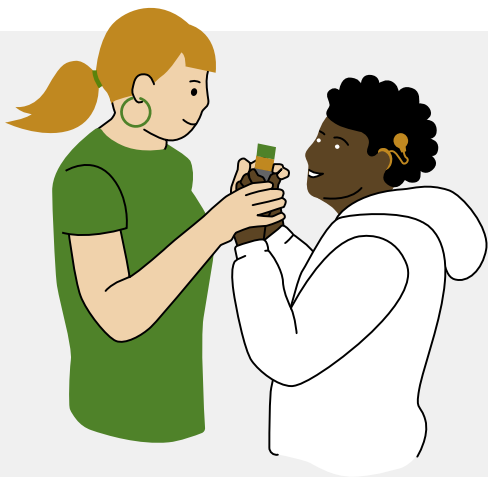


Objects as AAC in Tactile Communication

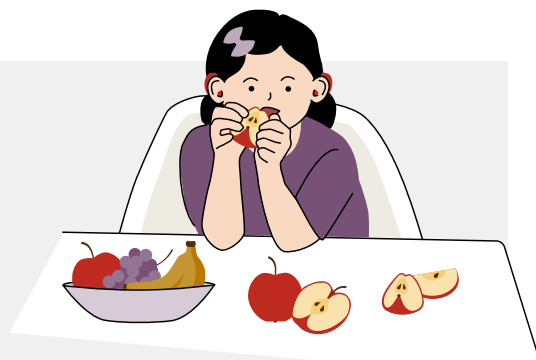
If you are close to a person born with combined visual and hearing impairments/deafblindness, it is important to understand how to adapt the use of objects as Augmentative and Alternative

Communication (AAC). Take advantage of our advice to understand how you can facilitate communication in various ways when the person primarily relies on touch, smell, and taste.



Tactile Communication

A person born with both visual and hearing impairments depends on touch for communication, even if they have some residual vision or hearing. This is because the ability to use vision and hearing varies from one situation to another. The surrounding environment needs to act as communicative role models and use objects as AAC alongside tactile signs/sign language and social-haptic signals.



Tactile Exploration

The properties of objects, such as softness, vibration, or temperature, can be interpreted through touch. Often, the hands, fingers, feet, and mouth are used for this exploration. When larger objects need to be explored, the whole body is often engaged. It is crucial to allow the use of the entire body to feel, shake, bang, and explore the size and function of the object. Smell and taste are also important. Very large objects, such as a car or a house, are often challenging to “get a grip of” tactilely and put together into a whole. With touch, exploration happens bit by bit and is then pieced together into a whole. Tactile exploration takes time and requires many repetitions.

Choice of Objects

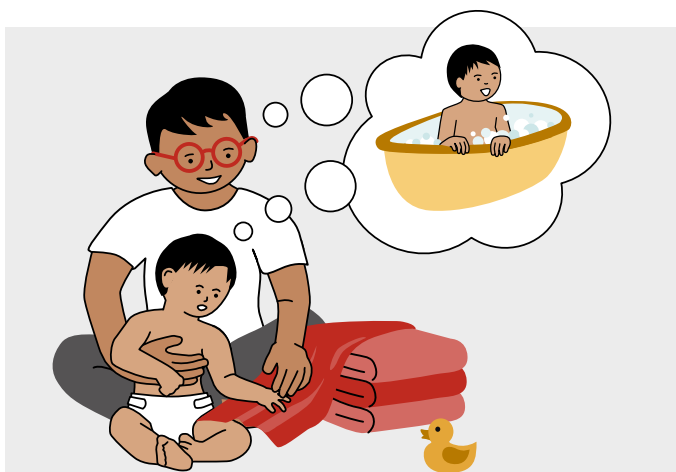
Keep in mind that it is more difficult for the person to notice that others use objects, and to understand how others use objects. Therefore, the object must be something the person uses themselves in everyday life. Initially, concrete objects in their natural size should be used. Avoid miniatures, like a toy car symbolizing a taxi. Often, the actual object cannot be explored tactilely because it is too large, like a house or a car, making it difficult to understand the symbolic meaning of a miniature. Instead, a piece of the actual object may provide a clearer association, such as a piece of a seatbelt with the buckle attached as a symbol for riding in a car.



