

When your child does not see and hear like other children

Guidance for you as a parent



National Resource Center
for Deafblindness



The book can be ordered and can
be downloaded at www.nkcdb.se

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Hello
parent!



Right now, your child is still small, and a whole life awaits. Your child has impaired vision and hearing and will need support in various ways, and you, as a parent, are the most important person for your child. By discovering, observing, stimulating, and encouraging, you will be able to help your child learn and develop.

In this book, you will find information and guidance on how to support your child's development. The guidance is primarily directed at you, who have a child aged 0–3 years with congenital, combined vision and hearing impairment.

When your child does not see and hear like others

We primarily use our vision and hearing to be social and communicate with others or to get information about what is happening in the environment. We also need vision and hearing to navigate and move freely in different environments. When vision and hearing are not enough, other senses must help out.

Combined vision and hearing impairment mean that both vision and hearing are affected in the child, but it does not necessarily mean that the child lacks vision and hearing completely. Many children have some vision and hearing they can use with the support of various aids.

Some children are also sensitive to glare or have difficulty seeing in the dark. Others may have a limited field of vision. Combinations with other disabilities are also common.

Impairment of vision and hearing is often not visible on the child's eyes or ears. Instead, it is often something in your child's behaviour that catches your attention, for example:

- The child does not turn its head towards sounds
- It is difficult to make eye contact with the child
- The child does not react, or reacts slowly, to loud sounds or voices
- The child does not make many sounds itself
- The child does not reach or move towards an object

It can be challenging for a small child with impairment of both vision and hearing to perceive what is happening around them. The child often needs to rely on other senses like touch, smell, and taste to explore its surroundings.

Each child learns to use its senses in its own way. Some children touch things and people to discover the world, while others may rely more on their residual vision or hearing. Your child will find its own way of getting to know its surroundings and developing communication.

Some children get confused by using vision, hearing, and touch simultaneously. They often resolve this by using one of the senses in a particular situation. You can observe how your child uses its different senses in familiar places and various situations. This will give you clues as to how you can support your child.

Security and safety

Security and safety are crucial for a small child's development. Physical contact with parents is essential for a small child who cannot use its vision and hearing in the same way as others. Having close body contact with you as a parent becomes particularly important. This contact helps your child develop an understanding of its body, your body, and gradually more things it comes into contact with.

A combination of gentle movements, warmth, and touch makes your child feel secure and safe. Touch your child in everyday situations like diaper changes, baths, or at bed-time. Take advantage of regular routines, such as holding the child close to your body, massaging arms and legs during a bath, or applying body lotion, to strengthen your relationship.

Carry your child in a baby carrier or a wrap sling that facilitates body contact. Change positions gently so that your child has time to get used to the movements. Sudden movements can be frightening.



Teach
the child to
recognize your
unique scent



Use a blanket or similar when holding your child close to you. The blanket will have your scent and provide comfort even when the child needs to lie on its own.

