



Touch Opportunities for Learners who are DeafBlind

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June 15, 2023

Agenda

- About Orion & Family
- Connection Considerations
- Going Tactile
- Touch for Communication + Information
- Active Touch = Active Attention
- Moving Within the Home
- Tips for Creating Opportunities





My son, Orion

- Born July 2010
- DeafBlind: Profoundly deaf, does not have usable vision.
- Unconventional/emerging communicator
 - Controls other people's hands to make requests.
 - Hands objects to you for help with it or to request more of it.
 - Object symbols, objects and motion.
- With Orion, our family uses touch for communication, information, prompts, **hand-under-hand** and some Protactile.
- Orion benefits from support from another person when walking short distances.



First Post ABOUT Orion doings:
<http://hexwit.blogspot.com/2010/10/orions-cute-little-accomplishments.html>

Our Family's Value of Touch

- We knew DeafBlind people before Orion
 - This was incredibly helpful for us as new parents of a DeafBlind child
- Our family does not rely on sound
- This led us to consider Orion's next primary sense that was working: Touch
- This habit... this lifestyle did not happen overnight. It is also still developing!



Orion's Communication Preferences

- 2018 version

COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

WAYS THAT WORK FOR SUPPORTING
THE CHILD'S COMMUNICATION

WAYS THAT ARE NOT HELPFUL
FOR THE CHILD'S COMMUNICATION

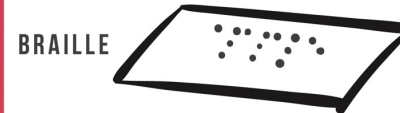
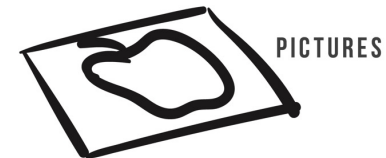
TEDDY,
AS OF
2/28/18



TAKING A MOMENT TO
RECOGNIZE HIS "TOPIC":
WHAT HE IS CURRENTLY DOING

GIVE HIM TIME TO FEEL,
THINK AND RESPOND

HW
2018
HEATHER WITHROW



TACTILE SYMBOLS



Bloopers

- We would not have arrived to where we are... without making mistakes.
- We should encourage a culture of humans learning from things we didn't plan, fumbling and delightful discoveries.
- I'm still practicing and learning from kids and adults alike!



Touch Considerations

- Preview with your student/family before you begin, as appropriate
- Meet your child/student where they are
- Update/clarify as needed
- What has been their experience with touch?
 - Medical experiences/physical trauma
 - Startle/surprise
 - Gentle/casual “everyday” touch
- Medical diagnoses

Touch Considerations

- Comfort level/boundaries: It varies between individuals
- School/Program policies
- Reflection on visiting aj granda at her home: Staying in touch was not startling.
- Positive touch experiences need to outweigh negative touch.

Going Tactile

- As a Deaf O&M student wearing blindfolds during cane class sessions: “Hurry, I need Protactile!”
- A person’s back has been used for tactually drawing maps for O&M purposes (Bozeman & McCulley, 2010).
 - Protactile uses for this method, mapping, too, on backs as well as legs, arms, and hands.
 - Used for room familiarization and routes.
 - Note: Point of reference/home base should begin from the perspective of the person receiving tactile information.
 - Example: Here to there = lower to upper back; wrist to fingers.

Bozeman, L. & McCulley, R. (2010) Improving orientation for students with vision loss. In W. Wiener, R. Welsh, & B. Blanch (Eds.), Foundations of orientation and mobility (Vol. 2). New York, NY: AFB Press.

