

B E S T P R A C T I C E S

hawai'i & pacific **DEAF-BLIND** *project*

Pro-Tactile: Supporting Communication with Deaf-blind People

Pro-Tactile is the socio-cultural philosophy currently shaping Deaf-blind practices in the areas of language, interpersonal communication and politics, according to two Pro-Tactile leaders in the Deaf-blind community--AJ Granda and Jelica Nuccio. The information from this fact sheet is focused on the language and interpersonal aspects of Pro-Tactile practices.

THE DEAF-BLIND WAY

Touch is a big part of Deaf-blind culture/community and extremely important for Deaf-blind individuals. Deaf-blind individuals can be called **tactile** people, in a similar way to how Deaf individuals are called **visual** people, and how Blind individuals are called **auditory** people.

There are many ways touch supports the lives of people who are Deaf-blind, including orientation of where they are, as a form of language, to connect with the environment and others, and for pleasure.

Pro-Tactile communication strategies were created by Deaf-blind people in order to provide important information that has been missing in other forms of tactile communication.

ENHANCING COMMUNICATION THE PRO-TACTILE WAY

First, let's talk about a communication strategies called **back-channeling** that are commonly used by hearing and deaf people when communicating with each other. Back-channeling shows that you are paying attention and listening to the speaker/signer, reacting and/or agreeing/disagreeing with the other person. When we are listening to or watching a conversation, we naturally give feedback either as a verbal or visual response (back-channeling) to the speaker/signer. When we are responding to communication in sign language, Back-channeling might be a head nod, a facial expression, or a specific sign like "oh-I-see". When we are responding to a speaker in spoken English, we might nod our head or say things like really?, wow! or oh-no! to show our response.

Without back-channeling, Deaf-blind people can feel like they are talking/signing and nobody is there, nobody is paying attention. However, that natural feedback or reaction is important for everyone (including Deaf-blind people) when having an interactive conversation. Back-channeling is used to help Deaf-blind people know how people are reacting to what they are saying in order to get a full picture of what being communicated around



It's a way to stay 100% connected to the person you are talking to by providing a constant stream of feedback using touch.

Pro-tactile Back-Channeling is:

- * Showing feelings, expressions, and cues that we see on people's faces through touch on the hands, legs, or back of the Deaf-blind person. For example, tapping the leg to show understanding.
- * Using touch to show emotion and sharing feelings that are being expressed.
- * Genuine expressions that do not follow rules but come from one's ability to emotionally connect during communication.

Information adapted from:

Personal communication with AJ Granada

Granada, AJ and Nucco, Jelica (2013). VLOGs from *Pro-Tactile Way* retrieved from <http://www.protactile.org/pt-vlog---1.html>



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