Information for Families: How to get help for your deafblind/multisensory impaired child out of school and at home

If your child is deafblind then your family may be entitled to extra help

All deafblind children are entitled to have their needs assessed and met. Children are deafblind if they have a hearing impairment and a visual impairment that together cause them difficulties in everyday life.

- They don't need to be totally blind or deaf
- They may have other disabilities, as well as impairments of their other senses including balance and proprioception.
- They may be said to have MSI (multisensory impairment) rather than deafblindness – these terms mean the same thing
- They may have conditions, such as Usher Syndrome, which cause their senses to deteriorate over time

All these children are included, provided they have current medical diagnoses of both permanent hearing and visual impairments.

N.B: A visual impairment is when the vision cannot be corrected by wearing glasses.

What sort of help is available?

The type of help provided depends on what specific needs are identified for your child during the specialist deafblind assessment and may cover a wide range of types of support.

Many deafblind children may need one-to-one support. This may be a personal assistant with knowledge of deafblindness or could be from trained intervenors[1] or Interpreters for Deafblind[2] who can help them to access community activities. One-to-one support may be provided so that children can visit friends, or use leisure facilities such as swimming pools, or join clubs such as Scouts or Guides.

Other support might include

- Holidays or short breaks
- Support for families caring for a deafblind child at home
- Aids or adaptations for the home
- Technology to help with communication, mobility or daily living

1 Trained Intervenors. "An Intervenor acts as the eyes and ears of the individual who is deafblind, making him or her aware of what is occurring and attaching meaning to all experiences. An Intervenor intercedes between the individual who is deafblind and the environment in such a way

so as to minimise the effects of multi sensory deprivation and to empower the individual to have control over his or her life." (p. 3)

Ref: Henderson, P. and Killoran, J. (1995) Utah enhances services for children who are deaf-blind. Deaf-blind Perspectives. 3(1), pp. 3–6.

2 Interpreter for deafblind people. Interpreters for deafblind people use manual communication (tactile sign language or Deafblind Manual) to enable deafblind people to understand, participate and interact. The interpreter also relays visual and other non-verbal information, for example reactions to what has been said, movement of other people and what they are doing.

Who provides it?

Gloucestershire County Council Children's Social Care will commission a specialist deafblind assessment if the child meets the criteria for this. The child and family may also be offered an assessment from our social work teams or from Early Help. The assessment will inform the local authority about what is needed and what services may be commissioned to meet that need. Services recommended by the specialist assessment may include short breaks, holidays, domiciliary care or in lieu of theses services direct payments may be offered, where families are paid to make their own arrangements for support services.

How can I get this help?

If your child/young person is already known to the Disabled Children's Service or to social care, a new referral is not necessary. The social worker involved can be made aware of your child/young person's entitlement to this specialist assessment and either they or you as parents can request this when their support package is being reviewed.

If you have not previously had any assessment or been known to the childrens' social care team, parents/carers should contact the Children and Families Services Helpdesk Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) on 01452 426565 or email childhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk Professionals can make a referral via the professionals portal on this link, which your MSI teacher can do if you are unable to email yourself to make a request for a Deafblind Assessment. https://forms.gloucestershire.gov.uk/RequestSupport_Childrens_EarlyHelp

The referrer should make a specific request for the specialist deafblind assessment of the child's needs in accordance with 'Care and Support for Deafblind Children and Adults Policy Guidance, 2014' (issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act, in relation to children).

Specialist deafblind assessments must be made by specialists trained in deafblindness. In Gloucestershire there is now an agreement that qualified consultants in deafblindness/multisensory impairment will be commissioned by Social Care to carry out the specialist deafblind assessments. Your child's Advisory Teacher for Multisensory Impairment/Deafblindness should be consulted during the specialist deafblind assessment.

The assessment will include areas such as

- Communication
- Mobility
- Technology that may help
- One to one support and social interaction

It should take in to account current needs and those which will occur in the future. This is especially important for children whose sight or hearing could change over time.

Parents, carers and family members should be fully involved in the specialist deafblind assessment – you know your child best.

After the specialist deafblind assessment, you should get a document clearly setting out your child's needs and how the local authority plans to meet them. The specialist deafblind assessment report can be shared with other professionals working with your child and the outcomes should be reviewed at least annually.

Deafblind Register

Your child or young person's Multisensory Impairment Teacher keeps a list those in the county who are Deafblind/Multisensory Impaired. They try to ensure that those Children and Young people who are entitled to this assessment are offered this. They will talk to you as parents/carers about this assessment and what it involves and share your child's details with the social care team with your permission.

For further advice contact your child's Advisory Teacher for Multisensory Impairment/Deafblindness heather.penney@gloucestershire.gov.uk