



# Nevada Dual Sensory Impairment Project Newsletter

University of Nevada, Reno

Vol. 25, No. 1

Winter (1) 2017

The Nevada Dual Sensory Impairment Project aims to enhance the educational services provided to children and youth, birth through 21 years who have dual sensory impairments, by providing technical assistance to families and involved agencies.

## How to Promote Self-Determination for Children with Disabilities

By Jill Grattan & MaryAnn Demchak

Self-determination can be defined as, “the means for experiencing quality of life consistent with one’s own values, preferences, strengths, and needs” (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001, as cited in Brotherson, Cook, Erwin, & Weigel, 2008, p. 22). Individuals with strong self-determination skills report higher quality of life and more satisfaction with their lives (Wehman, 2013). Individuals with strong self-determination skills have more positive employment and independent living outcomes (Wehman, 2013). Self-determination skills are “one evidence-based predictor of post-school employment, education, and independent living success” (Test, et al., 2009 as cited in Wehman, 2013, p. 43). The phrase ‘self-determination’ encompasses behaviors such as: choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal-setting and attainment, self-advocacy, leadership skills, self-awareness, self-management, and self-regulation (Carter,

Sisco, & Lane, 2011). In short, self-determination means having control or taking charge of things in your life. Self-determination can be complex and complicated (e.g., typical adult life) or as simple as picking something to eat. Regardless of how severe a disability an individual might have, self-determination is important because it gives the individual control over aspects of his/her life.

Self-determination encompasses many skills, behaviors, and values and is on a continuum (or range). Some individuals can participate and make choices in regard to most areas of their lives, while others can make choices in only a few areas of their lives (Morgan, Bixler, & McNamara, 2002). All individuals communicate and can use their communication to make choices (which is an important aspect of self-determination). How each individual communicates (e.g., likes, dislikes) may vary widely. Children with multiple disabilities often communicate in ways that are hard to recognize and understand. For example, some children communicate through eye gaze (e.g., looking at one object for a longer duration than he/she looks at other objects could indicate preference or a choice). Other children may reach for an object to indicate choice, change their breathing patterns, smile, or have changes in muscle tone to indicate preference or dislike of something. Others might use sign language or spoken words.



Skills related to self-determination vary by age. For young children, self-determination may involve choosing what clothes to wear or with what toys to play. As a young adult, self-determination may involve making choices regarding employment or learning how to use public transportation. Regardless of ability level, teaching skills related to self-determination is important for everyone. Teaching self-determination skills in childhood, allows adults to provide children with practice, support, guidance, and refinement of these skills before they become independent (Palmer et al., 2012). Additionally, teaching self-determination skills in early childhood may help to prevent learned helplessness, overdependence, and a low sense of self-efficacy (Palmer et al., 2012).

Before reading ideas on how to promote self-determination in the home, it is important to understand that it would be difficult for a family or educator to implement all of the ideas listed below. In addition, some of the ideas listed below may not agree with a family’s value system. If a family is interested, the family should pick strategies that fit into their

### Inside this issue:

Self-Determination	1-4
Tips for Home & School: Progressive Time Delay Prompting	5-7
Conditions of the Eye & Ear: Dry Eye Syndrome	8-9
Etiologies of Deafblindness: hydrocephalus	10
Websites in the Spotlight: Hearing-Related Resources for Families	11
Lending Library	12

existing values, needs, strengths, culture, and safety concerns (e.g., getting into/out of a bed may not be relevant due to safety concerns) (Shogren & Turnbull, 2006). A variety of ideas on how to teach skills related to self-determination to young children are listed below; ideas are listed in separate areas, however, many overlap and fit into multiple areas. These ideas are pulled directly from the following research papers: Cho & Palmer, 2008; Erwin et al., 2009; Shogren & Turnbull, 2006.

Choice Making	
Home	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choice making within the family schedule (e.g., brush teeth first or brush hair first?)</li> <li>Teach choice making in ways that are appropriate for the family (e.g., toys, games, clothes)</li> <li>Teach within activity choice making (e.g., sit on the couch or on the floor, which bedtime story to read, which pajamas to wear)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choice making within the school schedule (e.g., counting or number identification first?)</li> <li>Teach choice making in ways that are appropriate for school (e.g., snack, drink, free time activities)</li> <li>Teach within activity choice making (e.g., sit in the blue chair or red one? Use the red marker or the blue crayon? Yellow paper or white paper?)</li> </ul>

