

## **Educational Accommodations to Consider for Children, Teens, and College Students with Usher Syndrome<sup>1</sup>**

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The tips and strategies listed below are intended to give you ideas to consider for an individual student. A Learning Media Assessment and other specialized assessments can determine accommodations that might be beneficial for an individual student. Always involve the student in discussing what he or she thinks would be helpful and acceptable.

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### **General Considerations at School**

- Assign buddies so the student with Usher syndrome has someone to serve as a guide (e.g., for informal situations or class discussion, not as an “aide”).
- Plan and practice response to emergency situations, evacuation drills.
- Allow the student time to visit and orient to new buildings before entering school there.
- Consider advance dismissal so the student can navigate hallways before they are too crowded between classes.
- Alert the student to changes in furniture, schedules, and any construction.
- Windows should have adjustable shades.,
- Make it a policy that drawers and doors are always closed, never left half open (so the student won't run into the door).
- Consider offering a classroom or school-wide program to educate other students about Usher syndrome.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from several sources; see References at end of this handout.

## **General Tips for the Family Re: School**

- Maintain close ties with school staff to support any new skills being developed (e.g., use of low vision aids, white cane, Braille literacy).
- Ask school staff and adult services agencies to identify other parents of children who have Usher syndrome to ask questions, compare progress, discuss concerns, and obtain needed information.
- Ask to meet adults who have Usher syndrome to get ideas for what helped them function in various school settings, as well as for general information and support.

## **General Tips for the Teacher**

- Reduce classroom obstacles: De-clutter the classroom and provide clear pathways. Alert the student to any changes in furniture location.
- Provide at least one area for instruction with non-cluttered background (e.g., hang a solid cloth over an area of wall).
- Refrain from moving about the classroom while speaking/teaching.
- Do not stand in front of bright windows. Windows should be behind students to permit them to see you. In some cases the student should sit at a right angle to the windows.
- Teach the students to state their name before speaking.
- Say the name of each child who is speaking during class to permit successful conversation tracking the child with limited visual fields.
- Wear solid-colored clothing without patterns—dark if light skinned, and light if dark skinned, but not white—even if your student does not use sign language. (Busy patterns cause some people with Usher syndrome to become dizzy.) You might buy a smock to wear in the classroom when working with the student.
- Adapt lighting for student's individual needs. The setting needs to be "light enough" without being too bright. For example, fluorescent lighting might provide sufficient lighting for one student while being painfully bright and create problems with glare for another. Use full-spectrum lighting whenever possible.

- Allow the student more time to complete work and tasks. Give them time to examine charts, visual items up close. Students may need “time and a half” to complete the same work as their peers. They may move more slowly and cautiously; allow them the time needed to navigate safely.
- After the initial diagnosis, watch for emotional changes in the student and provide appropriate supports.

## **Class Work in Groups**

- Recommend horseshoe shaped seating arrangement.
- Ask other students to raise hands, identify themselves before speaking.
- The group facilitator or teacher should assist the student by directing attention to the next person to speak/sign.
- See if the student wishes to have another student take notes, or get copies of the teacher’s class notes, to allow the student to focus on the discussion and minimize missed information.
- Allow extra time for group discussions and activities with the student who has Usher syndrome, to insure full participation.
- Use an interpreter (oral or sign) so the student can focus attention on one person who will relay all of the visual and spoken content.

## **Make Sign Communication Accessible**

- Reduce signing space. Ask the student to define his or her visual field; it will vary depending on distance, lighting, and individual vision needs.
- Wear darker/lighter solid-colored clothing (depending on skin color).
- Reduce unnecessary movement while teaching.
- Repeat comments by other students.
- Ensure adequate lighting.
- Remove sources of background distraction and glare. Use a solid-colored backdrop behind the interpreter/signer.
- Employ a “copy signer” in a busy classroom with signing students.
- Employ tracking and/or tactile techniques when needed.

## **Enhance Residual Hearing**

- Allow the student to sit where hearing is enhanced while meeting vision-related needs as well.
- Assess the environment both inside the room and outside that might interfere with optimal listening. Reduce background noise to the extent possible (e.g., replace noisy heaters, provide quieter space for individual work, don't allow lawn mowing during critical classroom time).
- Make sure assistive technology for hearing is working properly (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants), and consider additional assistive technology that works for the student (e.g., personal FM system, classroom system such as RedCat).

## **Make Printed Materials Accessible**

- Use non-glare paper.
- Provide clear copies (laser print quality).
- Enlarge when needed. Some students find a larger font size (e.g., 18- or 24-point) helpful.
- Try a yellow transparency over pages to increase contrast for reading.
- Employ closed-circuit television (CCTV).
- Use dark ink (never red) when writing on papers.
- Allow student to write answers instead of using computer score sheets.
- Use tactile enhancements.

## **Make Black/Whiteboards Accessible**

- Describe what you are writing.
- Use black markers on white boards (avoid colors).
- Use yellow or white chalk on clean blackboards (avoid colors); letters should be 3-4" in height (check with student).
- Use combined upper- and lowercase letters (not all capital letters).
- Give student hard copies ahead of time.
- Stay close to the images on the board.

## **Make Projected Materials Accessible**

- Make materials available for student to review a second time.
- Adjust classroom lighting so student can still see you during projection.
- Enlarge images.
- Use yellow transparencies with overheads to increase contrast.
- Provide student with hard copies to follow.
- Use an individual monitor with a splitter in the classroom.
- Print materials for use with projector on yellow paper.

## **Make Computers Accessible**

- Provide student with cursor locator or enlarged mouse (use customizing options on computer and/or adaptive software).
- Adjust monitor brightness and color for best contrast.
- Use larger font size and/or enlarging software.
- Apply keycap enlargers when needed.
- Tape a yellow transparency over the screen to decrease glare and increase contrast.

## **Other Accommodations Include:**

**Vision Services:** Provided by a certified Teacher of the Blind/ Visually Impaired and certified Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructor. A Learning Media Assessment will help determine appropriate learning media and strategies, including the need for enlarged print and/or Braille.

**Orientation & Mobility (O&M):** Document the assessment and support needs for the student to travel independently. Explore the use of sighted guide, self-protective techniques and trailing skills, cane travel, and land marking skills and techniques.

**CCTV** (closed circuit television): For reading books and helping with enlarging prints on the computer.

**Notetaking Services:** Can allow the student to concentrate on following the teacher's instruction and/or interpreting.

## References

(1) ASHA Website (“Understanding Usher Syndrome: Appendix: Intervention Strategies,” downloaded 5/10/10 from:

<http://www.asha.org/aud/articles/UsherSyndrome.htm>

Section titled: “At School” (Author: Josara Wallber, AuD, CCC-A, Idaho State University, walljosa@isu.edu)

(2) “Strategies and Tips for Working with College-Age Students Who Have Usher Syndrome” (downloaded 5/10/10 from:

<http://www.netac.rit.edu/publication/tipsheet/ushers1.html>

(3) Usher Syndrome Blog (The Experiences of Molly Watt and Her Mum) (downloaded 5/10/10)

<http://ushersyndromeblog.blogspot.com/2010/05/experiences-of-molly-watt-and-her-mum.html>

(4) Fact Sheet: Tips for Students With Usher Syndrome (by Juli Baumgarner, Pennsylvania Deafblind Project, published in Fact Sheets by Colorado Services to Children with Deafblindness, January 2002).

(5) Jordan, Beth (2000). Functional Implications and Environmental Modifications with Students who have Usher Syndrome. Helen Keller National Center.