

Definition

Is there a difference between deafblind and MSI (Multisensory Impaired?)

Deafblindness is a combination of both visual and hearing impairments which can be of varying degrees of severity and can be accompanied by additional medical and learning needs.

In the UK there is no nationally agreed definition to describe the population of children with a combined hearing and visual impairment. This sometimes leads to confusion and misunderstanding which can prevent appropriate services being established..

The use of the term MSI (multisensory impairment) has exacerbated the uncertainty about the group being referred to. It has become common practice to describe the population of children with PMLD as MSI although this term was originally devised by deafblind practitioners to describe the cumulative consequences of being deafblind;

- *access to information*
- *reduced motivation to reach out to the world*
- *functional development of near senses*

The mandatory training available for specialist teachers uses the term MSI which is also used in Early Support Literature and Natsip literature. Sense uses deafblind and MSI interchangeably but the Departments of Education and Health use deafblind and dual sensory impairment.

Local Authorities and schools have developed their own definitions and criteria but many use the description found in the **Local Authority Circular LAC (DH) 2009**

People are regarded as deafblind if their combined sight and hearing impairment cause difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility. It is the way in which one sensory impairment impacts upon, or compounds the second impairment, which causes the difficulties, even if, taken separately, each single sensory impairment appears relatively mild.

Dr. Liz Hodges, Lecturer in Deafblindness and Multisensory Impairment in the School of Education, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. uses the following definition in her thesis;

Definition

A child who is deafblind has some impairment of both vision and hearing senses. whether organic or perceptual in nature, the combination of which produces significant difficulties beyond those which would ordinarily be expected to result from a single sensory impairment. Few deafblind pupils are totally deaf and blind, most have some residual hearing and/or vision. Deafblindness may be congenital, or the result of illness or accident. It may also be a significant aspect of multiple disability.

Appropriate Support

Regardless of terminology, it is most important to recognise the unique support needs of a child who is deafblind. Even a mild loss in both distance senses (vision and hearing) can affect the ability to communicate, develop personal relationships, and acquire concepts. Deafblindness affects human development and emotional well-being.

Deafblind children are likely to need focused support in the following areas:

- Social Development
- Communication
- Independence
- Mobility
- Learning through tactile means
- Learning to integrate and make sense of sensory information

www.natsip.org.uk

www.sense.org.uk

www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/.../early-support/