

THE BENEFITS OF EARLY TOUCH: APPLYING PROTACTILE LANGUAGE PRINCIPLES WITH INFANTS & TODDLERS WITH DUAL SENSORY LOSS



2026 EARLY HEARING DETECTION & INTERVENTION CONFERENCE

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How do infants & toddlers generally gather information from their environment?

Vision

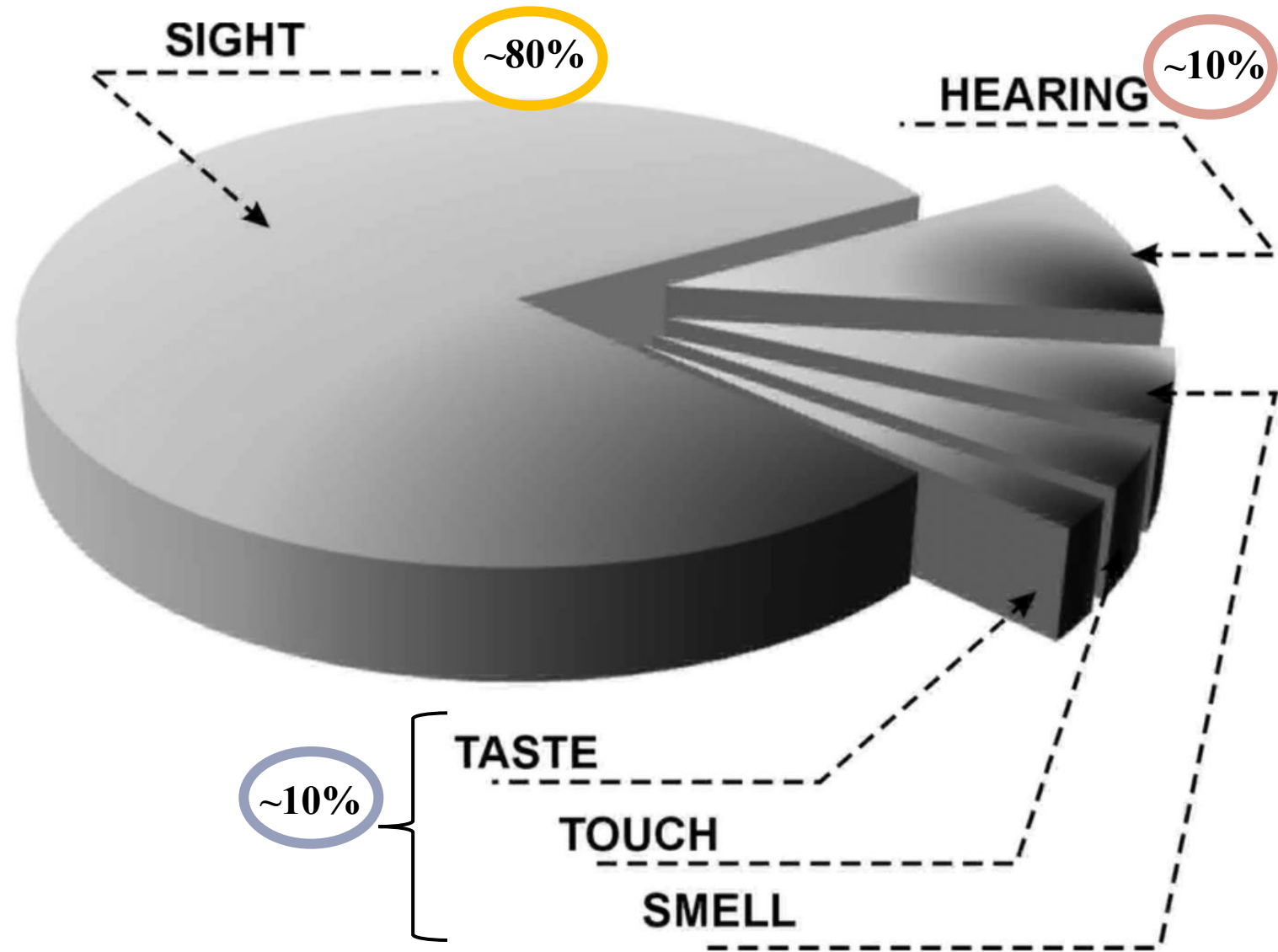


Hearing



HOW WE LEARN

- The majority of our learning is through our **vision**
- The next highest sense for learning is **hearing**
- What happens when both senses are **compromised?**