Create a
secure place
at home for
your child

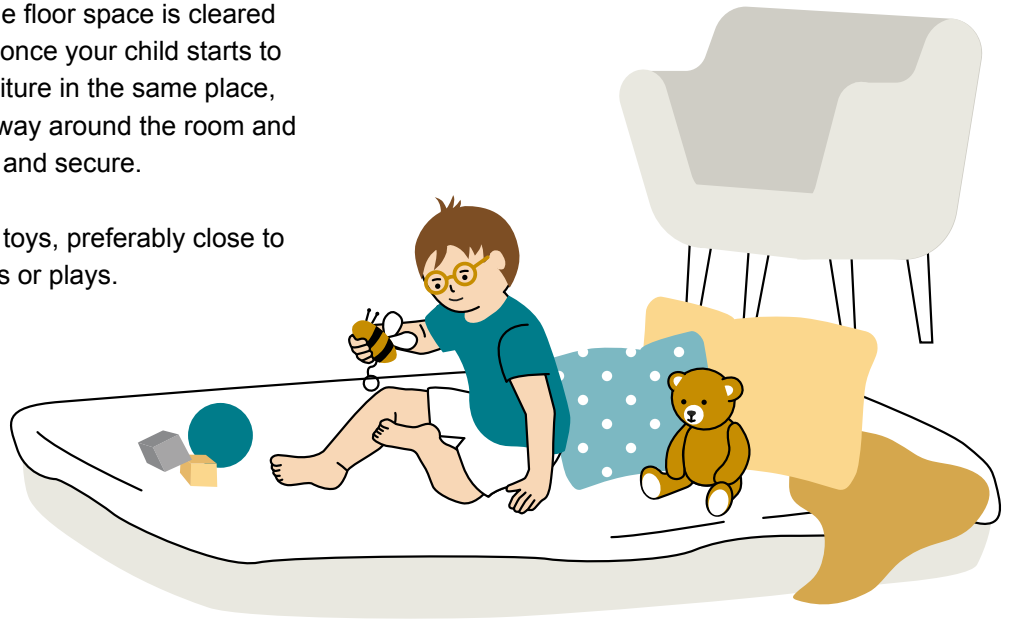


Prepare a special place for your child at home where it can feel safe when it lies on its own. Children with both vision and hearing impairments often feel safer in a smaller and confined space. For instance, you can place pillows or a rolled-up towel around your child so that it feels the boundaries. Try varying the surface of the area, depending on what your child seems to like: a towel, a sheepskin, a blanket, or a play mat.

Bedrooms and living rooms are two places where your child will be spending a lot of time when you are at home. Ensure that the floor space is cleared and avoid moving furniture once your child starts to move around. With the furniture in the same place, your child learns to find its way around the room and become more independent and secure.

Use a designated place for toys, preferably close to where your child usually lies or plays.

Remove items
that you think might
be frightening or
dangerous when your
child begins to
move around on
its own



Learn to use your hands

Hands are crucial for small children with impaired vision and hearing. Hands serve the same function as sight and hearing in sighted and hearing children. Hands become the child's eyes, ears, and voice. Therefore, try to encourage your child to be curious and interested in using its hands.

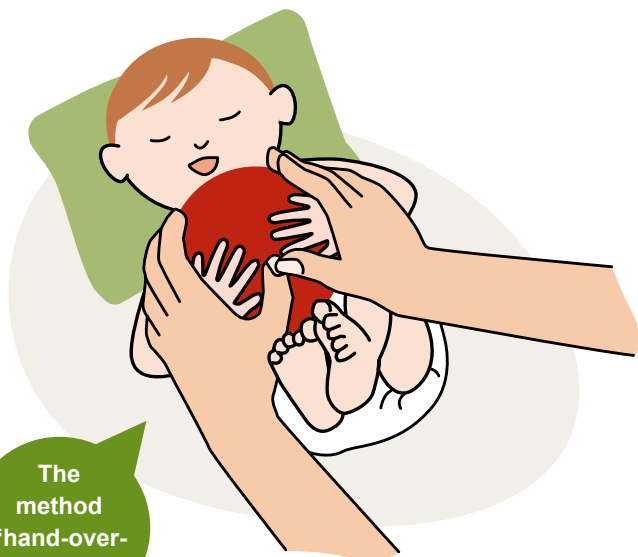
Help the child get used to touching hands. It is common for a child's hands to be sensitive in the beginning. You can massage them with gentle strokes or apply lotion to them. This way, the child gradually becomes used to your touch. You can also let the child feel with its feet.

Help the child get used to touching hands



In the beginning, before your child is aware of and attentive to things in the surrounding, you can gently take your child's hand and place it on whatever you want the child to notice. It could be a person or an object. The method of gently taking and guiding the child's hand is called "hand-over-hand."