Granda, a & Nuccio, J. (n.d.) Protactile Principles. <https://www.tactilecommunications.org/ProTactilePrinciples>

Going Tactile

- Basic tactile information
 - Left, right (turn)
 - Straight ahead
 - Stop
 - Go
 - Yes, no
 - Laughing On You (LOY)
- Changing Sides
- Increase cane arc width
- Tactile List

Tactile List on the Fingers

Great for “Now & Then”

September 2021

Touch for Communication + Information

- Direct Contact
- Indirect Contact (Via Environment)

Touch for Communication + Information

- **Direct Contact**
 - Tactile ASL
 - Protactile (Est. 2007)
 - Prompt/Attention/Greeting
 - Invitations to Join
 - Observation of Activities
 - Just Passing By
 - Is Tip-Toeing a Good Idea?
 - Playing Games
 - Tactile Tickle Monster

Touch for Communication + Information

- **Indirect Contact (Via Environment)**
 - **Approach** for Prompt/Attention/Greeting
 - Movement (Vehicle, stroller, wagon, breeze/wind, etc.)
 - White cane, adaptive mobility device (AMD), stirring spoon
 - Scents, sounds (Pleasant/Unpleasant)
 - Home/building vibrations
 - Doors, furniture moving, kids running, clog-dancing
- If it's unclear, it at least grabs attention that something is happening.
 - Tip: Go to or bring the source so the child can explore, make connections

Proximity of Your Presence

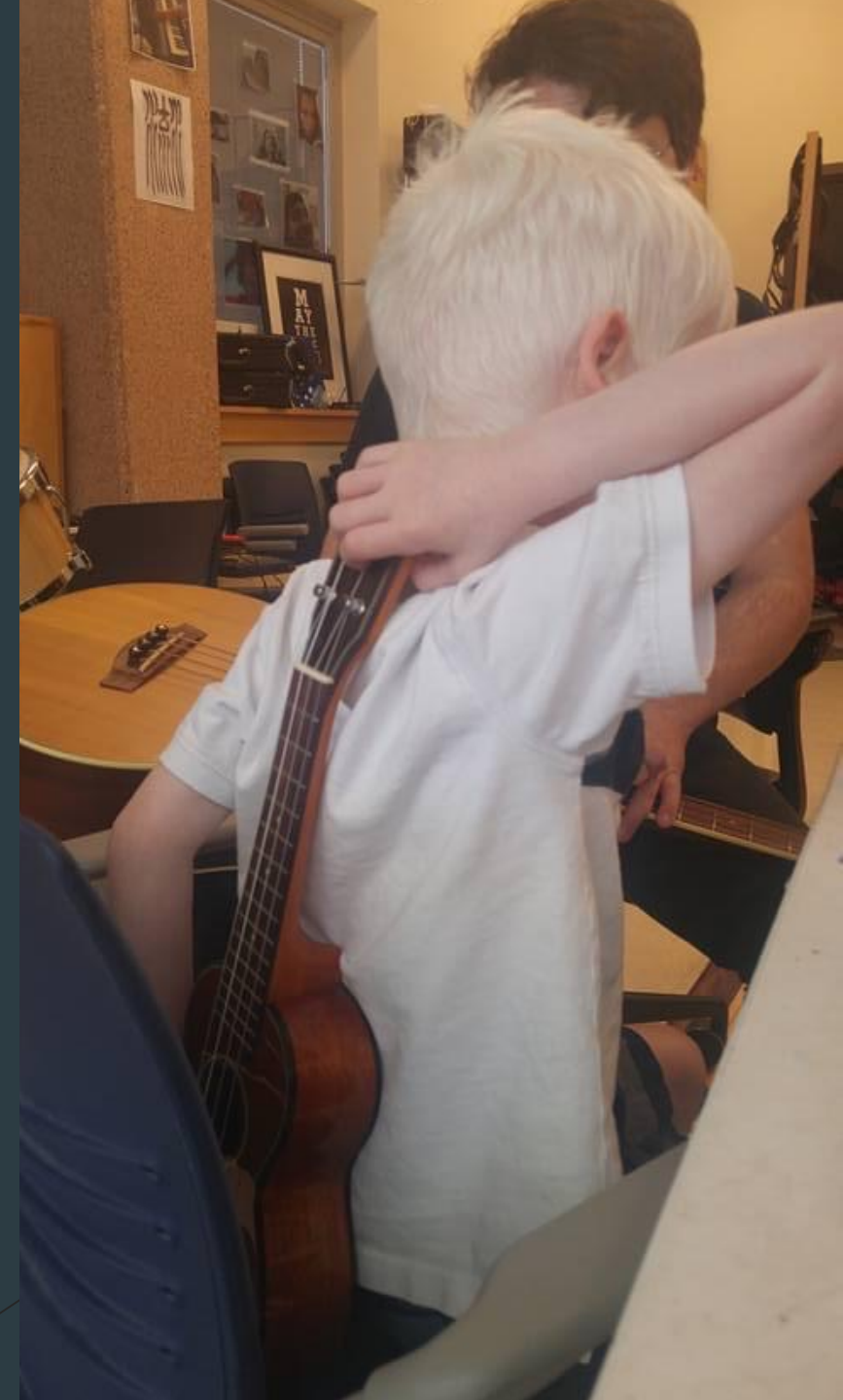
- Proximal to distal tactile feedback. (Example: arriving, leaving, changing locations/sides)
 - Proximal: Toward the center of the body, close.
 - Distal: Away from the center of the body, distant.
- Direct to indirect contact; vice versa.
- The same can be done when you are relocating objects (toys, sippy cup)