To Increase Independence	
Home	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place toys in accessible spaces (e.g., bins on the floor that child can access without help) and clean up independently</li> <li>Keep toys in the same space with a consistent organization system so the child learns how to find toys independently and where to put toys when cleaning up.</li> <li>Move objects that may make independent moving around house difficult (e.g., move rugs that block/prevent use of walker or wheel chair)</li> <li>Keep furniture in predictable spaces</li> <li>Child-sized furnishings (e.g., small table where he/she can sit to play)</li> <li>Teach the child to explore the feeling of flooring and/or to touch walls as he/she moves about the family's living space</li> <li>Use predictable and consistent routines, so children can anticipate what is going to happen next</li> <li>Encourage use of adaptive equipment and assistive technology so the child can more easily participate in family activities and play with friends</li> <li>Encourage the use of adaptive/assistive equipment, as necessary, in daily activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place toys in accessible spaces (e.g., containers on low shelves the student can access without help) and clean up independently</li> <li>Keep toys in the same space with a consistent organization system so the student learns how to find toys independently and where to put toys when cleaning up.</li> <li>Move objects that may make independent moving around the classroom difficult (e.g., move furniture or desks that block/prevent use of walker or wheel chair)</li> <li>Keep furniture in predictable spaces</li> <li>Child-sized furnishings (e.g., small table where he/she can sit to play or complete academic work)</li> <li>Teach the student to touch walls as he/she moves about the classroom and/or school</li> <li>Use predictable and consistent routines, so the student can anticipate what is going to happen next</li> <li>Encourage use of adaptive equipment and assistive technology so the student can more easily participate in school activities and play with peers</li> <li>Encourage the use of adaptive/assistive equipment, as necessary, in daily activities</li> </ul>



University of Nevada, Reno  
Statewide • Worldwide

**MaryAnn Demchak, Ph.D., BCBA-D**  
mad@unr.edu  
Project Director

**Jill Grattan, M.Ed.**  
jillgrattan@gmail.com  
Project Graduate Assistant

The University of Nevada, Reno is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, creed, national origin, veteran status, physical or mental disability, and in accordance with University policy, sexual orientation, in any program or activity it operates. The University of Nevada employs only United States citizens and aliens lawfully authorized to work in the United States.



Office of Special Education Programs Project Officer, Jo Ann McCann.

The contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, #H326T130011. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

**(775) 784-6471** **(877)-621-5042** **Fax: (775) 784-4384**  
(In Reno/Sparks Area) (Toll-Free in Nevada)

*Mailing Address:*  
**College of Education**  
**Mail Stop 299**  
**University of Nevada, Reno**  
**Reno, NV 89557**

For past editions of our newsletter, visit our website.  
<http://www.unr.edu/ndsip>

### Communication – Home or School

- If the child is non-verbal, encourage use of communication systems (e.g., augmentative alternative communication, gestures, hand leading, idiosyncratic noises) throughout the day
- Whether the child is verbal or non-verbal, encourage him/her to communicate throughout the day
- Encourage the child to express a range of emotions
- Encourage the child to express his/her opinions (e.g., preferences, desires, to reject, or protest)
- Teach the child how to appropriately reject something (e.g., end an activity, reject a toy or a person)
- When the child communicates, respond to his/her requests (as appropriate) to teach the child that his/her communication is important
- Teach beginning problem solving (e.g., if the child wants a toy and cannot reach it, teach the child to find an adult and ask for help; if the child cannot open the lunch box, teach the child to ask for assistance)
- Provide rich descriptions of what the child feels/touches/hears and what the adult is doing
- Place child's hands on top of adult's hands so the child can 'observe' the adult's actions

### Possible Adaptations for Home (consider the child's safety and abilities)

- A bed can be lowered so a child with disabilities can climb in and out without help
- Consider having drawers with clothing accessible so the child can choose what he/she would like to wear
- Consider adapting toilets or bathtubs to be accessible to the child
- Create play spaces in main living areas, so children can play in same room as adults and other family members
- Create safe places to play inside and outside

### Social/Emotional

#### Home

- Provide a mirror in a place so the child can see him/herself, both to look at him/herself and while engaged in activities (e.g., brushing teeth)
- Display the child's artwork around the house
- Hang pictures of the child (some at a level where the child can see him/herself)
- Find safe places where the child can go to be alone and allow him/her to have alone time
- Find an area that the child can control (e.g., his/her room, inside of a tent, a corner), so the child can develop a sense of control over his/her environment
- Discuss the child's strengths and unique characteristics
- Encourage children to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses; discuss yours (e.g., "Waiting is hard for mommy too")
- Help children set and work toward simple goals
- Encourage child to self-regulate (e.g., calm him/her self down)
- Encourage children to work out small disagreements with friends
- Encourage the child to try new things (e.g., activities, games)
- Encourage the child to be persistent when faced with difficult tasks