The method "hand-over-hand"



When your child becomes more active and aware of its surroundings, you should begin using the "hand-under-hand" method. You then guide the child by instead placing your hand under its hand. This way, the child can choose whether it wants to be involved and touch something or not. Learning to choose to participate is important. If you, as an adult, control the child's hands without the child wanting to participate, there is a risk that the child becomes cautious about its hands and avoids using them.

The method “hand-under-hand”



When using the hand-under-hand method, it may be necessary at first to make adjustments so that the child holds one or more of your fingers to follow your movements. You can also gently support with your thumb on the child's hand to guide the child to follow your movements. When the child has become accustomed to using the hand-under-hand method, you can remove your thumb support.

Make your hands available to the child. Keep them close or in contact with the child, with the palm up. This way, the child can grab and guide your hands to show or tell things.

By using the hand-under-hand method, you can act as a model for your child in everyday life. For example, you can show how to make contact with someone and how the child can discover new things. You can also demonstrate how everyday chores and activities can be carried out, and how your child can use its hands to communicate. This way, you can help your child become curious about the world, learn new things, and become more independent.

When your child becomes more involved and independently uses its hands in various everyday situations, you should gradually remove your hands. This encourages the child to use its hands independently. Continue using the hand-under-hand method when introducing objects to the child and when you are playing and communicating together.



Play and interaction in everyday life

The path to language development starts with play and interaction. This is true for both spoken and sign language. It is crucial for you as a parent to initiate interaction with your child early on. Both interaction and play should be based on touch, which you can support with auditory and visual impressions. Initially, you as a parent are the most important partner, but gradually other people and even toys can become significant for your child. The way in which you and your child interact creates security and advances the child's ability to communicate.

Prepare your child for the fact that you are about to make contact. This may involve talking, knocking loudly on the door, or walking with heavy steps so that the child can feel the vibrations and know that you are coming.

Position yourself close to your child whenever possible, so that the child can sense you and perceive your scent. This can be on a blanket on the floor, next to a baby seat, or in a way that your legs are in contact in different ways. Closeness allows your child to lean against you and touch you.



Let each family member have his own greeting



Make it a habit to greet your child in a way that builds on touch. For example, touch the child's leg or shoulder. Let each family member have their unique greeting so that the child knows who is making contact. Also,

let your child feel the person, like the parent's beard or hair. Your unique way of greeting becomes the same for the child as if you were looking at each other and saying hello.

Sing and talk to your child! The child can then feel the vibrations in your body. You can also hold your child's hand against your throat.

Play with your child when it sits in your lap. It is a safe and secure way to play together. Sing familiar songs together, preferably songs with movements that the child can learn. Clapping hands or bringing the child's feet together are other ways to add movement to play.

Use hand-under-hand in interaction and play. This means having your hands under the child's hands, and the child's hands follow yours. This way, you show the child movements, and you can play and explore the environment together.


Use the hand-under-hand method when you play with your child



Using the body

Small children gradually learn to understand their bodies, to use their hands, crawl, and walk. This often happens without much thought. For a child with both vision and hearing impairments, the environment needs to assist. Your child needs to gain experience in using its body, meeting different people and places, such as its bed, play mat, bathtub, and eventually the various rooms in your home. This way, your child gradually becomes more aware of its body and how to use it.

It is good to carry the child in a carrier or wrap sling. This way, the child feels your movements and simultaneously gains experience with various body movements. Lifting the child is another way to increase its awareness of its body, as well as direction and movement.



Find a good starting position for the games

Allow your child to sit facing outwards in your lap. This way, the child can feel your body movements while making it easier for you to use hand-under-hand when doing various activities. The child can also sit between your legs, with one of your legs behind the child and the other over the child's legs. This position prevents the child from falling backwards or forwards while maintaining contact.

Play games and sing rhymes or songs that naturally involve touching your child's body and doing various movements together. Games that reoccur in everyday life help your child become more aware of its body. Use different play equipment, such as a play tunnel, play tent, a cardboard box, or a basket.

