



# The COVID-19 Pandemic: Best Practice of a Family Member with Deafblind Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) the author has contact with a family with seven children who are deafblind (children, adolescents and young adults). This family has been supported since 2007 by a team from the Centre for Education and Community Based Rehabilitation (CERBC), an organization specialized in supporting those with a disability. In earlier articles (Byaruhanga et al., 2021; Byaruhanga, 2019), the mode of conversation of these seven children with deafblindness was observed using filming and video analysis. The present report is part of a focus group study on the observations of a family member's (uncle) communication, as a primary communication partner of the children, about prevention measures on hand washing and other hygienic practices during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Uncle's success to establish and stabilize a space of understanding**

Selection of objects (basin of water, jerrycan, handkerchief), approaching the children, and touching them in order to get their attention, were important actions in engaging the children in the activity and showed communicative intentions (Souriau, 2014) in the context of a new reality. The uncle's acts of initiating the conversation, touching for attention, and making them touch objects such as the water can or the handkerchief, were part of tactile communication. Tactile languages are natural languages, as research has shown that areas in the brain associated with language become active when tactile stimulation is used (Collins, 2004).

Furthermore, the uncle's demonstrations and having the children act out the demonstrations were appropriate skills needed for primary support staff, as were the involvement of his body in producing signs referring to elements that were understood by children (Hart, 2006; Souriau, 2014). The uncle used simple gestures / signs, adapted to daily realities e.g., pointing in space meaning "go to the toilet" and portraying "hand

washing in the toilet”. These actions attracted the attention of the children and made them smile. These actions or demonstrations of hand washing, walking, or portraying “it is not allowed to shake hands or touch during the greeting”, showed an appropriate way of communicating to empower the children and allowed them to develop knowledge and skills to cope with the new reality (Marková, 2016; Nafstad & Rødbroe, 2015). Moreover, these actions produced coherent gestures, portraying the real space and narrative space (Souriau, 2014). This means that, communication partners should be creative and able to understand the communicative spaces as well as have an ability for mutual sharing to achieve a goal.

### Lessons learned

- Having different strategies and communication ways to meet in interaction and create meaning on an equal basis is the partner’s responsibility.
- Communication partners should be creative and able to understand the communicative spaces.
- Communication partners need to encourage interaction and turns for a successful transfer of information during a group coaching process.

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