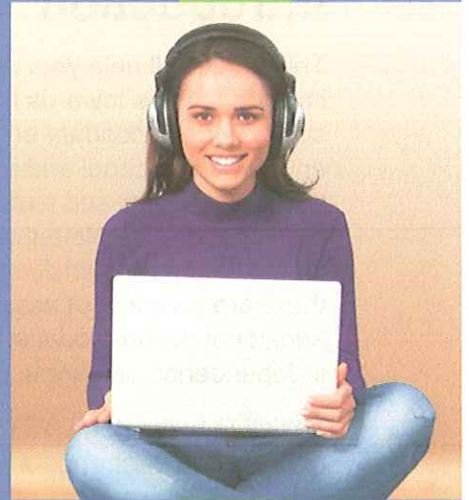


# Getting Started: Help Your Child With a Learning Disability Be More Independent With Assistive Technology (AT)



Center on Technology  
and Disability

*Assistive and Instructional Technology  
Supporting Learners with Disabilities*

**PACER CENTER**   
CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.

## Introduction

This guide will help your child with a learning disability take important steps towards the independence needed for high school, postsecondary education, and employment. As children enter middle school and prepare for high school and beyond, there is an increased expectation that they will be able to manage and complete their schoolwork independently. This can be a challenging transition for some families, but fortunately there are a variety of assistive technology devices, services, and additional accommodations that can help your child develop their independence at a comfortable pace.

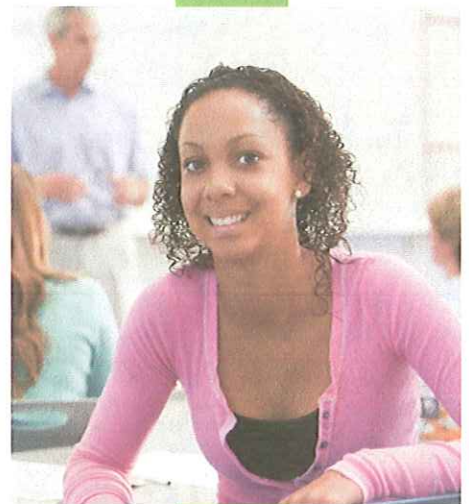
Assistive technology (AT) includes tools that allow students to maximize their strengths with new ways to complete schoolwork. (For several examples of assistive technology, please see the accompanying guide, "How technology can help your child with a learning disability be more independent.")

Using the right AT may help your child complete tasks independently that previously would have required assistance from you or school staff. When combined with the right accommodations and family support, assistive technology can be an integral part of your child's plan for greater independence.

## First Steps: Set Priorities for Your Child's Independence

### Step 1: Think ahead to high school and beyond and consider skills your child needs to learn

- Ask yourself the question, "When my child is preparing for high school and later for postsecondary education, what are the activities he or she will need to do independently? What skills will s/he need to do those activities successfully?" Make a list of your responses.
- Reflect on this list and assess which skills your child is working on, and what level of independence he or she is capable of with these skills.
- Determine which skills on the list your child is not working on and when that work should begin.



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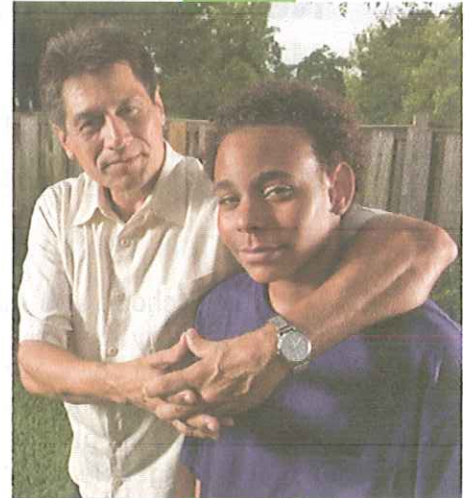


## **Step 2: Determine what skills and activities your child is motivated to perform independently**

- Ask your child, “Are there activities at school or at home that your teachers or I help you with that you wish you could do by yourself?”
- Tell your child what aspects of his or her educational progress make you proud, and let the child know what skills you’d like to see him or her improve.