Encourage your child to participate in various daily activities, such as holding a feeding bottle or a spoon. Initially, it may be challenging for the child to use its hands in this way. Use hand-under-hand, allowing the child to follow your movements with its hands.

Give your child a massage. When you give a massage, you learn how the child's body looks and feels in different moods.

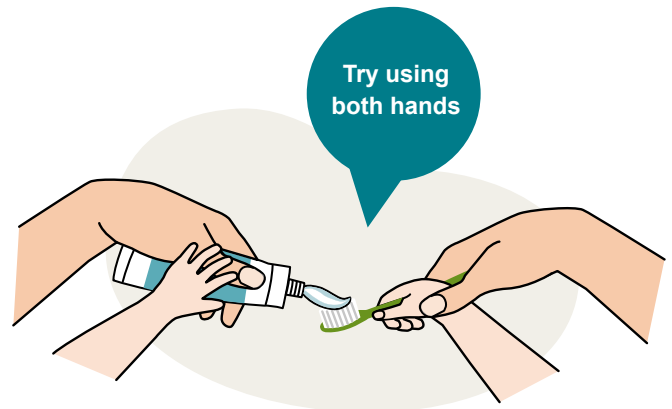


If your child has usable hearing, you can attach small bells to the ankle or foot for a while to help bring attention to the feet.

Try placing your child on its stomach. It's a good way to strengthen motor skills. Place the child on your chest or over your legs so that the child has contact with you. A new position may be easier to accept close to the parent.

Spark your child's interest in using both hands. Use a cup with two handles, toys that can be taken apart and put together, or hold the toothpaste tube together when squeezing out toothpaste.

Show your child different landmarks in the environment when it has started moving around on its own. Carpet edges, tables, chairs, or doors can make it easier for the child to perceive its own placement in the room.



Exploring and understanding the surroundings

A child needs many experiences of exploring and discovering before it learns to recognize things in its surroundings. Your child learns to understand its environment by touching it. Initially, when your child uses touch to explore, hands, feet, mouth, and tongue, are particularly important. Often in combination with any remaining vision and hearing, smell, and taste.

Let the child touch and feel you. Encourage the child to explore your face and hands. By feeling you, the child will discover your unique features and clothing.



Let the child touch and feel you

Help the child explore through hand-under-hand. Show the child different qualities of an object that may be challenging to discover independently, such as unscrewing the cap of a bottle or examining the back of a chair. Play games with objects that encourage exploration, such as hiding items inside clothes to encourage searching for them.

Set up a dedicated space for your child where it can discover and explore freely. You can use a baby gym or create a small area. Hang various items on elastic strings so the child can reach, play with, and release them. Use things the child can grab and use different shapes and materials. If the child has usable vision and hearing, try various sounds and items that can provide visual impressions. In short, stimulate different senses!

Stimulate the child's different senses!



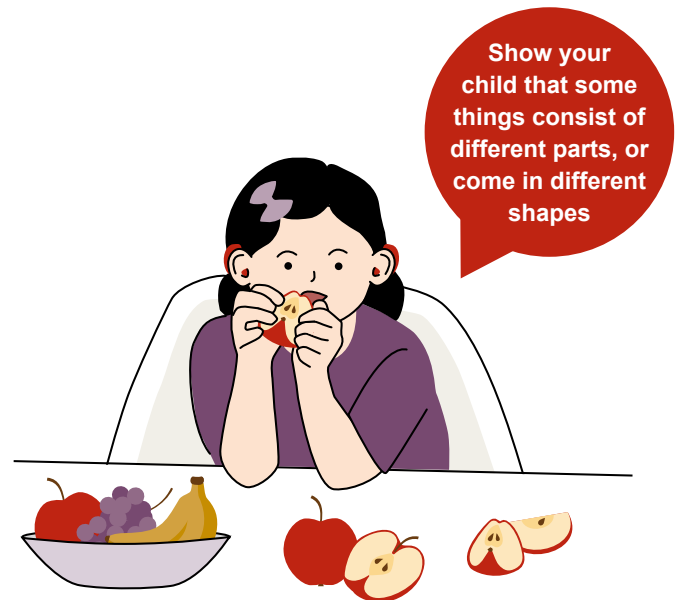


Let your child feel different materials

Introduce the things in your home that your child often comes into contact with. After a while, you can also bring in materials from nature for the child to explore. Help the child come into contact with objects, for example by attaching them to a string on a chair, stroller, or wheelchair.