Introducing Objects with Hands

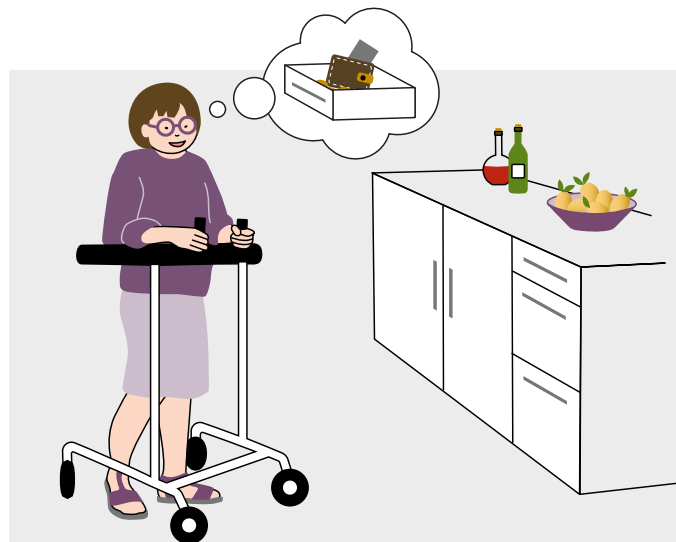
Hands are often sensitive. They are crucial and used in various ways to feel or communicate with others. Avoid directing the person's hands to touch an object. If their hands are extra sensitive, it might work better for them to explore with their feet. Make contact by touching their shoulder or arm before touching their hands. Introduce an object by either gently placing it on the person's arm or hands or using the hand-under-hand method. In this method, you introduce the object by holding it yourself and letting the person's hands first come into contact with your hands and then with the object you are holding.





From Concrete to Abstract Usage

Before the ability to generalize develops, the object needs to be precisely the one used in the activity. Over time, as the person understands that the object is a symbol and represents something beyond itself, the object can be presented in a different situation from the activity it represents. The transition to a more abstract understanding for someone with combined visual and hearing impairments is facilitated by using a familiar part of an object, such as a piece of a towel symbolizing taking a bath or the cap of a bottle instead of the whole bottle.



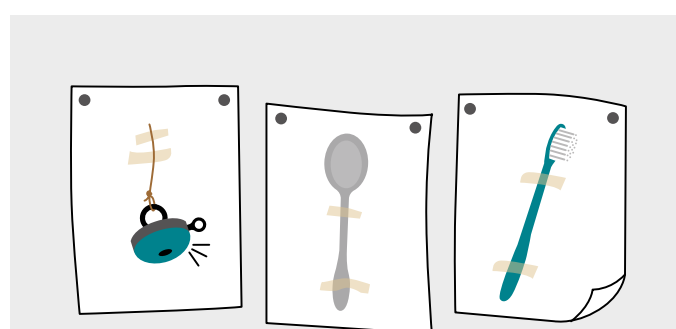
Placement and Storage of Objects

When someone has both visual and hearing impairments, it is crucial that every item has a designated place. This allows the person to locate objects independently and take initiative. Initially, objects should be placed in their natural locations, such as shoes on the shoe rack, toys in the toy box, and coats and jackets in the hallway. With time, objects or parts of objects can be put on a keychain or in a bag when the person is in other environments, giving them access to the communication objects.



Memory Aids and Storytelling

Objects are tactile and therefore work well as memory aids for someone with both visual and hearing impairments. They can serve as memory aids and conversation topics, used in various environments to help the person share stories with others who were not present during a specific event, such as at school, in day habilitation, or at residential places. Objects can also be kept to communicate about people and plan events that occur infrequently, such as vacations or special activities.



Tactile Pictures, Books, and Schedules

Objects are essential for developing an understanding of tactile pictures and using tactile books and schedules. In time, parts of objects can be attached to laminated pages or wooden boards to help with understanding tactile pictures, as a transition from 3D to 2D. Objects, parts of objects, and tactile pictures can also be used in tactile schedules to facilitate information, overview, time perception, literacy, and communication. Objects can also be incorporated into tactile books, where parts of objects are attached to pages, functioning as parts or sequences in a whole story.