



### iLEARN, iGROW, iPLAY: NEW TECHNOLOGY BENEFITS YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Until six months ago, 5-year-old Leo Foley, who has Down syndrome, communicated primarily through sign language. When his mother, Brenda, couldn't understand a sign, he would become upset and start having tantrums. The situation was frustrating for both Leo and the entire family, Brenda says.

"We just could not always figure out what he wanted," she says. "Sign language was working, but we didn't always know the signs that he knew. One night he was really, really upset, and we just could not figure out what to do."

That's when she decided to purchase Leo an iPad to help him communicate. Now, when Leo needs or wants something, he uses his iPad, customized with pictures and phrases such as "I'm hungry" or "I need to go to the bathroom," to tell his parents. Because his parents can easily understand him now, Leo's behaviors have become more positive.

"It has improved his ability to let us know what he needs," she says. "With the iPad, there are so many communication possibilities that it's almost unlimited."

Although the iPad has been on the market for less than two years, it's become a very popular device for people with



Leo Foley uses his iPad to communicate

disabilities. Some of its factors—such as its easy-to-use touch screen and thousands of inexpensive applications ("apps")—make it a quality assistive technology device for young children with disabilities as well.

In addition to the iPad, there's also the smaller iPod touch or iPhone, both of which offer similar features and apps, as well as other smart phones, such as the Android or Blackberry. All of these devices offer apps for young children, with many specifically for children with disabilities. E-book readers, such as the Kindle or Nook, also have educational games for young children.

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These devices offer many benefits for young children with disabilities, especially for children with speech or language delays, autism, or developmental delays. They are customizable, lightweight, and appealing to all children, both with and without disabilities. They can also help increase a child's independence and participation in early childhood settings, such as home or child care. Certain apps, such as Prologue2Go for the iPad, help children communicate through pictures on the screen. Other apps use videos to teach children social skills.

For Minnesota parents looking into the iPad or iPod touch, PACER's Simon Technology Center (STC) Lending Library has both devices available for families to check out before purchasing. Parents can make an appointment with the STC by visiting [PACER.org/stc](http://PACER.org/stc) or calling (952) 838-9000. The STC also holds workshops throughout the year on iPod/iPad apps for children with disabilities.

"Before we had the iPad, I used the STC Library several times," Brenda says. "They gave us such great ideas. They really understand what kids like, and they know so much."

## Deciding on a Device

Because there are so many assistive technology devices available, it's important to consider all options before acquiring an iPad, iPod touch, or other similar device. Families should ask:

- What is my child's need?
- How will my child use the device?
- How will my child access the device?
- How much memory do I need?
- Who will own the device, the family or the school? If the school obtains the device for your child, discuss this question with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team.

Mike and Carolyn Thomson's 5-year-old son Finn has Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder. They have been considering the iPad for several months as a communication device for Finn. Because he also has poor motor skills, Mike and Carolyn believe the iPad's larger size and sensitive touch screen would work best for him.

"For Finn, the larger tablet would be most conducive to his learning and would also help him communicate," Mike says. "He could show us when he's hurt or hungry, and we could respond immediately. Communication is our biggest challenge by far, and I think the iPad will greatly improve his quality of life."



Finn Thomson (center) with his sister Delaney and brother Cade

Tonya Hilyard, whose 3-year-old son Sam has speech apraxia, is also thinking the iPad could replace Sam's choice board as his main method of communication.

"I'm waiting until we write his IEP and we can see exactly where the need is," Tonya says. "I believe the iPad would help him communicate better and help everyone understand him better."

Sam already uses the Nook Color, Barnes & Noble's e-book reader, to play educational games. "I have puzzles and apps for learning colors and letters," Tonya says. "If he answers a question correctly, there are fireworks on the screen. It's great to see him receive praise for doing it correctly."

To make sure the iPad will be the best choice for Sam, Tonya plans to visit PACER's Simon Technology Center and compare similar assistive technology devices.

"I want to rule everything else out before I decide on something," Tonya says. "I just want to find what will work best for him."

What works best will vary from family to family, depending on a child's needs. Katie Duff has found that her 4-year-old daughter Macy benefits from using Skype, a website that offers free video calling through computer webcams.

Macy, who has a visual impairment with subsequent motor delays and apraxia of speech, didn't like to talk



Macy Duff

on the phone to her grandfather, who lives in Houston, Texas. While her receptive language was good, she had trouble expressing herself and would “just mumble on the phone,” Katie recalls.