Active Touch= Active Attention

- Jude Nicholas: Tactile Working Memory Scale (2019); Active Touch (2010).
 - Attention, perception and working memory while the hands are exploring the object rather than object placed on hand.
 - Consider the same for the body and...
 - the spatial relationships between objects, the body and where on the body. (*Calendar box, partitioned plate, toy locations.*)
- Orientation and mobility:
 - Systematic search patterns & familiarization
- Active touch: Object familiarization through systematic exploration, thanks to Jude Nicholas + team's work on Tactile Working Memory Scale. (Nicholas, et al., 2019, p. 25)

Active Touch



October 11, 2017

A Little, Yet Big Orion Moment

A Boy,
His Drink
and a Straw

May 2018

Emotions Through Touch

- Your calmness, excitement, frustration can be felt through touch. Speed, trembling, sweaty hands.
- Consider calming touch to comfort, as well as happy/rhythmic/playful touch as “Pep Touch” (Pep Talk) for getting ready to do something.

Meaningful Responses Via Touch

- Responding to a child-initiated action confirms/informs them that their action makes a difference in their environment.
 - Big brother responded to Orion's gesture.
- If unsure, touch back and stay present/available.
- What is their topic? Observe what your child is doing as you approach and make your presence known. *(Chris Montgomery & Deanna Peterson, based on Interaction led by Bernadette van den Tillaart)*
- When you initiate or respond to your child, wait and see what happens.



Moving Within the Home

- Travels to functional destinations to communicate/get what he wants.
 - Kitchen to eat/drink
 - Bathtub & front yard (kiddie pool) for enjoying time in water
 - Bed for relaxation and play
- Persistence: if he hasn't found what he wanted, he'll keep on going. (Note: The same is true with food!)



