

SERVING CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Serving children with special needs is an integral part of the mission of all libraries. Karen Messick, the head of Youth Services for the New Jersey Library for the Blind and Handicapped, wrote this section to help librarians serve these young people and to provide information on the services of her library.

Section 1: Serving Children and Teens with Special Needs (Blindness, Visual Impairment, Physical Handicap, Reading Disability)

The New Jersey Library for the Blind and Handicapped (NJLBH) in cooperation with the National Library Service, a division of the Library of Congress, provides recorded, Brailled and large-print books to residents of the state. It is the only source in New Jersey for children and teens with reading disabilities to obtain popular, unabridged books on cassette tape from an all-inclusive and up-to-date “talking book” collection read by professional narrators.

Services are free and available to anyone in New Jersey who cannot read conventional print books because of blindness, a visual impairment, a physical handicap that prevents handling of books or a medically certified reading disability such as a perceptual/neurological impairment, a learning disability or dyslexia.

The NJLBH is a public library that provides a collection of novels, magazines, literature and books for reports and recreational reading on cassette tape, in large type or in Braille. Books are sent to members through the U.S. mail designated as “Free Matter for the Blind and Handicapped,” and they may be returned the same way. There is a three-month loan period, and fines are not charged for late or overdue material.

Special tape-cassette players sent through the U.S. mail, also posted as “Free Matter for the Blind and Handicapped,” are loaned free to members to play their “talking books” recorded on four tracks at 15/16 ips (inch per second). This machine may be kept as long as the member needs it. The only requirement for keeping the machine is that the member regularly uses the library’s extensive and comprehensive book collection. The collection includes most, if not all, of the books on school reading lists, plus offers a wonderful array of books for recreational reading and summer reading club choices. If a machine is defective, it may be returned “Free Matter,” and a replacement machine will be mailed.

There are a wide variety of available books, offering an abundant selection of children’s books in Braille as well as picture books with plastic Braille pages inserted into the text known as **PRINT/BRILLE** books. A catalog

of Braille Books for Children in Grades Pre-School through Grade 4 includes the designation **PRINT/BRAILLE** in the annotation and is available upon request. A parent or teacher can help a child learn Braille by using the print page, while the child uses the Braille page. A blind child can read a picture book using the Braille, while classmates or siblings enjoy the pictures.

Interlibrary loan for titles not in the NJLBH collection also is available to library members.

Access to the complete library collection is available via the worldwide web on the internet at www.loc.gov/nls/web-blnd/search.html. This catalog also gives access to the catalogs of nine other agencies for the blind, from which members can order by interlibrary loan through NJLBH. Periodically, the National Library Service prints a special catalog featuring new books for young readers in print and in Braille. Three catalogs list books in Braille and in Large Print issued by the NJLBH for children in preschool-grade 4, grades 5-8 and grades 9-young adult. They also are available upon request.

As part of its lifetime reading program and to encourage reading all year long, the NJBLH sponsors a six-week Summer Reading Club from July through August. The statewide slogan Read and Grow at Your Library is our theme, and appropriate incentive gifts and activity sheets will be distributed throughout the summer. Members set their own reading goals, and prizes are awarded to those members who reach their goals.

For more information on how to become a member of the NJLBH, to schedule a presentation or to receive an application or a catalog, youth services librarians, interested parents and teachers inquiring about services to special needs children and teens are encouraged to call Karen Messick, head of Youth Services, at 609-530-3251, to send e-mail to kmessick@njstatelib.org and/or to check the website at <http://statelib.org/lbh/index.htm>

Tips for Serving a Blind or Visually Impaired Young Person

1. It is not necessary to raise your voice to speak to someone who is blind.
2. Body language does not work with a blind child/teen. (He/she cannot see you nod your head or point with your hand).
3. Use tactile stuffed animals, puppets, shapes or raised illustrations in your storytime so that the blind child can be as fully involved as the sighted child.
4. Storytimes and other programs that highlight the other senses—smell, touch, taste, hearing—should be encouraged and used.
5. Use 14-point print (as in this section) or larger.
6. Use Print/Braille books occasionally in your storytimes. These books can be purchased at a reasonable cost from Seedling's Braille Books for Children. Call 800-777-8552 for information or a catalog.
7. If manipulatives are not being used as part of a storytime program, it is very important to describe in detail what is portrayed in the book's illustrations. Incorporate the picture and what it imparts to the story line, so that the blind child will understand that the character is on the swing and flying over the treetops, for instance.
8. When you speak to a blind child/teen, say, "Hello, their name, it is your name." By doing this, he/she will know whom he/she is talking to without embarrassment.
9. It's okay to say, "I'll **see** you."
10. If a child/teen is using a white cane for mobility, don't move it without telling him/her that you are doing so. This is what he/she uses for things he/she can't see and remains with him/her at all times.
11. Don't move or position a blind child/teen for directions or place his/her hands on something. Spoken instructions are more helpful.
12. Don't assume a child/teen needs help unless he/she asks for help.
12. A partially opened door to a room or a cabinet is a hazard to a blind person.
13. Place a blind or visually impaired child at the front of a group so that he/she can "see" any modeling you may do: i.e., arm movements.

14. Explain any illustrations that add significance or importance to the story that sighted children can see, but a blind or visually impaired cannot see and therefore will need a detailed explanation.
16. Never distract a guide dog from its responsibility of leading a blind person.