Using Skype, however, Macy can see and talk to her grandfather at the same time, making it a much different experience. “On Skype, she’s so lively and interactive,” Katie says. While they talk, Macy’s grandfather

also includes some learning exercises, such as holding up flashcards and asking her to spell the object on the card.

“She probably wouldn’t have the relationship she has with her grandfather if it weren’t for Skype,” she says. “The sky’s the limit with what you can do on Skype.”

## The Sky’s the Limit

Like Katie Duff, many parents and professionals are realizing the sky’s the limit with these new technologies, particularly for young children with disabilities.

“The way technology is going, it’s making it easier for kids who wouldn’t have learned to communicate otherwise,” Mike Thomson says. “Many parents understand the desperation of trying outlets that come up short. That’s why this technology is so inspiring.”

Katie, who has used different devices with Macy, including Skype and the iPad, predicts that technology will play a big role in Macy’s life for years to come.

“This technology is empowering for kids with disabilities,” she says. “They need something they can do themselves and be proud of. I don’t want anything to stop my daughter, and I know technology will be a big part of that throughout her life.”

*For more information on iPads and other assistive technology devices, call PACER’s Simon Technology Center at (952) 838-9000 or visit [PACER.org/stc](http://PACER.org/stc). For more information on upcoming PACER workshops on apps and other assistive technology, visit [PACER.org/workshops](http://PACER.org/workshops). For a basic overview on iPods, iPhones, and iPads, download PACER’s free guide “There’s an App for That: iPod/iPad 101,” available at [PACER.org/publications/stc.asp](http://PACER.org/publications/stc.asp).*

## POPULAR APPS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Here’s a list of popular early childhood apps for the iPhone, iPod touch, and iPad. Other apps can be found through PACER’s Simon Technology Center ([PACER.org/stc](http://PACER.org/stc)).

### Early Childhood

Bugsy Pre-K  
iPlay & Sing  
Little Explorers: ABC Wildlife  
Peekaboo Barn  
Wheels on the Bus

### Writing

ABC Phonics Animal Writing  
iWriteWords

### Literacy

ABA Problem Solving – What Rhymes?  
Bunny Bus Lite  
FirstWords: Sampler  
iKnow Phonics – ABCs

### Comprehension

A Seed Grows  
Farm Animals – LAZ Reader  
SUPER WHY!



## PACER ANSWERS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Whether you have questions about special education services provided by public or private schools or iPads and other communication devices, Judy Swett, PACER's early childhood advocate, has answers.

**Q:** My son has been receiving preschool special education services. After considering kindergarten programs, we have decided to send him to a private school with his siblings. The private school is not located in our school district. Will the private school provide the special education services written in his Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

**A:** Most private schools are not required to provide any special education services. However, the public school district in which your son's private school is located must provide "equitable services" to children who are eligible to receive special education services. You should contact the new school district and arrange a meeting with staff from the private school to discuss a special education program for your son. Bring along a copy of his current IEP. It is likely that the new school district will propose a new service plan that will reflect when, where, and how special education services will be delivered. The public school district is required to provide transportation to the location

where these services will be provided if they are not being provided in the private school.

**Q:** I believe that my child would benefit from the use of an iPad and a communication device. Can I purchase them and then submit the receipts to the school district for reimbursement?

**A:** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires schools to provide assistive technology if the IEP team determines that a child needs it to receive an appropriate education. The team must plan for acquiring, operating, maintaining, and repairing assistive technology, as well as training the child, staff, and family in its use and care. Because this is a team decision and there is a wide variety of devices that may be needed in order to provide an appropriate education for your child, you cannot assume that the school district will reimburse you if you purchase a device on your own. As part of determining the need for assistive technology, the IEP team should do an assistive technology evaluation to determine what device(s) are needed. Once this evaluation is done, the IEP should include information on what devices will be used, how they will be used, where they will be used, and how they will be maintained.

*Have more questions? Call PACER at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with an early childhood advocate.*

### Early Childhood Terms to Know

**Functional Behavioral Assessment:** A functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is a process for collecting information about a child. This information helps determine why challenging behaviors occur. The data also helps identify ways to address the behaviors using the child's strengths.