Give your child time to explore and feel the same things many times to remember them. Make sure that you vary materials, shape, and texture. Many children prefer to start exploring hard and dry materials, like uncooked rice and pasta, feathers, or dry sand. You can place the material in a container and let the child feel it. Gradually, you can also hide objects in different materials to increase your child's curiosity and motivation.

Many things consist of different parts, like a slice of bread or half an apple is part of a larger whole. If you always give your child pieces of an apple, it will be challenging for the child to connect the pieces to a whole apple. There are also items that belong together but feel different, such as shoes and shoelaces. Teach your child that some items belong together, both by feeling them separately and when they are attached.




Show your child that some things consist of different parts, or come in different shapes

What is your child trying to communicate to you?

From the very beginning, infants start communicating with their surroundings. A small child does this through its body, gaze, voice, and smile. Parents respond naturally, often through eye contact, a smile, and talk. Your child has the same need to communicate with you and others, but on its own conditions. Since you cannot rely entirely on eye contact and speech, you need to find other ways to make contact. You need to learn to see and perceive your child's signals and attempts at communication, and then respond in a way that the child can perceive.

Keep the child close to you, face to face, so that you can more easily perceive all the child's signals. This can be the child's heartbeats, facial expressions, muscle tension, body movements, yawning, gestures, or sounds.

Pay attention to small hand or body movements, small movements toward a person or an object, a smile, or an open mouth. Such signals may indicate that the child is content, active in your interaction, and wants to continue.



I recognize this person!

Your child's breathing changes when it hears your voice.

Make it a habit to observe your child. This can be in everyday routines like diaper changes, dressing, feeding, and bathing, or during interactions and play. Try to interpret nuances in your child's expressions. You will learn how your child communicates to seek attention, protest, or to make you understand that "I want this."



I want more food

Your child feels the spoon touching its lips and opens its mouth.

Learn also to perceive signs that tell you that your child needs a break. It might be that the child turns away its face or body, leans backwards, closes its mouth, becomes stiff, or cries. Other signs of the need for a break can include the child clearly shaking its head or pressing its eyes. Turning away and suddenly becoming still can also be a sign that the child is more attentive at that moment.

I don't want any



Your child closes its mouth when the bottle comes, or turns away, leans back, becomes stiff, and upset.

I want to swing more



Your child moves its body in a rocking motion when you stop swinging it.

Again!



Your child gets excited and anticipates the next step in the game when you count down to blowing on its stomach.

I want to play more



Your child reaches for your hand when you pause in a clapping game.

I'm thinking

I need a break



Your child is actively engaged and shows interest in the game, then becomes stiff, stops following your movements, or turns away.

Shared attention

Becoming aware of each other is a natural part of early interaction between children and parents. Over time, attention is expanded to other things, such as toys or objects used in various daily routines. This often occurs with the use of vision by pointing and looking, and with the use of hearing by putting words to what you see and do. For a parent of a child with visual and hearing impairments, other ways to capture the child's focus and attention are necessary. You also need to learn how to confirm that your focus is directed at the same object. In this situation all senses become important, but especially touch.

If your child has some visual ability, encourage it to focus on you, for example, by wearing brightly coloured lipstick, glasses, or wrapping the frame of your glasses in aluminium foil. You can also use a lamp to illuminate your face or hair.



