

Chapter 13

A Parent's Guide to Support Technologies for Preschool Students with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Parents encounter many challenges when facing the need to raise and support a child with a disability. Many find technology to be of assistance, first turning to the Internet as a source of information and later turning to assistive technologies to directly support the needs of their child. This chapter outlines the multiple uses of technology related to the raising and support of young children with disabilities. The information provided serves to give an overview perspective while simultaneously providing actual specifics related to technology that can be useful to parents throughout the journey of raising a child with special needs.

INTRODUCTION: CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Parenting a child with a disability is a unique and often trying experience, as care-taking responsibilities typically escalate significantly beyond that of what was initially expected. While government policies in the United States such as the Individuals

with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 are designed to assist parents in meeting the needs of their child, gaps in needed professional services for these children continue to persist. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), families containing a child with a disability are often unable to find appropriately trained professional child care programs that are able to meet the specialized needs of their child. As a result, forty-

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five percent of mothers of a child with a disability are unable to return to competitive employment. It has also been estimated that a caretaker of a child with a disability spends as much as 86% of their day within three feet of their child with a disability (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). This alludes to the extent of care-taking responsibilities a parent of a child with a disability may face when unable to find appropriately designed services. Despite more recent government policies that have increased the funds allocated for infants and toddlers to improve early intervention services for children aged birth through three, the need for quality professional help remains a necessity as the majority of the responsibilities continue to fall on the shoulders of largely untrained and socially isolated parents.

From the recognition and diagnosis of the disability, parents represent the front line of action coordination in meeting the needs of their child. Parents often find that they are largely on their own in this effort and many turn first, to the Internet for help. Where parents of the past were referred to as “refrigerator mothers” due to their being isolated within their homes with their child, modern parents are able to harness technology to obtain needed information and to connect with others that are also struggling to meet the needs of their child. Technology has and continues to revolutionize the ways in which parents obtain support and information as well as the ways in which children with disabilities are supported. For parents of children with disabilities, the rapid changes technology brings can bring current support while holding out the future hope, that the lives their child will lead will be the fullest and happiest possible.

Objectives

After reading this chapter the reader should be able to identify technology resources for parents with special needs children and gain insight into the issues parents of these children face when try-

ing to support learning through technology. After reading this chapter the reader should be able to:

- Identify resources for identifying resources for special needs children
- Develop a better understanding of Early Intervention for young children
- Identify types of assistive technology

BACKGROUND: FINDING OUT ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S CONDITION

The diagnostic stage is critical and obtaining the appropriate diagnosis is the first step to providing the child with the assistance he or she needs to assimilate into society. This step can be difficult, as not all children are born with the condition or suffer from an easily identifiable physical disability. Many children are not appropriately diagnosed due to the array of symptoms that present without physical characteristics. Examples of such conditions include Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), communication delays, and other significant cognitive or behavioral impairments. Many parents simply rely on their pediatrician but the pediatrician may not be enough in cases where the child does not manifest physical symptomology. In this case, multiple interventionists are needed to appropriately and effectively obtain the correct diagnosis and to demystify the areas of concern noticed by the parent.

Actually receiving the appropriate diagnosis might seem on the surface to be an easy step. The reality is that this crucial aspect of the process can be a maze for parents without the appropriate guidance and personal knowledge needed to know which questions to ask or who might know the answer. The maze can even seem more complex when sometimes distraught parents are bombarded with information and technical jargon. To assist parents in ensuring the correct diagnosis is received, a formal, multifactor assessment covering multiple developmental domains and administered

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