**Positive Behavior Intervention Plan:** A positive behavior intervention plan is a proactive plan that includes strategies to help prevent a challenging behavior from occurring. It is typically written after a functional behavioral assessment has been conducted. A positive behavior intervention plan should include the specific steps that will be taken to help your child learn new behavior skills. It should also address environmental changes to reduce or eliminate challenging behaviors, as well as supports for the student to use appropriate behaviors in different settings.

## MAKE LIFE EASIER WITH THESE TIPS FOR RUNNING ERRANDS

Want to know how to make life easier for you and your young child with a disability? For tips on managing everyday tasks, such as diapering and bedtime, access the “Making Life Easier” tip sheet series from the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI). These tip sheets for parents and caregivers contain valuable information on how to make challenging events easier to navigate, and even enjoyable, for both you and your child. You can learn more about TACSEI’s “Making Life Easier” tip sheets at [challengingbehavior.org/do/resources/making\\_life\\_easier.html](http://challengingbehavior.org/do/resources/making_life_easier.html), or contact PACER Center for copies of the tip sheets.

Here is an excerpt\* from one of TACSEI’s “Making Life Easier” tip sheets on running errands with your young child with a disability.

### Tip: Plan for the transition from home to going out.

Let your child know where you both will be going. This can be done verbally, visually, and/or with sound. Remember to allow time for the transition.

- Tell your child where you will be going.
  - Some children need a more concrete and visual support of where they are going with you. Many parents have found great success with a travel book. This can be made with a small photo book with blank photo sleeves. To make a travel book, take photos of the places in your community that you frequent. Place each picture in a photo page. Describe where you will be going using the photos.
- Prepare a cooler with a snack, a drink, and an ice pack.

### Tip: Make your car a child-friendly place.

If your child is busy in the car, both you and he will have a happier experience.

- Many parents have found it successful to have an activity bin in the car. Fill the activity bin with a few of your child’s favorite things. Some examples might be a couple of books, markers and drawing paper, figurines, or a sticker book.
- Children’s music CDs: There are many music CDs that have music and lyrics that both you and your child will enjoy. You’ll find some with songs from your child’s favorite television shows and movies.

### Tip: Provide your child choices.

Use choices to prevent challenging behavior. When you offer your child a choice, you provide him with the opportunity to have control and be independent.



- If your child has limited communication skills, provide him with a choice board. These are pictured choices from which he can tell you what he wants. They could be photos or clip art. You might have a page in his travel book of song choices, CD choices, or snack/drink choices.
- Let your child choose the music to be played.

### Tip: Keep your child comfortable.

Make sure that your child is not too hot or cold. If he has limited language, he may not be able to tell you that he is uncomfortable (except through challenging behavior). If you can, cool the car off in advance. Have a comfortable object (e.g., blanket) in the car for comfort and warmth.

These simple prevention tips can make getting in the car or on the bus to run errands much easier for your child. Once out of the house, you and your child can take care of these household tasks and have fun during your time together.

*\*Developed in collaboration with PACER Center.*

*The Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI) is a federally funded center that translates extensive research into actual, everyday practice to improve the social-emotional outcomes for children with, or at risk for, delays or disabilities. Learn more at [challengingbehavior.org](http://challengingbehavior.org).*

## HELP YOUR YOUNG CHILD WITH THESE RESOURCES

Parents play a critical role in their child's development. Providing a safe, loving home and spending time together—playing, singing, reading, and even just talking—can help a young child learn and meet developmental milestones. While spending time with your children, it's important to have information regarding typical childhood development so you can recognize the signs of any developmental delays and intervene early. For more information on early childhood development or services, visit the following websites:

**CDC | [cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly](https://cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly)**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information on the developmental milestones for children from 3 months to 5 years of age and offers developmental warning signs for each age group. The CDC website also offers interactive tools for users to select areas of development and examine expected changes in milestones over time.

### **ECFE classes**

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes typically meet once a week and consist of parent-child activity time, parent discussion time, and children's activity time. To register for an ECFE class, contact your school district. For more information on the ECFE program in Minnesota, visit [education.state.mn.us](https://education.state.mn.us) and click on Early Learning Services, Early Childhood Family Education.

### **Head Start | [nhsa.org](https://nhsa.org)**

Head Start is a national program that provides education, health, nutrition, parent involvement, and family support services to at-risk children and their families. The program serves children in families that earn at or below the federal poverty level, which for a family of four is \$22,350.



