

Haptics

Access to visual and environmental information allows a person who is deaf-blind to make informed choices and decisions based on a more complete picture of their situation. This type of information can be provided and received via sign, voice, text, or touch. Individual preferences as to how they would like to receive this information, vary from person to person. Often people use a combination of methods. If an individual has some usable hearing, they may ask for the information to be presented verbally, while others may request that this information is presented in American Sign Language (ASL). However, more and more people who are deaf-blind are relying on touch to access environmental information.

Haptics is a standardized system for providing and receiving visual and environmental information as well as personal reactions/social feedback via touch signals on the body. Haptics was developed by deaf-blind individuals in Norway during the early 1990's in an effort to standardize a method of communication that was already evolving organically within the deaf-blind community. Haptic communication is a fixed set of signals performed in a specific way and in a defined order.

The two main benefits of this method are that the individual is able to receive this information discretely and in real time. The provider does not have to wait for the receiver's hands or eyes to be free to access the sign, voice or text. A simple signal can be provided on the arm, back, or even the leg to inform the individual another person has just entered the room, a drink has been placed in front of them, or they should move their hand a bit to the right to grasp the object for which they are reaching. Social feedback is the personal reactions one receives in one to one or small group settings. There are specified signals used to provide this feedback. These signals represent the facial expressions, body movements, or voiced comments that are typically used to either let someone know that you are following along with their conversation, shocked by what they are telling you, agreeing or disagreeing and so much more.

Q & A

How did HKNC learn about Haptics?

HKNC worked closely with trainers from Norway to incorporate this system into our curriculum. HKNC and Hapti-Co (the training team from Norway) co-wrote an American version of the Haptics book to share with English readers. This version was slightly modified from the Norwegian version to accurately represent the linguistic and cultural differences of the American deaf-blind community.

Who Uses Haptics?

- Receivers of Haptics are typically deaf-blind but not always
- Providers can be anyone
 - another deaf-blind individual
 - a family member
 - co-worker
 - classmate
 - teacher
 - friend
 - interpreter
 - Intervener

How do you determine what information to provide?

The receiver will determine the amount and type of information they would like to receive. However, several factors may influence this decision including;

- The situation they are in: (i.e. formal presentation or social gathering)
- The role of the individual: (i.e. presenter vs. participant)
- Age of onset of vision loss: (i.e. a person who was born blind will typically want different information than an individual who just recently lost their vision)

- Personal preferences – everyone is different

Often individuals find just a few signals can make a tremendous change in their lives.

What is the difference between Haptics and Pro-Tactile?

Often people question how Haptics differs from Pro-Tactile (PT). To clarify, (PT) is much more than a system of providing visual and environmental information. Developed in 2007, by individuals who are deaf-blind in Seattle WA., PT is a philosophy, a language and a movement that promotes equality and access for individuals who are deaf-blind. While methods for providing visual and environmental information are used in this overall philosophy, these methods are purposefully not standardized or documented. The creators explain that PT uses more of an organic or natural interaction where the communication partners decide what is best for them at the time. For more information, please go to www.protactile.org. HKNC is fully supportive of PT and all philosophies and systems that improve the quality of life for individuals who are deaf-blind.

Haptics is not a language, nor does it represent a movement or any cultural inclinations. Haptics is simply a standardized system for providing and receiving visual and environmental information and social feedback. Haptics was developed by deaf-blind individuals in Norway during the early 90's in an effort to standardize a method of communication that was already evolving organically within the deaf-blind community. Haptic communication is a fixed set of signals performed in a specific way and in a defined order.

What is social feedback/personal reactions?

Haptics can be used to provide information about what is occurring in one's environment, but it also can be used to provide one's own personal reactions (social feedback) in a one to one or small group setting. Imagine telling a friend a story and not being able to see them nodding indicating they are following along, eyes widening with excitement, welling up with tears or laughing at a joke. If a person expresses them self and accesses communication using with their hands, they are not able to get this

information at the same time. Haptics allows an individual to get those reactions in real time.

Where can I learn more about Haptics?

- **Email:** To learn more about Haptics, please contact pld@hknc.org
- **Books:** For information about ordering HKNC's book on Haptic Communication, please go to our website. Our book is available in hard copy, kindle reflowable and fixed layout, and epub3 at iBooks. All links can be found by following this link:
<https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/publications>
- **Online Haptics course:** [Haptics online course](#)