



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

WHAT DOES THE TERM 'ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY' (AT) MEAN?

Assistive Technology (AT) means any item, piece of equipment, product or system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized that can be used to directly assist, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with learning disabilities. Source: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 20, Chapter 33, Section 1401 (25) USA.

AT can involve both high tech and low tech tools. The purpose of AT is to help individuals with learning disabilities work around specific deficits in order to reach their full potential.

The term learning disabilities, describes a neurobiological disorder in which an individual's brain is structured differently. These differences in brain structure may affect a individual's ability to interpret what they see and hear and may interfere with a individual's ability to speak, listen, read, write, spell, reason, recall, organize information and/or do mathematics. Processing speed and memory are also affected.

Even though individuals with learning disabilities have average to above average intelligence, they need tools to help them with these skills.

Research shows that 80% of individuals with learning disabilities have difficulties with language skills, including reading, writing and spelling. Source: What a Decade of Research Tells Us About Learning Disabilities in Children and Adults, US National Institutes of Child Health study, 1997.

AT does not try to improve but rather provides an alternative approach that 'works around' the deficits while capitalizing on strengths.

Learning disabilities cannot be cured or fixed and are lifelong. Their impact is felt in such areas as

- independent living,
- home management,
- money management,
- job retention and success,
- post secondary education and
- social interaction.

BENEFITS OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- AT can help the individual with learning disabilities (LD) be more independent
- Using AT can provide more choices and greater freedom in daily life
- AT provides tools to enable a individual to experience success at home, at school, at work or in the community
- AT helps people of all ages
- AT can make the difference between dependence and independence for people with LD and their families
- AT, successfully applied, can increase an individual's confidence and self esteem.
- AT improves the quality of life, and removes barriers providing the tools for possible employment and educational opportunities.

The key to effective AT is finding the right match between the AT tool, the learning disability, and the task. Finding the right tool is easy, addressing the problem(s) and making it work may not be as easy and may require a trial and error approach.

FACT SHEET

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