

Involving Teens and Young Adults in Selecting Assistive Technology



Center on Technology
and Disability

*Assistive and Instructional Technology
Supporting Learners with Disabilities*

As your child becomes a teenager or young adult, they will be making more choices, including about their education. If your son participates in the decision-making process that includes parents, teachers, or the entire Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, he is likely to be more interested in and take ownership of the results. Your daughter's insight and feedback can be vital in finding technology tools and strategies that work for her.

The following tips may help your teen or young adult better understand, advocate for, and use assistive technology.

Start the Discussion in a Positive Way

Teens are often concerned about their disability or learning difference. It's important for you to stay positive and talk about your students' strengths when discussing technology. Acknowledge struggles and let your child know you are proud of the unique successes that she or he has accomplished. Ask for your daughter's thoughts about using technology to help make school easier for her. Assure your son that using assistive technology is giving him a chance to show his knowledge in a way that matches his skills and abilities. If your child is concerned about others seeing him or her use assistive technology, explain that assistive technology often is a part of or looks like the technology used by everyone. For example many smartphones and mobile devices have features such as text-to-speech (TTS), which reads text aloud, or features that enlarge the screen for ease of viewing.

Identify Challenges Technology Can Address

Prioritizing academic or life skills makes it easier to find the most effective technology for your student. For technology to make the most impact, define and address educational challenges your student experiences. Ask your daughter how she wants to improve what is most challenging for her. Ask for specifics. For example, does she have difficulty with generating ideas to write about, organizing thoughts, spelling,



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handwriting, or other tasks? Once you have focused on the areas where she needs improvement, you can think about how technology can help.

Brainstorm Ways Technology Can Help

Technology can make completing a task easier and more enjoyable. After you and your son determine the specific tasks on which to focus, you can consider supports to make a difference. At this point, don't worry about naming a specific technology tool. Instead, think of what features could make a task easier. For example, if your son's visual processing makes it difficult to follow the text of a typical paragraph, you can brainstorm about how to change the text. Would larger fonts help? How about extra spacing? Could changing the color contrast between the text and the page help distinguish individual words and sentences? Today's wide selection of technology options means there are good options available. Once you and your son have a list of helpful features, you can search for specific technology.

Talk with Someone Familiar with Assistive Technology

Finding the right assistive technology is easier if you talk with someone who can match the features you want with specific technology products. These professionals may be able to help.

K-12:

- Assistive technology specialists in your school district
- Occupational therapists (OTs) or speech/language pathologists (SLPs)
- Special Education teachers
- Your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team

Higher Education:

- The college or university's Disability Services office
- Professionals working in study skills service departments



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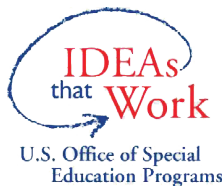


Community:

- Staff of various disability organizations
- States' assistive technology centers. To find an assistive technology center in your state, visit the Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs website at www.ataporg.org
- Health clinics or institutes that specialize in working with individuals who have disabilities

Next Steps

Once you have identified specific technology tools that might benefit your child, you can locate and try them to make sure they're the right fit. The steps to this process are available in the accompanying Getting Started Guide entitled "Getting Started: Exploring Assistive Technology with Your Teen or Young Adult."



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