**Help Me Grow | [parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/HelpMeGrow\\_SpecialNeeds/](https://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/HelpMeGrow_SpecialNeeds/)**

Minnesota's Help Me Grow Early Intervention Services for eligible infants and toddlers are designed to meet the unique developmental needs of each child and their family. Help Me Grow Early Childhood Special Education Services for eligible children ages 3-5 provide supports and services individually tailored to meet the learning needs of each child. These services are delivered at no cost to families.

**Minnesota Parents Know | [parentsknow.state.mn.us](https://parentsknow.state.mn.us)**

Minnesota Parents Know is a state program that offers resources on child development, health, and parenting. Hosted by the Minnesota Department of Education, the website provides up-to-date, research-based information on children from birth through grade 12, strategies to support children's learning, expert tips, an interactive early childhood and child care search, connections to Minnesota services and resources, and videos.

### **Access PACER's Archived Early Childhood Webinars Online**

PACER's archived early childhood webinars offer a wealth of information on working effectively with professionals, finding funding programs and determining eligibility, and developing outcomes for your young child. Access any of PACER's free early childhood webinars ("Parents as Team Members," "TEFRA/Medical Assistance," and "Families Are Important") at any time by visiting [PACER.org/webinars/archive-listing.asp](https://PACER.org/webinars/archive-listing.asp).

## TACSEI | [challengingbehavior.org](http://challengingbehavior.org)

The Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI) translates research on young children with challenging behaviors into everyday practices. It offers parents, caregivers, and service providers modules and practices to improve the social-emotional behaviors of young children with delays and disabilities.

## ZERO TO THREE | [zerotothree.org](http://zerotothree.org)

ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports parents and professionals in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. It offers interactive resources on early childhood behavior and development, child care, education, and public policy.

## PACER Center | [PACER.org/ec](http://PACER.org/ec)

PACER's Early Childhood Project offers individual assistance, workshops, and print resources for families of children from birth to age 5. The Early Childhood Project webpage has additional resources, publications, and links

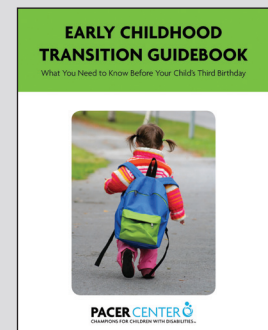


to organizations and programs that serve families of young children with disabilities, both in Minnesota and nationwide.

*For more information on early childhood resources, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with a parent advocate.*

### PACER's Early Childhood Transition Guidebook

Now available in Somali and Spanish! Learn everything you need to know about your child's transition from infant and toddler intervention services to preschool in PACER Center's new publication, "Early Childhood Transition Guidebook: Everything You Need to Know Before Your Child's Third Birthday." The guidebook explains what transition is, how and when to plan for it, how to implement a transition plan, and what to do if your child is not eligible for special education services. Download the book online at [PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp](http://PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp), or request a copy by calling PACER at (952) 838-9000. Free to Minnesota parents of children with disabilities.



### Request PACER's Updated "Families Are Important" Booklet

"Families Are Important: An Early Childhood Guidebook for Families of Young Children" contains information on Minnesota's early intervention system and offers guidance on how to access services for your child with a disability. The new version also includes updated terms and more resources for families. To request your copy, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or visit [PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp](http://PACER.org/publications/earlychildhood.asp). Free to Minnesota parents of children with disabilities.

### Connect with PACER Center on Facebook and Twitter

Want to stay informed of all the latest PACER news and happenings, including updates on PACER's Early Childhood Project? Find us on Facebook (PACER Center) or follow us on Twitter @PACERCenter. Be the first to hear about PACER news, information, and events, no matter where you are!



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(Alternate format is available upon request.)

## Activity Cards Help Children Build Vocabulary and Math Skills

PACER's "Let's Talk" activity cards are a fun and easy way to teach your young child vocabulary and speaking skills—the first steps in learning to read. These brightly colored, easy-to-read cards are designed to develop language skills in young children. The cards are available in English and Somali. PACER also has "Let's Talk and Count" activity cards available in English, Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. These cards help foster reading and math skills in young children. One set is free to Minnesota parents. Additional copies are \$4. For more information or to purchase the "Let's Talk" or "Let's Talk and Count" cards, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 or visit [PACER.org/publications](http://PACER.org/publications).