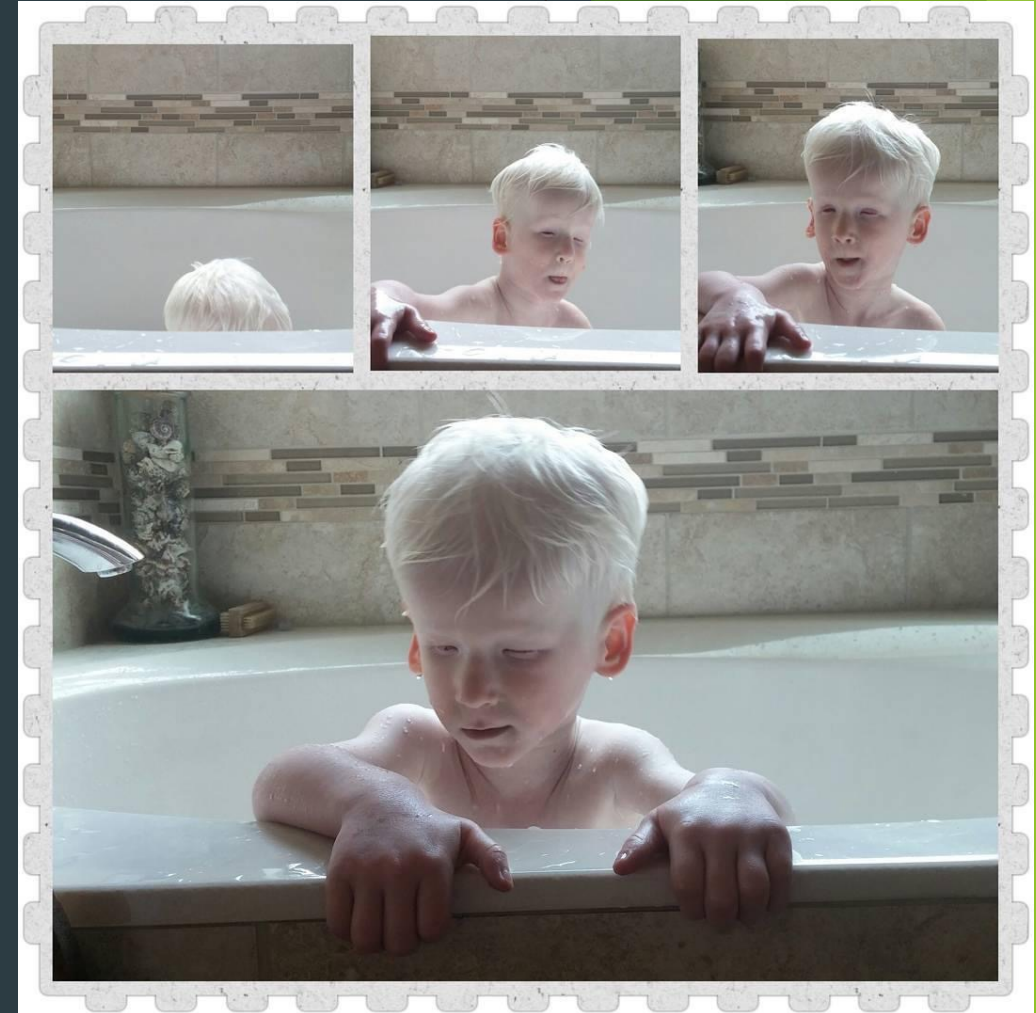
Creating Opportunities

- Recognize your child's likes and dislikes.
- Allow your child to take the lead.
- Encourage your child to take the lead (If not taking the lead)
- Be accessible, make them curious about what's happening nearby.
 - Use your accessible body movements and/or create vibrations nearby (pound, tap, stomp, shake) for them to notice, reach and explore.
 - If they use hearing, let the sounds fly.



Creating Opportunities

- Use your hand/body to model actions you want your child to learn.
 - Examples: Searching, exploring, jumping on the trampoline, brushing teeth, etc.
- Support movement and physical transitioning as needed.
- For movement/transitioning questions, consult with your child/student's:
 - physical therapist,
 - occupational therapist,
 - orientation and mobility specialist.