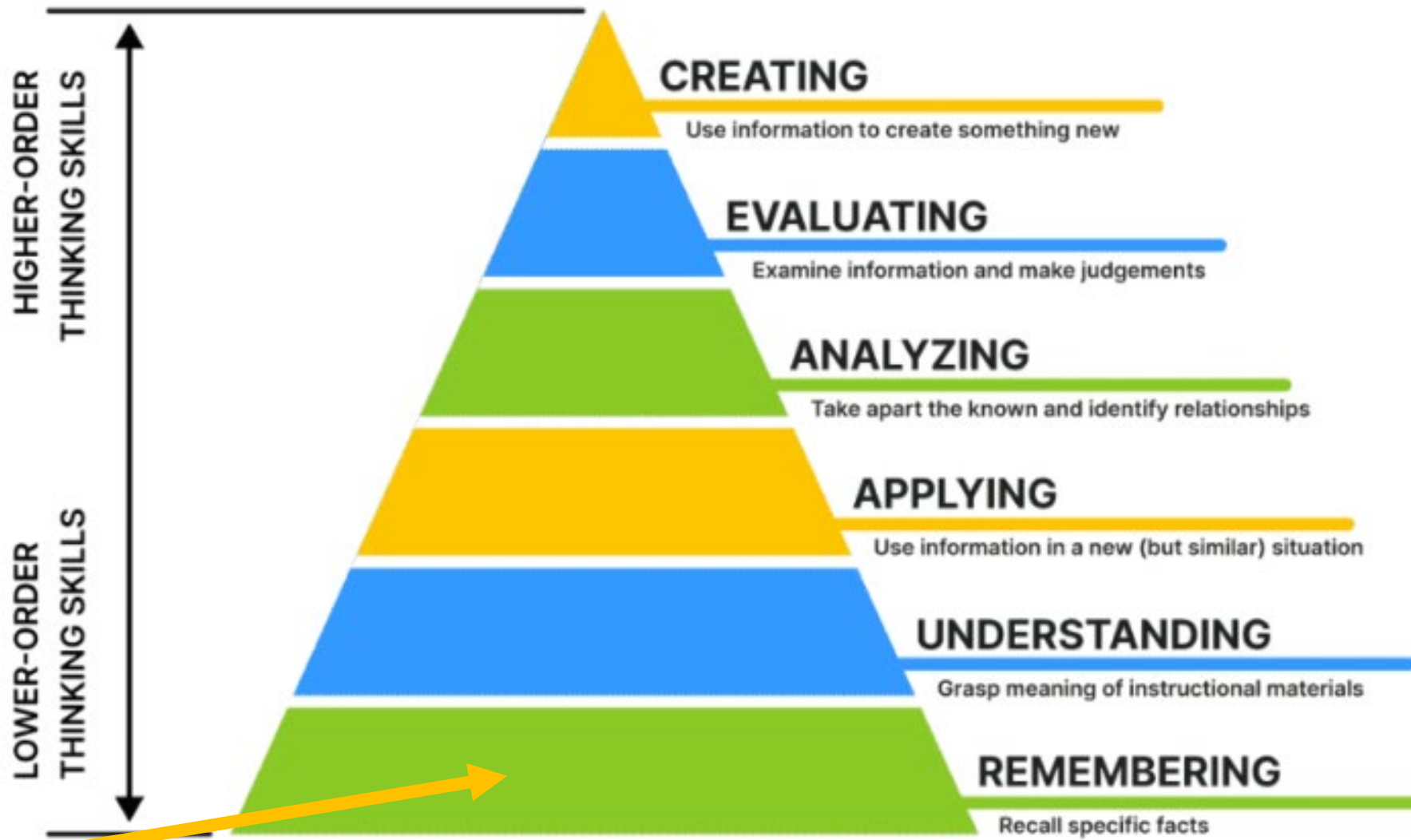


The Percentage schema input form of information acquired by the human senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste.