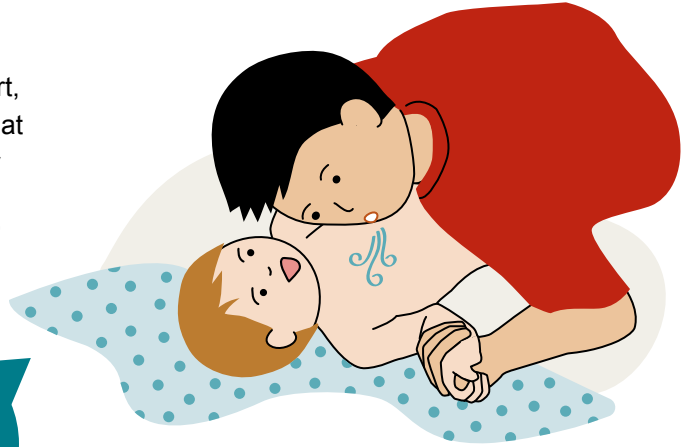
Capture
your child's
attention and
interest



If your child has some hearing ability, you can use different sounds to spark interest. Sing and talk to your child so it can hear your voice. Toys that make various sounds can also be interesting for the child.

Teach your child to pay attention to hands. Paint your nails with colourful polish or attach tape in bright colours to your fingers.

To capture your child's attention with tactile support, you need to be close to the child. Close enough that you are touching each other. You can stroke your hand over different parts of the child's body, blow on it, or create vibrations by "blowing raspberries."



Be so close to your child that you are touching each other

Give your child confirmation by paying attention to the same thing



When your child sits in your lap, try to imitate its body movements. This confirms to your child that you both are paying attention to the same thing. When your child touches something with its hands, you can place your hand next to or on top of its hands.

Follow your child in everyday activities to figure out what it pays attention to. Which senses does your child use to draw attention to something? In some situations, your child might use one sense, while in others, it uses another. It can vary! Touch, grip, body posture, muscle tension, pauses, and the positions of hands and feet are all essential for your child's attention. As you become more aware of your child's interests, you will find your own unique ways to achieve shared attention.

Daily routines

A child can early on anticipate daily routines and activities through various visual and auditory impressions it experiences in everyday life. For a child with impaired vision and hearing to understand or anticipate what is about to happen, touch needs to play a crucial role. Your routines act as signals for your child. They create a sense of security and help the child develop awareness of the surroundings. Routines also assist the child in distinguishing between night and day.

Give your child clues it can feel. In everyday life, this might mean touching the child's body in different places or ways. You can also use a reoccurring object. The touch you choose gives your child the possibility to anticipate and associate a specific touch or object with a particular activity. Always choose a clue that the child can easily understand, one that is clearly associated with and within reach just before the activity. For example, touching the child's legs before dressing, feeling the bathwater before the actual bath, pulling a bit on the diaper before changing, or touching a particular toy before playtime.



**Create
unique routines
together in
everyday life**



Create routines together in everyday life. Begin by using one of your reoccurring activities such as feeding, dressing, diaper changing, bathing, play, or bedtime. Establish a unique routine for what you are going to do and use your clues in the routine. For example, touch the child's mouth before feeding, change the diaper on the same surface, let the child feel the diaper, hold the child in a similar way during feeding, let the child sit in your lap while playing, or use a specific blanket at bedtime.

Pay attention to whether the child begins to signal that it understands what is about to happen. Notice if, for example, the child lifts its legs during dressing, opens its mouth at feeding time, or makes movements in play before you. Such signals indicate that the child is starting to understand, thanks to your routines. Confirm the child's signals by touching the child's body or repeating the movement. This way, you signal to the child that you have noticed its understanding.

Facilitate for your child by letting each routine have a beginning, a middle section, and an end. A clear beginning could be to let the child recognize a specific position or presenting a particular object. The end becomes clear to the child as the position changes, or the object is removed. If the child reacts to sounds, you can use music or other sounds to mark the beginning and end; start the music when the routine begins and turn it off when it ends.

