



**STEVEN W. NOYCE**  
Superintendent

**JENNIFER J. HOWELL**  
Associate Superintendent  
of the Deaf

**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES**

742 Harrison Blvd  
Ogden, Utah 84404-5298  
801-629-4700 Voice  
801-629-4701 TTY  
801-629-4896 FAX  
**1-800-990-9328 Toll Free**

**SALT LAKE OFFICE**  
3098 S. Highland Dr. Suite 205  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84106-3085  
801-464-2000 Voice  
801-464-2001 TTY  
801-467-6411 FAX

**OREM OFFICE**  
424 South 350 East  
Orem, Utah 84058  
801-431-5100  
801-224-8018 FAX

**SALT LAKE CAMPUS**  
**JEAN MASSIEU SCHOOL**  
1655 E. 3300 S.  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84106  
801-657-5762 Video Phone  
801-464-2004 FAX

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RE: Program Options (Parent Infant Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired)

Dear Parents,

We are pleased to announce to you our efforts at Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind in offering more intensive services through an array of options during these early years. We thank you for entrusting us with the vision services for your infant/toddler. We understand that your baby's needs cannot be separated from the needs of you and your family. Because parents are the child's best teachers, it is important for you to be involved in all the services your baby receives. As soon as a vision loss is suspected and/or identified, the goal of the Parent Infant Program and our Vision Specialist is to work with you and your early intervention team in offering the services that will be most beneficial to you and your child's development.

Infants begin learning about the world around them almost immediately. Approximately 85% of early learning is visual. Vision is our motivating sense. No other sense can stimulate curiosity, integrate information or invite exploration in the same way or as efficiently and fully as vision does. Each child with a visual impairment learns differently and requires teaching strategies, activities, and adaptations that support and encourage developmental progress. The sighted child sees color, size, shape, texture, distance, facial expressions, gestures, and gender all in one glance. In a tenth of a second, the sighted child can absorb a range of concepts; however, each of these concepts may need to be taught specifically and individually to the child with visual impairments. The child with visual impairments knows his/her world only by what can be touched within arm's reach. The child must be guided to use all of his/her senses to form an understanding of the objects and experiences within their world. The focus of the Parent Infant Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired is to help your child develop all senses by encouraging touching, movement, listening, smelling, maximizing functional vision, and creating opportunities for learning and exploration.

Effective, intensive early intervention is imperative during these early years. We in the Parent Infant Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired are excited to share this valuable time with you and your child. Your Early Intervention Vision Specialist will work with you to address your child's individual developmental needs that have been impacted by the vision loss. Through the IFSP process you, your Vision Specialist, and your Early Intervention team will work together to determine the service options that will best meet the needs of your family and the unique needs of your child. The service options that will be offered are as follows:

## **Home-Based Services**

The home offers a natural environment where services are embedded within the child's everyday routines. Vision strategies address the areas of development that the vision loss has impacted such as communication/language, cognition and play, fine and gross motor, social-emotional, and daily self-help skills. Adaptations of tactile, contrast, size, lighting, color, shape, listening, smell, etc. are utilized in assisting your child to maximize any remaining vision and compensate for loss of vision. Strategies are offered in support of the parent-infant relationship, activities with instruction to teach vision and compensatory skills are modeled, and resources of information are provided.

Family Service Option: Up to twice a week (60 minute sessions)

## **Orientation and Mobility Services**

The early concepts of movement, spatial awareness and environmental sound cues will be introduced and taught by the Early Intervention Vision Specialist. These services will be offered in all the environments that are typical for you and your child such as the home, the backyard, the neighborhood playground, and other local community places that you go. As soon as your child begins to move about their environment, an Orientation and Mobility Specialist will complete a formal evaluation. The Orientation and Mobility specialist will introduce the child to pre-cane devices and/or a cane for use in independent travel and provide specialized instruction when appropriate.

Family Service Option: Up to once a month (60 minute sessions)

## **Emergent literacy – Prebraille**

One of the most crucial components of a child's early learning experience is that of literacy. Every child should have multiple opportunities and experiences from a very early age to be immersed in literacy concepts. Emergent literacy refers to the cognitive knowledge and concepts children gather about language, reading/listening, and the written word. For children with visual impairments, emergent literacy must include tactile experiences integrated with verbal language. Prebraille skills are physical and sensory: tactile perception, fine motor skills, particularly finger and hand movements, and the ability to identify braille characters. Every child will have multiple opportunities in all modalities of literacy including braille, large print, listening, and optical devices.

Family Service Option: Ongoing basis

## **Early Childhood Sensory Center**

The Early Childhood Sensory Center provides another option for families to obtain information concerning visual impairments and the unique learning needs of their child. Families are invited to visit the Sensory Center as often as the schedule allows. They may experience the Sensory Center for a few hours at a time or extend their stay overnight. The family will be provided with a checklist of possible topics to be covered and the agenda will be tailored to the individual needs of the child and family based on interest in topics identified. The Sensory Center will offer information on topics such as the diagnosed vision condition, attachment, social and play interaction, pre-braille, emergent literacy, sensory motor skills, sensory integration, low vision optical devices, technology, family games and activities that the entire family can participate in, etc. Families and their children will have opportunities to experience materials and equipment not accessible in the home environment.