Why is this important to DeafBlind learners?

Knowledge/
Information
Gathering

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY - COGNITIVE DOMIAN (2001)



Bloom's Taxonomy underwent a significant evolution from its original version in 1950 to the revised version in 2001. <https://www.idreameducation.org/blog/blooms-taxonomy-cognitive-learning-levels/>

DEAFBLINDNESS
IS A DISABILITY
OF ACCESS AND
INFORMATION
GATHERING

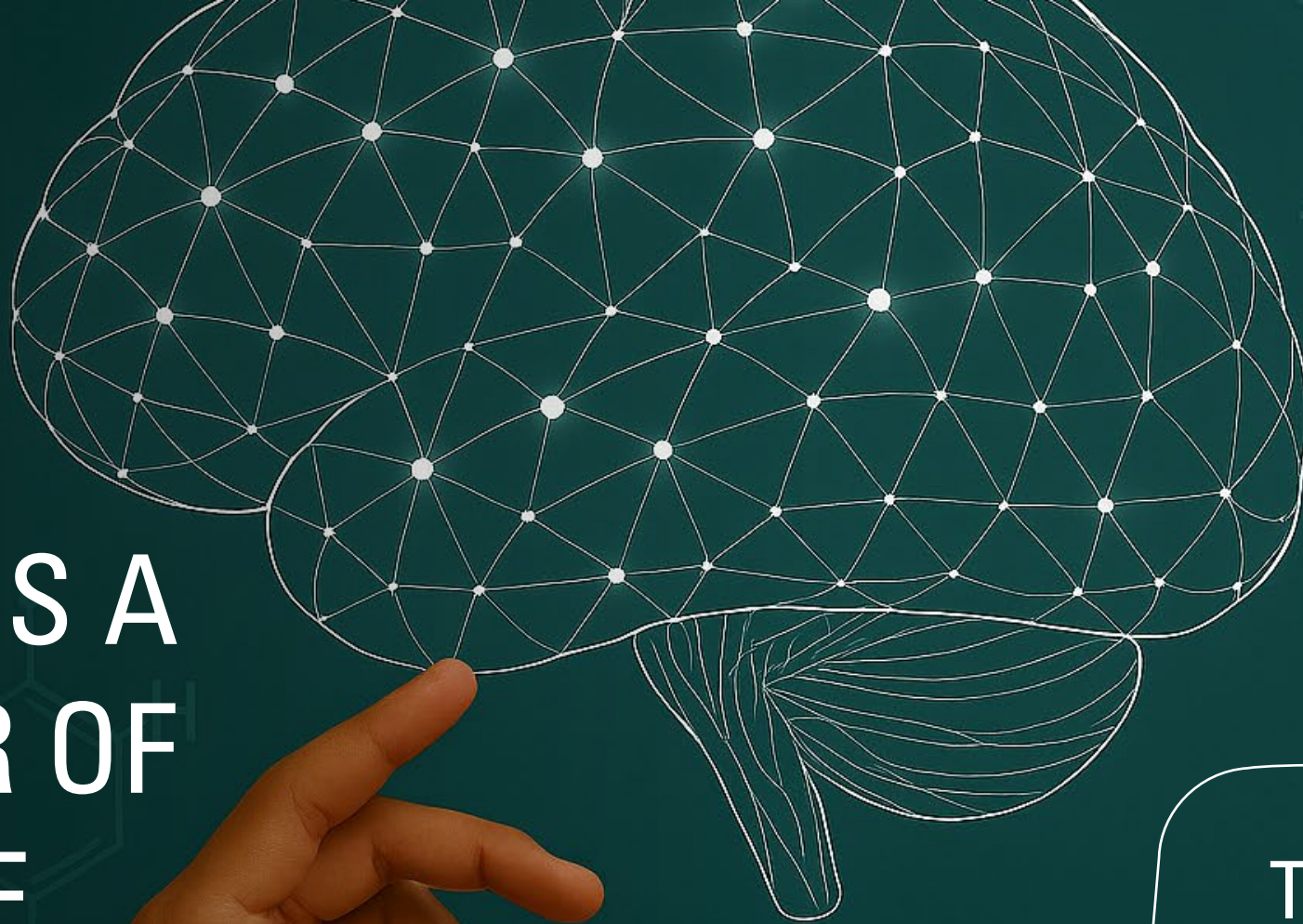




Why Touch Is Important

- All humans experience the sense of touch
- Very rare cases of 'touch blindness' or damage to the central nervous system, traumatic brain injury, rare degenerative diseases

TOUCH IS A MATTER OF SCIENCE



There are **two** pathways in the brain for processing touch.

