

How Technology Can Help Your Child With a Learning Disability Be More Independent



Center on Technology
and Disability

*Assistive and Instructional Technology
Supporting Learners with Disabilities*



As a parent, you have a vision of your child's future which for many includes living an independent life beyond high school, some form of higher education, and/or meaningful work. Students begin acquiring the skills needed for increased independence when they enter middle school and move on to high school. In high school and beyond many students are expected to manage and complete schoolwork as independently as possible.

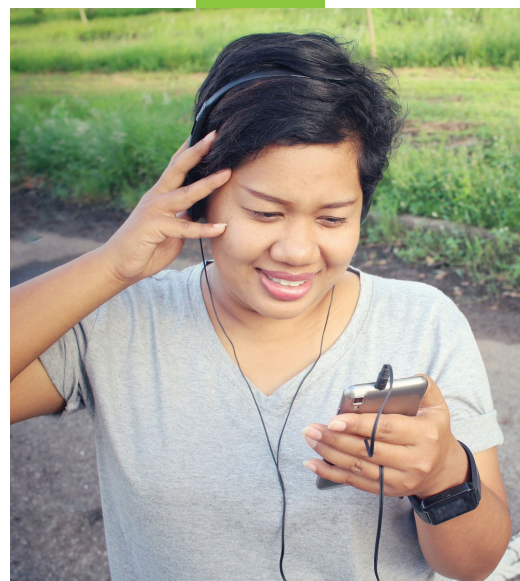
By focusing on your child's independence, you will help him or her make the transition to a postsecondary education or employment setting, where the ability to independently organize and complete work assignments is essential to success. Encouraging your child's independence does not mean abandoning any accommodations your child may receive. In fact, accommodations can be a key part of increasing your child's independence, allowing him or her to focus on the most important skills without being overwhelmed by others. At the same time, it can also be important to modify or remove older accommodations to encourage new skill growth in key areas.

How can assistive technology help with independence?

Assistive technology (AT) is any technology or equipment that helps people with disabilities do something they would not otherwise be able to do. It is exciting that accessible features are included in many different tools and devices and are readily available simply by turning them on. For example, features such as text-to-speech (TTS), where text on a screen can be read aloud or speech-to-text, a feature that allows a student to speak their words and sentences and have them typed, are now standard features in many of today's mobile devices and computers. The right assistive technology can increase your child's independence, helping him or her complete tasks that would otherwise require assistance or take a long time. Below are some common examples of assistive technology for the skills students develop and use on their way to academic independence. This list is a small sample of the many ways that AT can help.



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Managing schoolwork

- Manage schoolwork using an electronic planner instead of a paper planner. Electronic planners can send reminders to students and increase their awareness of what assignments are due soon and need their attention.
- Receive assignments via e-mail so they can be organized electronically and are less likely to be lost. This strategy is often enabled through an accommodation in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Reading and writing

- Use speech-to-text software to translate spoken thoughts into writing.
- Use text-to-speech software or audiobooks to read textbooks and assignments.
- Use word prediction software, which displays a list of words a student may be trying to spell as they type, or use advanced spell check software for spelling support.
- Use graphic organizers, such as mind mapping software, to organize thoughts independently for an assignment.

Focus and time management

- Try software that blocks interferences so that an easily distracted student can work on a computer, tablet, or smart phone without having to be monitored.
- Use a talking clock, which announces the time aloud at set intervals, to help with time awareness while working or taking a test.
- Create a task or 'to do' list to provide structure and direction on how to spend time when studying.

How can I encourage my child's independence?

As a parent, you may find yourself providing your child with a disability with extensive homework assistance so that it doesn't take as long to complete. To help your child transition toward greater independence, you may have to be less of a schoolwork assistant (one who plays a major role in completing assignments, such as writing a student's spoken thoughts for a paper) and more of a supporter (one who provides guidance but lets the



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student take the necessary steps on his or her own). Making this transition is much easier when your child has the right assistive technology and accommodations. Encourage your child to be adventurous in trying out different assistive technology and accommodations until he or she finds what works best.

Discussing the need for assistive technology should be part of every IEP meeting, and your IEP team can often provide helpful ideas about different AT and accommodations. If some technology doesn't work well for your child, let the IEP team know so they can explore other technology with your child. Start the discussion early with your IEP team about your child's academic independence. This will give your child time to develop and expand the skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education or employment. While taking the first steps towards greater independence may be difficult, your child's feeling of accomplishment and new-found independence will make it well worth the effort.

For more information about assistive technology for children and youth with disabilities, please visit:

- Center on Technology and Disability:
www.ctdinstitute.org
- Simon Technology Center:
www.PACER.org/stc



The Center on Technology and Disability is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) under award No. H327F130003 – 13A.