he will stop trying. When others are unable to agree to requests, the child should at least understand the message, "I hear you, but the answer is no".

In certain cases, the safety of the child, other people, and property is the primary consideration. In such cases, caregivers, teachers, and others should resolve the situation in the sagest way possible, and then plan with others how to prevent future occurrences of the dangerous behavior. When everyone's emotions are high, it is not a good time to teach. Those involved with the child should diffuse the situation, and direct the child back to participation in an activity during which teaching can occur.

POINTS TO REMEMBER :-

1. Behavior that others find undesirable may be serving an important function for a child who is deafblind
2. Troubling behavior should be treated as communication, with efforts made to uncover the message in the behavior.
3. A functional analysis involves asking questions to determine the child's motivation for behaving in challenging ways.
4. To determine the meaning of behavior, caregivers should gather information about the people, places, times and activities involved in situations where the behavior is most like to occur.
5. Determining the underlying cause of behavior is the best way to develop strategies for addressing it.
6. Strategies for addressing troubling behavior should focus on preventing problems rather than reacting to them.
7. Situations and environments can be modified to make troubling behavior less likely in the short-term
8. Teaching new skills can help children gradually replace troubling behavior.
9. Improving a child's satisfaction with his quality of life can have a positive impact on his behavior.
10. When troubling behavior occurs, the reaction of others should be to redirect and teach, without inadvertently reinforcing the behavior.

Reference:

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