Creating Opportunities



**Can we say "Foot-
Under-Foot"?**

October 2016

Creating Opportunities

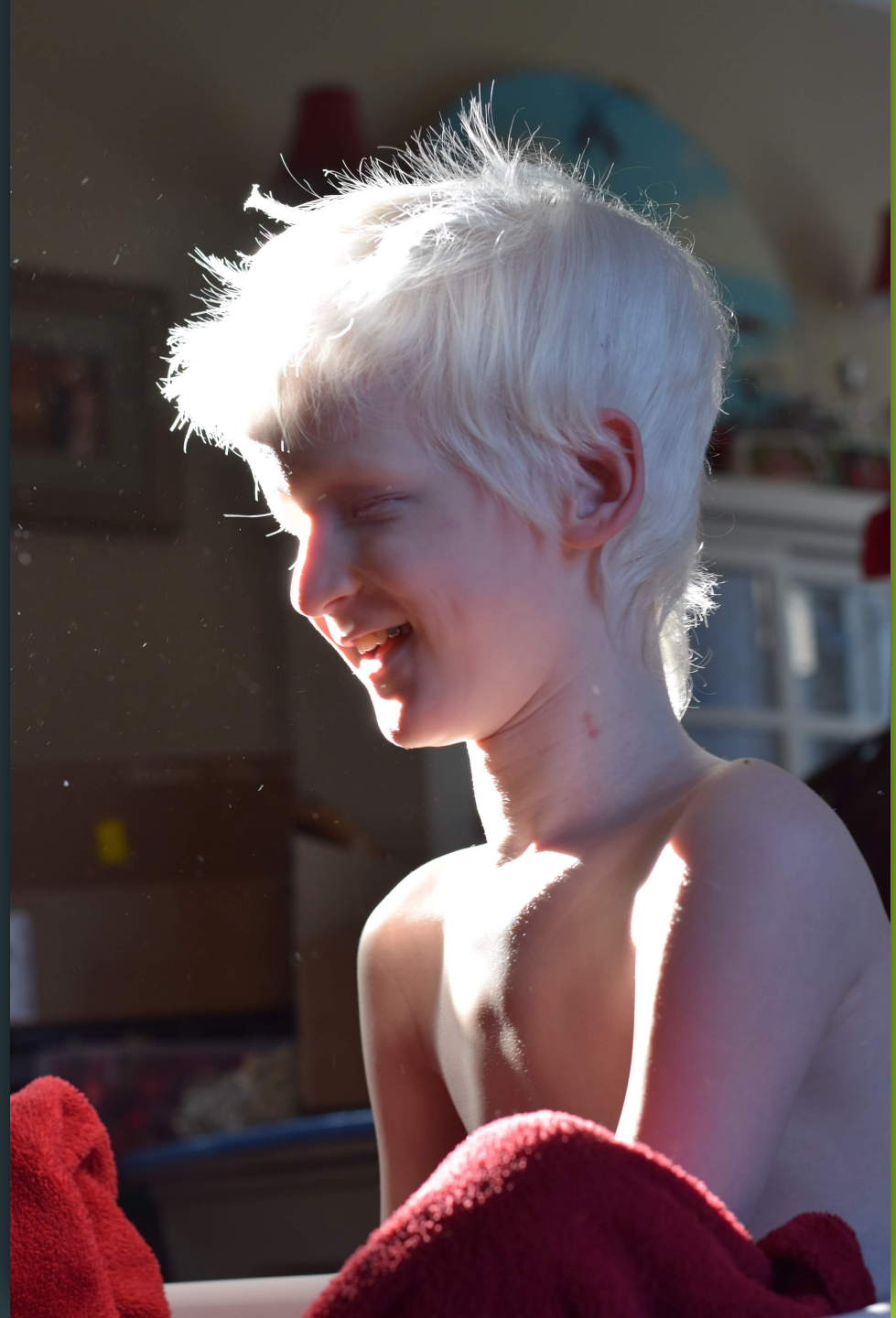
- Allow mistakes; increase/decrease support as needed.
 - If your child misses a landmark and becomes confused, monitor his frustration level and intervene, such as showing a clue, if needed.
 - They're opportunities for discoveries.
- Keep “wait time” in mind, always, as you give support.
- Move together and interact at a relaxed pace.
- Your... pausing... while walking/moving can be a prompt to check surroundings.
- Consider the demand on the child (activity, health, stress, positioning, new experiences, ambiguity).
- *Tip: Consider filming your interaction from beginning to end and then review.*



A Proud Orion Moment- Fixing his shirt! May 2014 (Almost 4 years old)

The moments add up!

- Enjoy your time together.
 - Even if it's a small, twinkling victory—enjoy it together. These moments, planned or not planned, will add up to form a constellation of accomplishments!
- “Moments of Joy” ~Dr. Jan van Dijk



Thank You!

A Mom's Musings: Orion The Kid

- Blog (since 2010!)

www.OrionTheKid.com

- Facebook

www.facebook.com/O.T.Withrow

- YouTube

www.YouTube.com/@HeatherWithrow

E-mail: heather@heatherwithrow.com



Resources

- Tactile Communications (n.d.). *Home*. <https://www.tactilecommunications.org>
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