

Choosing and Using Tactile Name Cues by Maurice Belote, CDBS Project Coordinator

A name cue is a physical touch cue that someone who is deaf-blind uses to identify the important people in his or her life. Name cues are used with these individuals as they cannot use vision and hearing to make sense of all the people who touch them and interact with them throughout the day.

Name cues are different from name signs. Name signs are signs for specific individuals and typically include one or more letters from the manual signed alphabet so they are more abstract than name cues. Name cues are purely tactile representations of people. Some examples of commonly used name cues include a distinctive ring, bracelet, wristwatch, or keys worn around the wrist.

Name cues are very important for children and young adults who are deaf-blind for two reasons. First, they teach the person that touch has meaning, and this serves to reinforce other tactile communication systems such as touch cues and object cues. Second, we want to make sure that people are not constantly coming in and out of an individual's world throughout the day without identification. For children and youth with limited vision and hearing, people come and go so quickly that, over time, these individuals with deaf-blindness may cease to show interest in those around them because they're not sure who these people are or what they want.

Points to remember when choosing a name cue:

- Make sure that your cue is different from other people who have regular contact with this individual who is deaf-blind. For example, it would be confusing for that person if many people used similar rings as their unique tactile identifiers.
- A specific name cue must be used consistently over time, so it must be based on something that you always have or always wear. For example, if your name cue is a specific wristwatch, you must always wear that watch on days that you will interact with individuals who know the name cue. If the watch breaks, it would have to be replaced with a similar watch. If you choose a distinctive bodily feature such as a beard, you are making a commitment to keeping that beard for a long time.
- Think about one or more individuals touching your name cue many times throughout a typical day. For example, do you really want your mustache touched by unwashed hands throughout the day, especially during cold and flu season? If your name cue is something that clips onto your belt, consider a child having to feel around your waist area to find cue. This is also true of name cues that hang around the neck, requiring the individual

with deaf-blindness to feel around your chest to determine who you are. This may not be desirable or even appropriate.

- Consider how manageable a name cue is if it is to be used many times throughout the day. If you have chosen the buzz-cut of your hair with its distinctive feel, do you want to have to bend over many times throughout the day to allow a young child to touch your head?
- A name cue can be something artificially created as long as it is consistent. An example of this is the terry cloth tennis-style wristband worn by a physical therapist that can be felt by the individual who is deaf-blind.

Points to remember when using a name cue:

- Begin by getting the person's attention by gently rubbing the back of their hand. This is usually the least intrusive place to initially touch an individual who is deaf-blind. (This is not true for every person. Ask family members or people who know the individual well for specific information about touch.)
- Use the name cue consistently throughout the day.
- Pair the name cue with speech. For example, have the individual who is deaf-blind touch the name cue while you say, "Hello Jane, this is Blanche". Always assume that the person may benefit from the auditory input, especially when you speak close to the person's ears.
- The individual who is deaf-blind may not want or be able to touch the name cue with their palm. There may be another part of the body where the child prefers to receive tactile information.

In some cases, the use of a tactile name cue can be expanded into an individual's object communication system and/or calendar system. Consider the example above of the physical therapist who wears a specific wristband as a name cue. A second identical wristband could be used in this child's calendar system to tell the child that the PT will be coming that day for therapy time. Imagine, for example, a scenario in which the physical therapist is one of the child's favorite service providers. Knowing that the PT was coming because the wristband was placed in the object calendar system could motivate the child to get through the other activities of the day. The positive anticipation of the upcoming PT time could be an important building block of language and other skill development.

It is important that the tactile name cues developed for a specific individual are clearly explained in the individual's personal communication dictionary. This will help ensure consistency among team members.

Contact any CDBS staff member for help with implementing name cues or other tactile cues. Also, check out CDBS Fact Sheet #3 for information on touch cues, Fact Sheet #4 on information about object cues, and Fact Sheet #25 on how to create a personal communication dictionary.

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