Engage your child in the entire activity. An activity consists of several parts that the child needs to be a part of and learn to recognize. The different steps contribute to an understanding of the entire process over time. For example, you can fetch the clothes together before dressing.

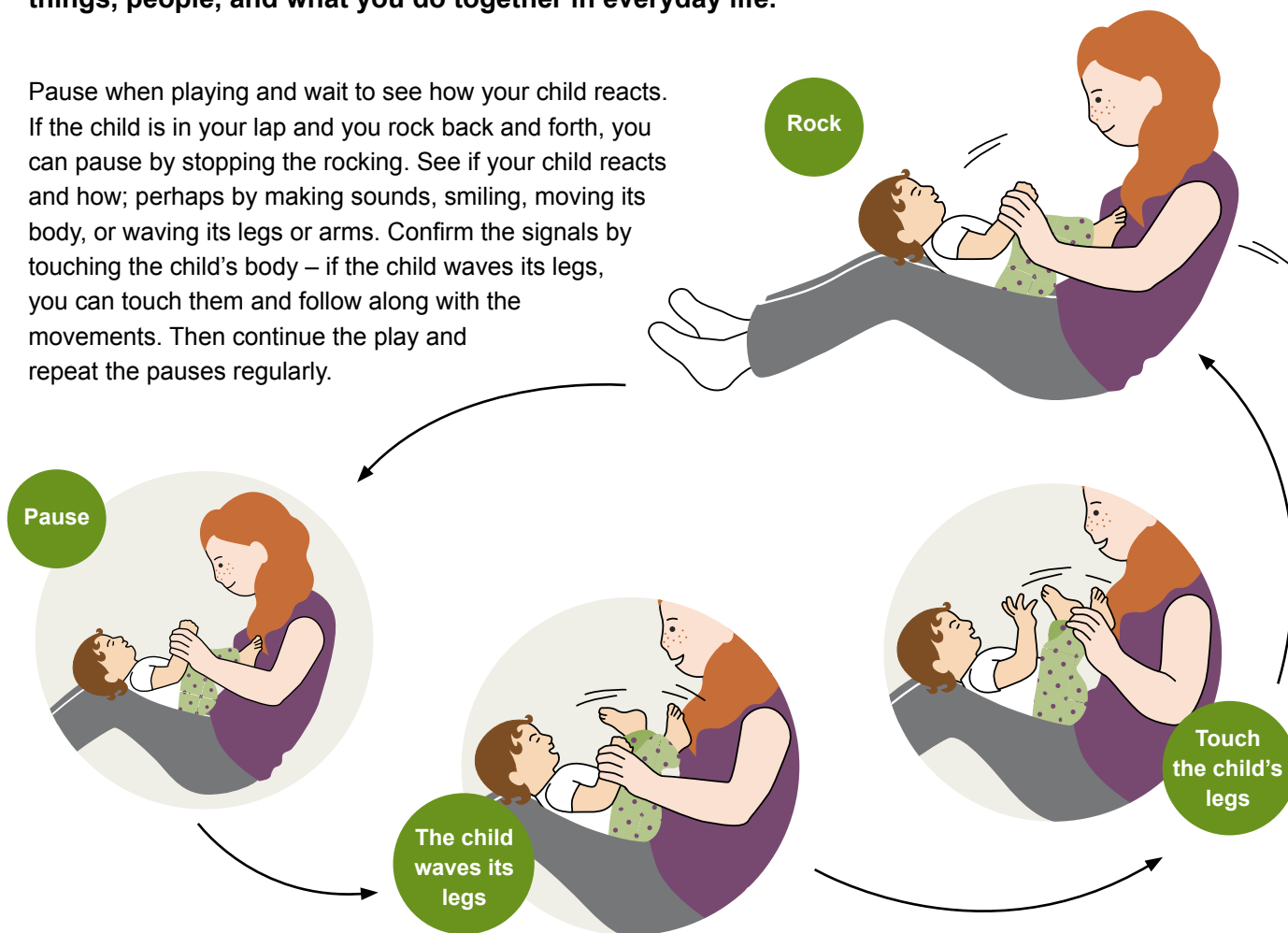
Let your child be involved in the different steps of an activity



Develop a language

The early communication between a child and a parent is all about the child discovering and understanding that it is possible to affect the surroundings. Based on this insight, the child learns that others react to what I do or signal. This motivates the child to continue and is the first step to being able to communicate with others. To encourage your child to continue developing its language, you need to put words to things, people, and what you do together in everyday life.