Tips for Serving Handicapped Children and Teens

1. A person's wheelchair is part of his or her body space. Do not hold onto the wheelchair.
2. Offer assistance to a child/teen in a wheelchair, but don't insist. If help is needed, your offer will be accepted, and you will be told exactly what will be helpful.
3. It is okay to use the words "walking" or "running" when speaking to a child/teen in a wheelchair.
4. If your conversation with a person in a wheelchair is longer than a few minutes, and it is possible to do so, consider sitting or crouching down in order to share eye level. It is uncomfortable for someone sitting in a wheelchair to look straight up for a long period.

Acknowledgement is given to the young readers at the New Jersey Library for the Blind and Handicapped, their parents and New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired education counselors for their help with these tips. Also acknowledged is the **Courtesy Rules of Blindness** taken from the National Federation of the Blind pamphlet *Do You Know A Blind Person?*

Section 2: Serving Children with Special Needs
(Deaf and Hard-of Hearing)

A Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Coordinator is on staff at the New Jersey Library for the Blind and Handicapped (NJLBH) and is in charge of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Program (DHHAP) at the library. She provides services and equipment to children, teens and other individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Her name is Christine Lam, and she can be reached at 609-530-3957.

The coordinator works in various ways with 11 regional resource-center libraries, located in the Ocean County Library, Piscataway Public Library, Gloucester County Library, Monmouth County Library, Montclair Public Library, Atlantic County Library, Burlington County Library, Newark Public Library, Clifton Public Library, Morris County Library and Hunterdon County Library. These centers provide assistive equipment for loan to local libraries in the county that may be borrowed for a time period specified by each center. There is no fee unless the equipment is damaged. Equipment includes assistive listening devices, TTYs, infrared or FM systems and many books and videos relating to DHHAP services and programming. At each resource center, a staff person knowledgeable about deaf and hard-of-hearing issues is available for consultation.

Christine Lam supports the interlibrary loan of materials that include videotapes and assistive equipment. The videos include everything from fairy tales to cartoons to child-oriented movies such as *Mr. Holland's Opus* and *Jumanji* that introduce elementary American Sign Language (ASL). There are videos and books that explain legal rights under the Americans with Disabilities law. Instructional videos on learning ASL also are part of the collection. Materials are loaned free for one month; some local libraries may collect fees for late return. The extensive collection of assistive equipment, which also is available for loan, features FM systems, both personal and large-room, infrared systems for small and large rooms, door-knocker signalers, alarm clocks, TTY's, phone-amplification pieces that fit into a regular hearing phone, a pocket talker and phone-ringer signalers. Much is available, and the coordinator will work with individuals to obtain the necessary and appropriate equipment to meet their needs.

Copies of lists of ASL Lessons with a Focus on Infants and Toddlers, Issues

of Interest to Parents of Young Children, ASL Lessons, Songs, Programs & Stories for Children are available by calling Christine Lam.

In conjunction with the Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH) and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Program at the New Jersey Library for the Blind and Handicapped, the coordinator was involved with a 2002 summer reading club literacy project to encourage libraries to be more accessible and friendly for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Parents and children are encouraged to call Christine Lam to request interpreting services, to host interpreted storytimes and special events and even to invite a deaf storyteller to present at their library. (DDHH can assist librarians with a list of names). The division will pay the expenses for the interpreters, real-time captioning or assistive-listening devices, and even the storyteller. This literacy project is a wonderful way to mainstream deaf and hard-of-hearing children into your existing summer reading club programs at *no* cost to your library. The DDHH and the DHHAP are ready and willing to work with local libraries to promote summer reading with lots of good ideas for possible events, and they will advertise accessible events. The 2002 Summer Reading Club Project ended in September, but with public demand the project may be re-instated for 2003 and beyond.

Tips for Serving Children and Teens Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

1. Get the deaf person's attention before speaking. A light touch on the arm, a wave or other visual signal will help.
2. Look directly at the deaf child/teen when signing/speaking even when an interpreter is present.
3. Maintain eye contact.
4. Make sure lighting makes your face and hands clearly visible.
5. Speak normally and clearly without shouting, don't exaggerate or overemphasize your speech.
6. Use natural gestures and facial expressions to supplement your communication.
7. Keep your hands away from your face and mouth while speaking.
8. If you have problems being understood, try rephrasing a thought using different words. Writing is also a good way to clarify.
9. Make sure the deaf or hard-of-hearing child is placed in the front at a storytime program so that he/she can lip read or, if the program is interpreted, see the interpreter.
10. Use books with lots of colorful illustrations to encourage participation by the deaf or hard-of-hearing child.
11. Use books where the group can learn some American Sign Language signs so children will be able to communicate after the storytime with the deaf or hard-of-hearing child.
12. Use normal speed unless you are asked to slow down.
12. Use a normal tone unless you are asked to raise your voice. Shouting will be of no help. If you are having trouble understanding a deaf person's voice, feel free to ask him or her to repeat. If that doesn't work, then use paper and pen. Communicating is your goal.
13. If you know any sign language, try to use it. If the deaf child cannot understand, he or she will let you know. Your attempts, however, will be appreciated and supported.
14. If a deaf child/teen is with an interpreter, speak directly to the deaf child, not to the interpreter.
15. When talking to a deaf child/teen, try not to stand in front of a light

source like a window because your face would be silhouetted in the light, and it would be hard for the deaf child/teen to see your face.

17. Do not use the term hearing-impaired.

Acknowledgement is given to the Rochester Institute of Technology for information found in its pamphlet *Let's Communicate: Basic Signs and Tips for Communicating with Deaf People*. Information also is provided by the Disabled Students Unlimited Club from the Regional Rehabilitation Research Institute on Attitudinal Legal and Leisure Barriers.