DISCRIMINATIVE TOUCH

The *facts* about touch

- vibration
- pressure
- location
- fine texture

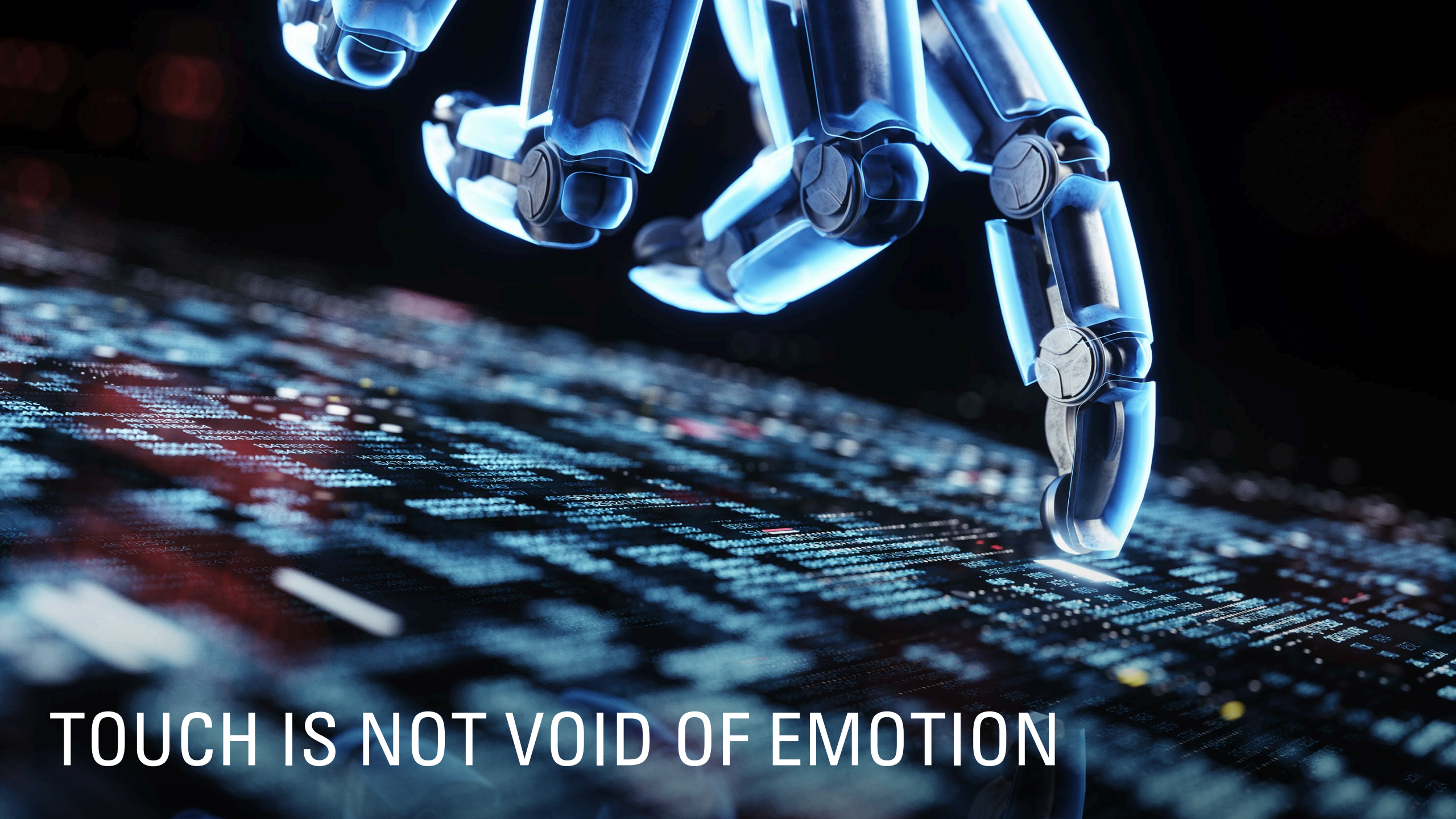


How do we experience discriminative touch?

