

As a parent or professional, your awareness of and advocacy for assistive technology can be an important part of providing your child or student the supports he or she needs to succeed. Research shows that most assistive technology (AT) can benefit even the youngest children with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> These tools can support a child's inclusion, learning, and participation in daily routines and activities. Research shows that because AT isn't as widely used as it could be, many children miss opportunities to use potentially life-changing technology.

If you're not sure where to start with AT, visit [PACER.org/stc/tikes](http://PACER.org/stc/tikes), for additional TIKES handouts which offer information about understanding the benefits of AT and how to try technology to see if it will help your child or student.



Once you are more informed about making AT decisions, you may wish to advocate for the inclusion of AT in your child or students' Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP). The following tips will help you advocate for AT.

## 1. Know the laws

Including or considering AT during the IFSP/IEP process is a federal law and is required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although the law doesn't explain how to consider AT, it does state that AT must be considered for every student with an IFSP or IEP. This is generally a short conversation during the annual IFSP or IEP meeting where the team discusses the child, the needs of the child, and if AT can help support those needs. Federal law references assistive technology in the following:

- The IEP Team must... (v) consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1), 1412(a)(12)(A)(i), 1414(d)(3), (4)(B), and (7); and 1414(e)]
- Early intervention services include... (xiii) assistive technology services and assistive technology devices [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.]
- Assistive technology devices are required only if they relate to the developmental needs of the infants and toddlers serviced by the program [United States Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). (2003, March 25). Letter in clarification of the Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP) current regulations under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act regarding assistive technology.]
- Each public agency shall ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services, or both, are made available to a child with a disability if required as part of the child's (1) special education, (2) related services, or (3) supplementary aids and services. [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1), 1412(a)(12)(B)(i)]

- On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased assistive technology devices in a child’s home or in other settings is required if the child’s IEP Team determines that the child needs access to those devices in order to receive FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education). [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1), 1412(a)(12)(B)(i)]

Ask questions throughout the IFSP/IEP process and make sure AT is part of the conversation. If necessary, remind the team that consideration of AT is a legal requirement.

## **2. Respond with confidence**

Now that you know a little more about including assistive technology, take the opportunity to educate your child or student’s team. Many districts have written guidelines about the consideration of AT, yet research shows AT is still underused. Here are some things you can say that support the process of consideration:

### **Developing the Voice of an Advocate**

<b>If this . . .</b>	<b>Then this . . .</b>	<b>Notes:</b>
The need for AT has been considered and the team does not think that he or she will benefit from AT.	How did the team reach this decision? Let’s review the evidence that supports this decision.	A lack of adequate progress is an important indicator for the need to consider AT.
The team wants to start with only no or low-tech solutions.	All possible solutions should be explored as quickly as possible to minimize the impact of no progress. Let’s match the features of the technology available with the needs of the child.	Simple technology is not better than complex technology and vice-versa. It depends on the child, his or her needs, and the features of AT that will best support the child.
We cannot afford that.	Cost cannot be a factor in AT consideration according to federal law.	Cost is often used as a reason to avoid the conversation about including AT even though it cannot be a reason.
We are not sure what types of AT are available.	What steps will be taken to fulfill the obligation to consider AT? Who can help us identify the appropriate technology?	Schools sometimes have an AT Specialist or other professionals who have AT knowledge such as occupational therapists and speech language pathologists, who may have the skill and expertise. These specialists, if available, could be asked to share their knowledge.

If this . . .	Then this . . .	Notes:
It's not clear that the child or student actually does better with AT.	Let's review the data that supports this conclusion. There is a need to review data collected over time, with and without the technology, to reach this conclusion.	Data or evidence can be very important in helping make decisions about the correct AT.
We don't want the child or student to become dependent on the technology.	Let's discuss how this technology will help foster independence rather than dependence.	AT can help children achieve independence. It can be a bridge that helps a child do something they could not do before, such as using a pencil grip that helps them to grasp and hold independently, or using a communication device that gives them a voice.
This child or student is not the only one who struggles with this problem.	I appreciate that concern, but my primary interest is the success of this child or student. Let's talk about how to use AT to help this child or student be successful. Maybe other children or students could also benefit from AT.	Like the IFSP and IEP, the consideration of AT is an individualized decision. Often the response to many questions is, "It depends."
We will provide some specialized technology but there is no need to write it into the IFSP or IEP. Much of this technology we use in the classroom for all students.	I am pleased to hear that AT will be provided. Documenting the process and use of AT is very important and is best practice. We need to document the plan for acquiring and using AT in the IFSP/ IEP. We want to ensure that as he or she transitions to other programs or other schools, the new team doesn't have to start from scratch regarding identified AT needs.	Because the law governing consideration of AT doesn't provide any guidance about the process, it is best practice to document the teams' decision even if AT was considered and not needed. This clearly communicates the decision-making process to everyone involved.
We are not authorized to make decisions about AT.	I am disappointed to hear that. When can we meet with someone who is authorized to make AT decisions?	A "district representative" must be present at each IFSP and IEP meeting. This person is authorized to make decisions. Ask the team who is the district representative at this meeting.

Table inspired by: Edyburn, D. (2009). Assistive technology advocacy. *Special Education Technology Practice*, 11(2), 15-19. Retrieved from <http://www.setp.net/articles/article0903-7.html>

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### 3. Next steps

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For some children, the use of assistive technology bridges a gap that enables them to “catch up” to the point where they no longer need AT. Others will be lifelong users and the AT they use will change as they grow. Keep this in mind when the IFSP/IEP team has a conversation about including assistive technology.

It is also important to remember that conversations about including AT can happen whenever there is a change in the child or student’s needs. This can happen at any time and may not align with annual IFSP or IEP team meetings. When a new need arises, the IFSP or IEP team should discuss and identify technology to meet this new need.

Technology is constantly changing and it is important to be informed about new technology that may help meet a need. Think about new technology in regards to how it will meet the needs of your child or student. The document “How to Try Assistive Technology” (available at [PACER.org/stc/tikes](https://www.pacer.org/stc/tikes)) has helpful information about data collection to support AT decisions.

Remember, AT has the potential to make a difference for your child or student. The process begins at the first or annual IFSP or IEP meeting where the team is required to consider assistive technology. Inform yourself about the laws, become familiar with technology that can meet your child or student’s needs, and be confident in advocating for technology for your child or student.

<sup>1</sup>Dunst, C.J. Trivette, C.M., Hamby, D.W., & Simkus, A. (2013). Systematic review of studies, promoting the use of assistive technology devices by young children with disabilities. *Tots ‘n Tech Research Brief*, 8(1), 1-21.