

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN IT HELP MY CHILD?

Assistive technology is any piece of equipment that enables children and adults to participate in activities at home, school, work or play. For individuals with disabilities, assistive technology can provide the help they need to live life to its fullest. Assistive technology equipment can range from a simple product to help someone reach an item on a shelf to very complex devices (such as computers that can speak, control household appliances, open doors and access the Internet).

In 1988, a nationwide law (PL 100-407- the Technology for Persons with Disabilities Act), provided the first federally recognized definition of assistive technology. It defined it as: *“Any item, piece of equipment or product system whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, it is any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition or use of an assistive technology device.”*

This legislation was important because it recognized the need for assistive technology and later became the definition used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Both laws provide opportunities for children to participate in their schools and communities to the best of their abilities. Importantly, this definition not only includes the tools and/or technology needed to accomplish this but the critical services that accompany them and ensure their success.

Services considered part of Assistive Technology include:

- Evaluation;
- Purchasing, leasing, or helping with the acquisition of assistive technology devices;
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices;
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices;
- Providing training or technical assistance for an individual with disabilities, their family, and/or the professionals who serve them.

The decision of how AT can help your child best comes from an ongoing dialogue which begins at an early age and continues through adulthood. Remember, just as a person’s needs, interests and abilities change throughout life, so do the assistive technology requirements of the child and their family. For this reason, AT should be viewed as an evolving process designed to enhance and maintain participation in the community. While it’s not a “miracle cure”, assistive technology does have great potential to help children participate. These services, along with the commitment and support of families and caregivers are the foundation for making possibilities come to life.

For more information contact:

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Or search TelAbility’s links for assistive technology and equipment