It's in everything...

- The texture of clothing.
- The smoothness of an apple.
- The chill of a bowl of ice cream.
- The feathers of a parakeet.
- The roughness of sandpaper.
- **The hands of the interpreter/
teacher/family member.**





TOUCH IS NOT VOID OF EMOTION

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL TOUCH

- the *emotional content* of interpersonal touch using different sensors in the skin.



Lived Experience

- Many DeafBlind people have countless experiences of **negative touch**
- This leads to mistrust & what is often referred to as **'tactile defensiveness'**




“CHILDREN WITH
MULTIPLE
DISABILITIES (DUAL
SENSORY LOSS)
LIVE IN A
FRAGMENTED
WORLD, OFTEN FULL
OF STRESS AND
ANXIETY.”

Dr. Jan van Dijk



WHAT IS PROTACTILE LANGUAGE?



Protactile Language was
developed by and for
DeafBlind individuals &
prioritizes **touch** over all other
sensory channels

“In every language,
the basic vocabulary
of everyday life is
drawn from nature and
social relations.”

— Edward Sapir
American linguist and anthropologist (1884–1939)

Protactile
Language is a
perfect example
of this as the
language grew
organically from
within the
community.

“ProTactile Language allows DeafBlind people to give, receive and exchange information through a **tactile** channel, rather than relying on auditory or visual channels to access information and language.”



Protactile Language

- A language separate from TASL with specific principles and practices
- Designed by and for DeafBlind people based solely through touch
- Currently borrows from ASL but evolving into a completely separate language



PROTACTILE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1. Establishing Co-presence**
- 2. Creating a Shared Space/Experience**
- 3. Building Reciprocal Feedback**
- 4. Encouraging Tactile Autonomy**

