

# Approaches to Literacy Instruction for a Student with Visual Impairments

## Who Has Challenging Behavior

By: Amber Rundle Kahn, TVI/COMS

1. **Assess** Has a functional behavior assessment been conducted? If not, talk with the educational team, gather the tools your team decides to use, and conduct one. There are a variety of interview tools, ratings scales, and observational tracking sheets that are available—if you don't have a behavior specialists or BCBA in your schools, ask your school psychologist, or director of special education for help. In addition to the typical literacy assessments, you will need to get to know the child and gather expert information from:
  - a. Families: records review—are there any key historical/medical components that may inform understanding about the student's behavior? What are the child's preferences and curiosities? How, where, and when does they engage with literacy at home? Does the child enjoy books, writing, and listening to stories? Who are the child's preferred peers and adults and what is it about those people that the child gravitates toward?
  - b. Other teachers (general, special educators, and TVIs: how does the student perform on academic tasks? Low academic achievement is often correlated with problematic/challenging behavior. Are there environmental adaptations that support literacy?
  - c. OT: work together to assess and ask what type of sensory processing/integration assessments have been or need to be done. Is the child's behavior sensory seeking? How are sensory integration needs being met?
  - d. SLP: are the student's communication needs being met? Does the student understand what is being asked of them? Do they have a way to express their wants and needs that aligns with the school and IEP team's behavioral expectations? Remember: behavior is communication!
  - e. School Psychologist: are there any concerns about the student's intellectual abilities? Consider: does the IEP team include all necessary members?
  - f. Social Worker: Does the student have meaningful relationships at school? Are there opportunities to develop more relationships around literacy activities?
2. **Observe various settings and times throughout the school day**--explore options.

Does the student have independent work habits? What is the student's threshold for independent, small group, and large group literacy activities? Does the student have favorite places to read/explore literacy, or favorite people to read with? Consider: is the student in the right place, for their academic and behavioral needs, at the right time?
3. **Schedule the student's day.** Often, large blocks of literacy time are too long for students with VI who have challenging behavior. Get a complete daily schedule and determine when, throughout the day, literacy can be infused. Highlight those opportunities on the schedule. Making lunch choices, reading class list to call attendance, and completing teacher-made literacy basket activities are all examples of steps toward functional and academic literacy. Identify key opportunities to infuse literacy and establish expectations for those times. Make sure these expectations align with the student's behavioral assessment and IEP goals. Involve the student's family in this step of programming. Schedule it. Do it. Collect data.
3. **Implement and celebrate small victories:** You're going to be an opportunity detective. Continue to look for times to provide literacy opportunities throughout the day.