

What is deafblindness?

Deafblindness is when someone's sight and hearing are impaired to the point that they find it difficult to communicate, access information and get around.

Some other terms to describe deafblindness include:

- Dual sensory loss
- Dual sensory impairment

Deafblindness is a completely unique condition – it's much more than a hearing loss plus a sight loss.

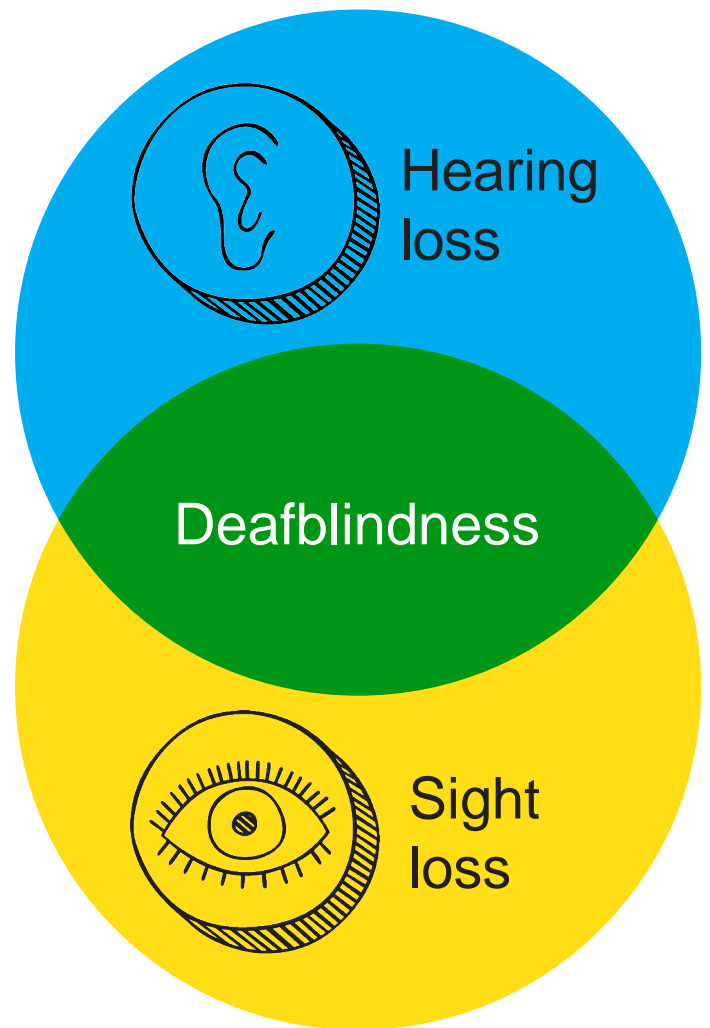
Here's an easy way to think of it.

If you mix the colours yellow and blue together, you get green. Green is completely different to both yellow and blue, it is a colour in its own right.

The same is true of deafblindness. If you have sight loss and hearing loss, then you are deafblind, which is a completely unique condition.

Deafblindness comes on a huge spectrum ranging from struggling to see and hear the TV right through to not being able to see or hear anything at all. However, lots of people with deafblindness are able to hear and/or see something.

It's important to remember that deafblindness affects everyone differently. It can make everyday life very difficult, and people who are deafblind are often very good at finding their own ways of doing things. With the right support and adjustments, people who are deafblind can achieve amazing things!



It is estimated that there are nearly 400,000 deafblind people in the UK. This is expected to increase to over 600,000 by 2030 due to our ageing population.

Deafblindness affects people of all ages, including children and young people, but it is more common in older people as our sight and hearing naturally worsen as we age.

What causes deafblindness?

Deafblindness can be caused by certain health conditions, illnesses, accidents or from ageing. Some causes of deafblindness are:

- Old age
- Eye conditions such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataracts and glaucoma
- Usher syndrome – a genetic condition that affects hearing, vision and balance
- Damage to the brain, such as from meningitis, encephalitis, a stroke or severe head injury
- Problems associated with premature birth
- An infection picked up during pregnancy, such as rubella, toxoplasmosis or cytomegalovirus (CMV)
- Genetic conditions, such as CHARGE syndrome or Down's syndrome
- Cerebral palsy – a problem with the brain and nervous system that mainly affects movement and co-ordination.

How do people who are deafblind communicate?

There are lots of different ways that people who are deafblind communicate. These include:

- Speech – lots of people who are deafblind can talk and have a bit of hearing
- Lipreading – working out what someone is saying from the shapes their mouth is making
- British Sign Language (BSL) – communicating by watching hand signals instead of spoken words
- Hands-on signing – feeling the movements of someone's hands whilst they do sign language
- Makaton – using actions alongside words
- Deafblind Manual – touching someone's hand in different ways for different letters
- Block – drawing letters on someone's hands to spell out words.

People who are deafblind use lots of ways to access reading material, including braille, screen readers and customising the colour and text size on their phones and tablets to make the text readable to them.

Living with deafblindness

Living with deafblindness does not always stop people being independent. Some people go about their daily lives with just a few minor adjustments or some well-planned technology. Others will need more support, such as a communicator guide or support worker, to help them with everyday tasks. For some people, simple changes to how their friends and family behave and communicate can make a huge difference to them.