#### School

- Provide a mirror in a place so the student can see him/herself, both to look at him/herself and while engaged in activities (e.g., washing hands)
- Display the student's artwork around the classroom
- Discuss the student's strengths and unique characteristics
- Encourage the student to evaluate his/her own strengths and weaknesses; discuss yours (e.g., "Waiting is hard for me too")
- Help your student set and work toward simple goals
- Encourage student to self-regulate (e.g., calm him/her self down)
- Encourage each student to work out small disagreements with peers
- Encourage each student to try new things (e.g., activities, games)
- Encourage each student to be persistent when faced with difficult tasks
- Encourage the student to try new things and take new risks appropriate to his/her age (e.g., trying a new food, playing with a new peer, trying new playground equipment)



Social/Emotional	
Home	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the child to try new things and take new risks appropriate to his/her age (e.g., trying a new food, playing with a new friend, trying new playground equipment at the park)</li> <li>• Do not overprotect the child with disabilities any more than a typically developing child would be protected in the same situation</li> <li>• Provide toys and other safe objects that engage all sensory systems (e.g., noise making, visual [light up], a variety of textures, variety of smells, and movements)</li> <li>• Encourage and reinforce the child for engagement in activities, tasks, and play with things they are interested in</li> <li>• Encourage and support the child “to be involved in learning activities he or she might not do on his or her own (such as reading or looking at books, sorting or matching objects by size or color, or exploring properties of materials, such as sand or water) with supervision”</li> <li>• Provide reinforcement for appropriate behavior (e.g., appropriate social behavior, appropriate play, appropriate behavior specific to each environment)</li> <li>• Teach consequences to choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not overprotect the student with disabilities any more than a typically developing peer would be protected in the same situation</li> <li>• Provide toys and other safe objects that engage all sensory systems (e.g., noise making, visual [light up], a variety of textures, variety of smells, and movements)</li> <li>• Encourage and reinforce the student for engagement in activities, tasks, and play with things they are interested in</li> <li>• Encourage and support the student “to be involved in learning activities he or she might not do on his or her own (such as reading or looking at books, sorting or matching objects by size or color, or exploring properties of materials, such as sand or water) with supervision”</li> <li>• Provide reinforcement for appropriate behavior (e.g., appropriate social behavior, appropriate play, appropriate behavior specific to each environment)</li> <li>• Teach consequences to choices</li> </ul>



**Literature to teach self-determination**

For children who can who are old enough to comprehend chapter books, Konrad, Helf, and Itoi (2007) offer a variety of specific examples on teaching self-determination through books.

Teaching skills related to self-determination can be incorporated throughout a families’ routine and can lead to a higher quality of life for the individual with disabilities.

#### References

Brotherson, M. J., Cook, C. C., Erwin, E. J., Weigel, C. J. (2008). Understanding self-determination and families of young children with disabilities in home environments. *Journal of Early Intervention, 31*, 22-43.

Carter, E. W., Sisco, L. G., & Lane, K. L. (2011). Paraprofessional perspectives on promotion self-determination among elementary and secondary students with severe disabilities. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 36*, 1-10.

Cho, H., & Palmer, S. B. (2008). Fostering self-determination in infants and toddlers with visual impairments or blindness. *Young Exceptional Children, 11*, 26-34.

Erwin, E. J., Brotherson, M. J., Palmer, S. B., Cook, C. C., Weigel, C. J., & Summers, J. A. (2009). How to promote self-determination for young children with disabilities: Evidence-based strategies for early childhood practitioners and families. *Young Exceptional Children, 12*, 27-37.

Konrad, M., Helf, S., & Itoi, M. (2007). More band for the book: Using children’s literature to promote self-determination and literacy skills. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 40*, 64-71.

Morgan, S., Bixler, E., & McNamara, J. (2002). Self-determination for children and young adults who are deaf-blind. *The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults who are Deaf-Blind, 1-20*.

Palmer, S. B., Summers, J. A., Brotherson, M. J., Erwin, E. J., Maude, S. P., Stroup-Rentier, V., Wu, H., Peck, N. F., Zheng, Y., Weigel, C. J., Chu, S., McGrath, G. S., & Haines, S. J. (2013). Foundations for self-determination in early childhood: An inclusive model for children with disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 33*, 38-47.

Shogren, K. A., & Turnbull, A. P. (2006). Promoting self-determination in young children with disabilities: The critical role of families. *Infants and Young Children, 19*, 338-352.

Wehman, P. (Ed.). (2013). *Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Baltimore: Brooks Publishing.

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Palmer, S. B. (2000). Promoting the acquisition and development of self-determination in young children with disabilities. *Early Education & Development, 11*, 465-481.