Pause when playing and wait to see how your child reacts. If the child is in your lap and you rock back and forth, you can pause by stopping the rocking. See if your child reacts and how; perhaps by making sounds, smiling, moving its body, or waving its legs or arms. Confirm the signals by touching the child's body – if the child waves its legs, you can touch them and follow along with the movements. Then continue the play and repeat the pauses regularly.



Give your child the possibility to choose. If the child has some vision, you can hold up things at the distance your child best perceives things. Notice if your child looks more attentively at or reaches for a particular object. If your child cannot see the objects, you can gently place them under the child's hands. Pay attention if the child touches one object longer than another or keeps its hand on one of the objects. Sometimes you may have to guess what your child has chosen.

For children with impaired vision and hearing, words and concepts need not only be spoken but also signed. If your child has some vision and hearing ability, you can talk while using signs. If your child lacks vision or has difficulty seeing signs, you need to sign so that the child receives the signs through the body, primarily the hands. This is called giving "tactile signs." If your child lacks both vision and hearing ability, communication needs to be entirely based on touch. The child needs to feel your language, and also others'.

Play turn-taking games with your child. If the child splashes water in the bathtub, you can do the same. Follow what the child does and do the same yourself. Use toys that light up or make sounds and take turns switching them on and off.

Help your child become aware of its own ways of communicating. Imitate your child's sounds and movements so that the child becomes conscious of its communication. If your child uses gestures and sounds to communicate, do the same and then add words and signs.

One way to start putting words to things and using signs together with your child is to begin with activities, objects, and people that the child likes. Use those words and signs frequently and with many repetitions!



Keep up the interaction

As a parent, you are the natural and most important person for your child's development and learning. However, parenthood comes without a manual, and in some situations, it can be difficult to know what to do.

The guidance in this book is based on knowledge and experience of supporting children born with both impaired vision and hearing. You can, of course, adapt and develop these tips further at home, together with your child and others in your everyday life.

Regardless of what you can take to heart, we hope that the content of this guidance inspires you to continue stimulating, engaging, and encouraging your child to develop new skills. All parents have different prerequisites. Regardless of your life situation, remember that you are the most crucial person in your child's life. As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else, and the interaction you develop together is utterly significant!



Would you
like to know
more?



If you, as a parent, want to connect with other parents who have children with combined visual and hearing impairments, you can turn to other parents within the Association of the Swedish Deafblind at **www.fsdb.org**

The Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools provides information about combined visual and hearing impairment, sign language education for parents (TUFF), and special schools when it is time for your child to start school. Visit **www.spsm.se**

The Swedish National Resource Center for Deafblindness Issues provides more information about combined visual and hearing impairment, or deafblindness at **www.nkcdb.se**

We primarily use our vision and hearing to be social and communicate with others, or to get information about what is happening in the surroundings. We also need vision and hearing to navigate and move freely in different environments.

When vision and hearing are not sufficient, other senses must help out. Each child learns to use their senses in their own way. This becomes particularly evident for you as a parent to a young child who, from birth, has an impairment of both vision and hearing. Your child will use its entire body to explore the surroundings, develop language, and communicate with others.

In this book, we have compiled some guidance and tips on how, through discovery, observation, stimulation, and encouragement, you can support your child's development throughout the early childhood period. This guidance is based on knowledge and experience from large parts of the world in supporting young children with combined vision and hearing impairments.