These principles
mirror best
practices in
DeafBlind
education

Hand-under-
hand

Establishing
Rapport

Child-Guided
Interaction

Coactive
Movement

Shared Tactile
Exploration



**APPLYING THESE
PRINCIPLES TO
DEAFBLIND
LEARNERS**

**– LET'S MEET
MADDIE**

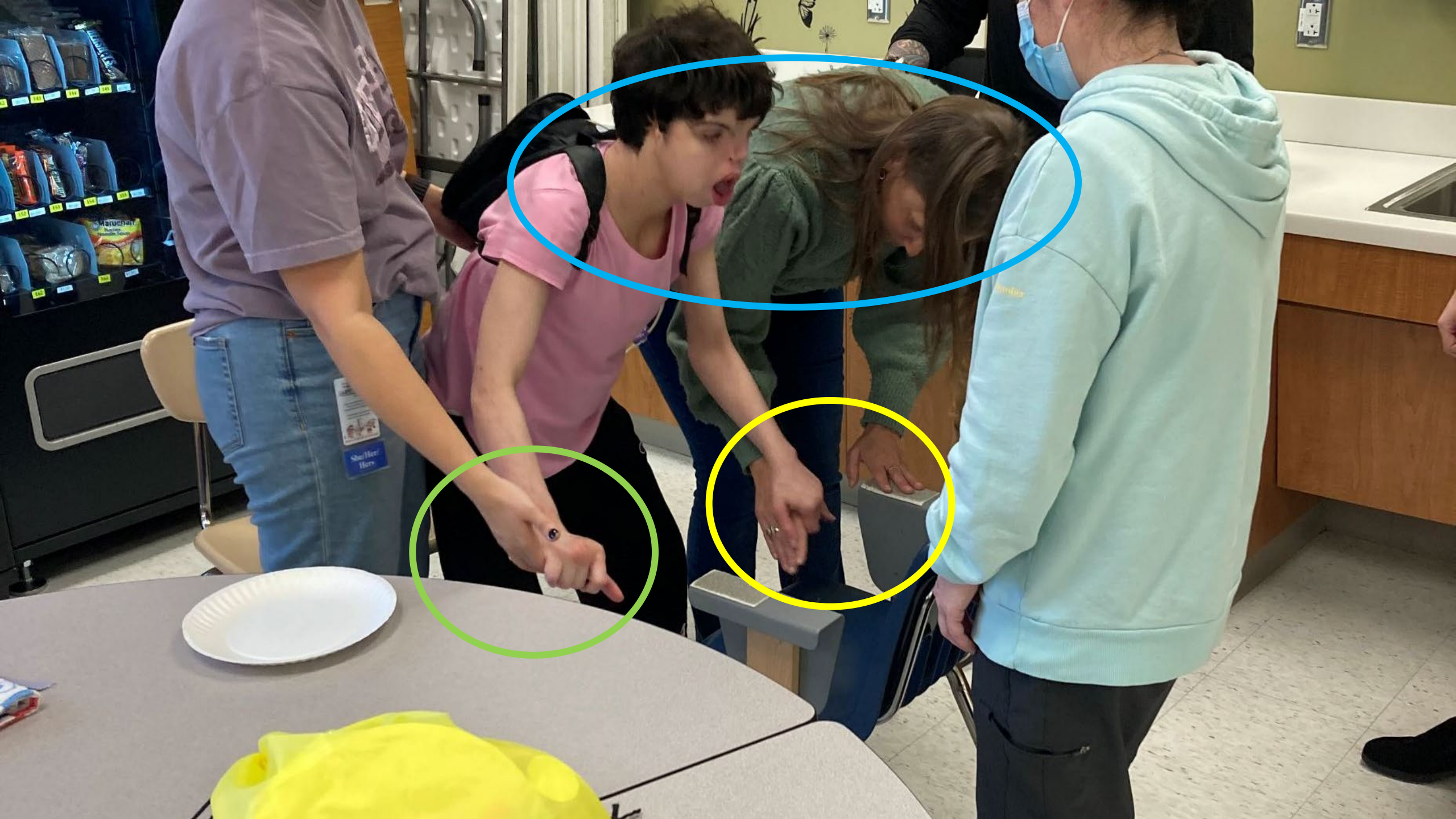


“Speech works on getting her to try tastes of food, whether or not Maddie sits down and will try depending on the day. Here Rho tried to get Maddie to sit down in her chair in the cafeteria.

It went on for 5-10 minutes.

Maddie never sat down but she stood there the entire time, calmly and without getting upset, “listening” to what Rho was telling her through touch. We could tell based on Maddie’s body language that she was taking it all in and trying to make sense of it all.

Ultimately Maddie signed “finished” to tell us she was done with the whole thing but the fact that she was absorbing information from an unfamiliar person without getting upset was very impressive.”





Second Meeting between Maddie & Rho

“I think she recognized her. Both times that Rho arrived, Maddie was on her swing and Rho introduced herself and followed a similar procedure where she kept her hand for Maddie to find it.

Maddie didn't push her away out of her space.

And as you see here, during OT, Rho sat next to her for the entire 45-minute session. Rho sat where the OT usually does and it didn't bother Maddie that Rho was next to her and the OT was in a different position as they went through the whole routine.

When Rho provides information on Maddie's body she stops her extraneous movements and stills herself to 'listen'.”



Protactile Language Interpreting Modules

16 hours of online content

- History of the Protactile Movement
- 7 Principles of Protactile Language
 - Contact Space
 - Reciprocity
 - Protactile Perspective
 - Size & Shape Specifiers (SASS)
 - Exceptions
 - Information Source
 - Tactile Imagery
- Communication Modalities and Accommodations Used by the DeafBlind Community
- Understanding Accessible Technologies
- Co-Presence
- Support Service Providers and Co-Navigators – A Paradigm Shift
- Co-Navigation – Applied Practice
- The Evolution of Protactile Language
- Evolving Principles of Protactile Language
- Protactile Linguistics – Discussing Recent Findings
- Prompt, Adopt, Touch (PAT)
- Protactile Alphabet and Numbering Systems
- Protactile Literature

Protactile
Language
Interpreting
Modules



Thank
you!

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www.nydeafblind.org