Family Service Option: Per Request

## **Regional Family Activities**

Regional activities within the community provide opportunities for children with visual impairments to interact with their world in settings not available in their home environment. Activities may take place at the neighborhood park, swimming pool, a vegetable garden, a fruit orchard, a farm, the zoo, or other location where the child can experience real objects in natural settings. These activities allow families to network, parents to learn additional strategies in working with their child, and the child to build new concepts to better understand their world.

Family Service Option: Up to 4 times per year (2 hour sessions)

## **Parent Education Seminars**

Intensive educational classes are offered to parents on specific topics unique to vision impairment. The classes will be offered in local areas as well as at the USDB sites throughout the state. The topics will be decided as per the need but will cover such areas as: Introduction to Braille; Feeding Issues; Sensory Integration; Visual Motor; Eating Concerns; Tactile Defensiveness; Expanded Core Curriculum; Transition at Age Three; etc.

Family Service Option: Once a week for 4-6 weeks (60 minute sessions)

## **Parent to Parent Network/Support**

Parents will have opportunities to be connected with both state and national family networking/support organizations. Networking/support opportunities will be provided through both formal and informal settings. Informal settings may be play dates, toddler/playgroups, family activities, etc. The more formalized organizations may be with Utah Parents of Blind Children, Family Connect, National Foundation for the Blind, and/or organizations specific for the child's vision diagnosis, etc.

Family Service Option: Per Request

## **Play Dates**

Play Dates provide opportunities for 2 to 3 families to get together to meet and build networks. It prepares families and children for a more formalized playgroup setting. The play dates allow the children to have opportunities to socialize, build language/communication, to generalize skills learned in similar settings and to interact with peer modeling. The play dates could be at the home of one of the families, at the park, the community pool, or other natural environments, etc.

Family Service Option: Up to quarterly (60 minute sessions)

## **Toddler/Playgroups**

Toddler/playgroup classes offer children ages 18 – 36 months an opportunity to learn in a group setting, to socialize and practice communication/language, and to interact with peer modeling. The classes allow children to function in a more predictable world and to generalize his/her knowledge to other environments and situations. Toddler classes provide the child with visual impairments opportunities to begin to explore and learn with other equipment and modalities that are not available in the home environment such as with a CCTV, other optical devices, electric brailers, etc. The Toddler/playgroup class also provides the parent with opportunities to play and work with their child on specific center based activities as well as networking with other parents. Parents will receive instruction on specific topics of interest to the group. Topics may cover such issues as sensory integration, emergent literacy, visual motor, etc.

Family Service Option: Once per week (75 minute sessions)

## **Blind/Visually Impaired Mentor**

A blind/visually impaired mentor would be assigned to families requesting this service. Mentors may be adults or students of High School age. Mentors may share experiences, answer questions, provide parents with a view of future opportunities and independence. Blind/visually impaired mentors will assist families in networking with other families that share the same eye condition as their child as well as with other blind and visually impaired adults and/or students. Blind/visually impaired mentors could participate in home visits, play dates, toddler/playgroup classes, and at parent education seminars.

Family Service Option: Per request

## **Vision Diagnosis Information**

There are numerous vision diagnoses as well as many other syndromes where vision loss may be a component. Information on your child's vision diagnosis and the impact on development will be discussed as needed in your home visits on an ongoing basis. Your Early Intervention Vision Specialist may also attend one appointment per year with you when you visit your ophthalmologist.

Family Service Option: Ongoing basis

## **Ongoing Intensive Vision Assessments**

Assessment is a critically important step in determining the visual needs for your child. Once the initial assessments are complete your Vision Specialist will have a better understanding of your child's visual abilities and the impact the vision loss has on their development. From the information gathered through the assessment process a plan can be created and implemented for your child that addresses what compensatory skills and low vision adaptations are needed to best meet your child's unique learning needs. Ongoing assessments are vital to establish your child's progress in their visual/compensatory skills, impact on development through the changes in the visual diagnosis that have been established, and changes within your family's needs.

Family Service Option: Ongoing basis

As you approach your next IFSP meeting, your Vision Specialist will work with you to determine other options that may be appropriate for you and your child. Options that will become part of the IFSP may be added at that time. Other non IFSP options will be discussed with you to determine which services will best meet your family and child's needs.

Thank you for your support of the USDB Parent Infant Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired. We look forward to our continued services with you and your child.

Sincerely,

Barbara Petersen

Director of the Parent Infant Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind

742 Harrison Blvd.

Ogden UT 84404

[barbarap@usdb.org](mailto:barbarap@usdb.org)