

Assistive Technology

WHAT IS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Assistive Technology is any device that can improve physical or mental functioning, alleviate a disorder, improve a person's capacity to learn, or even replace a missing limb. Assistive Technology comes in many different shapes, sizes, and packages. It can be acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customized, or designed specifically for one or more disability types. All Assistive Technology have the ability to be a capacity enhancer for an individual with a disability. For children with disabilities Assistive Technology devices and services can be included in their Individual Education Plans or 504 accommodations. Assistive Technology should be considered in a continuum and runs from least to most restrictive solutions for a student or an individual with a disability.

TYPES OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

There are ten classes of assistive technologies categorized by their main objective:

1. Architectural elements such as adaptations to the home or other premises
2. Sensory elements such as aids for hearing
3. Computers, such as hardware or software
4. Controls including environmental controls
5. Aids for independent living such as personal care items
6. Prostheses and orthoses
7. Aids for personal mobility including wheelchairs
8. Modified furniture
9. Aids for recreation and sports

10. Services such as device selection and training

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

In IDEA, the nation's special education law, Assistive Technology services are defined as **any** service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. Such terms include:

- a. The evaluation of the needs of a child including functional evaluation of the child in the child's customary environment
- b. Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices
- c. Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing devices
- d. Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs
- e. Training or technical assistance for the child or where appropriate the child's family
- f. Training or technical assistance for professionals including educational and rehabilitation staff, or others who provide services to the child to employ or those who are substantially involved in the major life functions of the child.



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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY EXAMPLES

It is impossible to list every Assistive Technology device known but all devices can be categorized into three basic areas including:

1. Low-tech tools. These are tools that don't require electricity to function (highlighters, pencil grips, schedules, calendars, sticky notes, symbols, index cards etc.)
2. Mid-tech tools. Tools in this category use batteries or have some circuitry involved. (Lights, buzzers, vibrating switches, basic environmental control units, portable word processors etc.)
3. High-tech tools. These tools may also use batteries, but they also have some advanced circuitry. (Computers, software, dynamic display communication devices, and electronic portable desktop assistants etc.).

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES EXAMPLES

Assistive Technology devices are tools and they don't do much good if you have the wrong one or you don't use them. Assistive Technology services make the devices practical, understood, and useable. In a school environment a service is used to make the device practical and some examples may include:

- Providing an opportunity for the student to use a communication device
- Brainstorming with other educators about the best way to organize a desk
- Implementing a behavior management system
- Teaching students or other educators how to use a device or software program
- Explaining to a parent the differences between two devices
- Attaching a mount for a switch near a computer workstation
- Adding Velcro to a visual schedule
- Working with a vendor to acquire a device for a student
- Developing a plan for a student's use of a device in different environments.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES

All children with disabilities should be evaluated to determine if Assistive Technology can assist them in their education and life. APEC can help connect families and educators with resources and training on the effective use of Assistive Technology in their child's IEP.

APEC IS HERE TO HELP

APEC provides free training, information, and consultation to families. Visit our training calendar for more information about learning opportunities at www.alabamaparentcenter.com or call our center.

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