

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Federal Definitions

Assistive technology - both devices and services - is one of the 17 services defined under Part C and Part B(619) of the IDEA, 2004.

Assistive Technology (AT) Device: (IDEA, 2004, §303.13(b)(1)(i))

“... any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability”.

Exception --The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, including a cochlear implant, or the optimization (e.g. mapping), maintenance, or the replacement of that device.

Assistive Technology (AT) Service: (IDEA, 2004, §303.13(b)(1)(ii))

“... any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.”

- the evaluation of the needs of such child, including a functional evaluation of the child in the child's customary environment;
- purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices by such child;
- 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, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs;
- training or technical assistance for such child, or, where appropriate, the family of such child; and
- training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education and rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of such child.

AT services can be provided by any member of the team. Training in the selection and use of AT with young children can be obtained from many sources. The more complex a device is, the more intensive training is required for knowledge and skills in selecting, adapting, and customizing a particular device.

IDEA indicates AT devices and services must be made available to a child with a disability if required as part of the child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP). Assistive technology must relate to the 0-2 year old child's developmental needs and be necessary to achieve an IFSP outcome. Early Intervention deals only with AT that is directly relevant to the developmental needs of the child and specifically excludes devices and services that are necessary to treat or control a medical or life-sustaining condition.



For preschool children with disabilities, Assistive Technology must relate to the child's education needs and be necessary to achieve an IEP outcome.

Assistive Technology for Young Children

This definition of assistive technology (AT) is intentionally broad as it defines devices and services that support the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities across the lifespan and has traditionally been used to improve education, rehabilitation and employment outcomes. Services provided to infants, toddlers and young children with disabilities are designed to meet their developmental and learning needs and the needs of the family to assist that development. Children develop and learn through active participation in everyday routines and activities that are part of their families' lives. When AT is used to support a child's ability to participate, skills and knowledge are gained that allow a child to eventually progress from dependent infant to independent child.

AT for young children looks very different from AT for older children or adults. Devices that help a young child to sit up, walk, sing, draw, play, enjoy books, take turns with friends, or blow bubbles-- in other words, to "do"— assist and promote the child's development. For this population, AT supports include but are not limited to: off-the-shelf toys and learning materials with easy to press buttons that are stabilized for use, modifications to items already in the child's environment such as a towel roll in a high chair to support sitting, or specialized devices that can be customized for communication or mobility assistance. Given the dynamic nature of early development, AT supports will change as the child's needs and abilities change.

AT includes a range of devices that reflect the abilities, preferences and needs of the developing child and his/her family. Specifically an AT device is selected that:

- addresses the barrier that the disability presents
- helps a child to do what he couldn't do before
- "fits" the context of home and classroom routines and activities
- is developmentally, age, and culturally appropriate, and
- assists in achieving outcomes

AT services are provided to children, families and caregivers to help them select, acquire and use devices that can support a child's ongoing development. Services include teaching IFSP/IEP members and other caregivers how to incorporate AT into multiple routines to maximize the child's active participation and continued development and education. These early intervention/early childhood special education services underscore building a family's ability to identify, advocate, and provide for a child's necessary supports.