## **Step 3: Talk with your Individualized Education Program (IEP) team about goals that develop your child’s independence**

- The goals you set with your child’s IEP team will help develop his or her independence and influence how key skills are developed.
- Discuss your vision for your child in high school and beyond, and ask what skills the IEP team believes are important to reach those goals.
- Discuss with school staff the strategies you use at home to encourage greater independence and ask how those can be mirrored at school. For example, if your goal is to have your child write assignments independently with help from you to organize his or her ideas, you could ask that school staff do the same.
- Decide which skills your child should be working on to be more independent, and set IEP goals to encourage skill development. Think about accommodations your child may need and decide if any existing accommodations could be changed or removed to encourage the growth of academic independence.
- Ask your IEP team what assistive technology they believe would help your child become more independent, and make plans for exploring and using AT.



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## Next Steps: Explore and Use Assistive Technology (AT) to Support Your Child's Independence

### Step 4: Talk with an AT professional about your goals

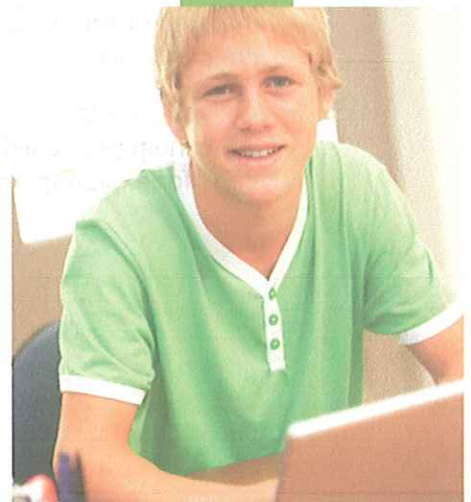
- Many schools and school districts have an assistive technology specialist who can answer questions about AT for your child. Ask your IEP team for a referral. AT services may include an assessment of your child's needs. An assessment should be conducted by someone who is knowledgeable about technology options.
- If your school district doesn't have an AT specialist, talk with the occupational therapist, speech language pathologist, or special educators about potential AT to explore.
- Many states have assistive technology resource centers with AT specialists who can answer your questions. Locate your state center at [ataporg.org/states.html](http://ataporg.org/states.html)
- Talk with the AT specialist about your child's goals, needs, and abilities before you talk about technology options. Reference the list you created in step 1 and ask about technology and strategies that might help develop the skills your child is working on. Let them know what technology your child currently has access to, including computers, tablets, and cellphones. This will help the AT professionals customize their responses to best fit your child.

### Step 5: Try assistive technology

- Now that you have ideas about assistive technology that may help, it's time for your child to try some different technology options and see what might be a good fit for their needs. Put something into the IEP about what you are trying. Here are two good places to begin:
  - Your school district may have an AT program that offers access to appropriate technology for your child. This might include a school-based or district-wide lending library of devices and software programs. Be sure to ask if such resources exist.



***Talk with the AT specialist about your child's goals, needs, and abilities before you talk about technology options.***



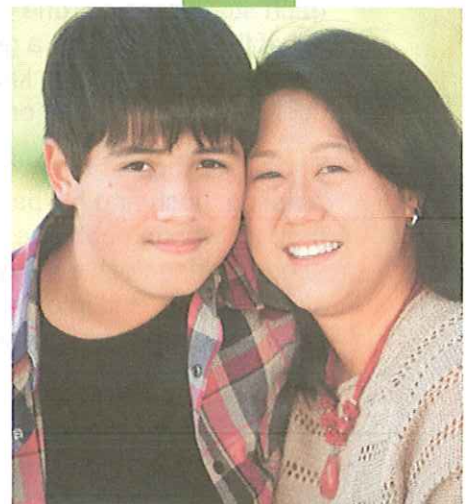
- Check with a local assistive technology resource center to see if they have the technology you want to try.
- If the right assistive technology is not available for loan, put something in the IEP about how your child will try the technology you are interested in. The school should work to provide your child with the type of technology specified.
- Once you have access to the AT you want to try, find out who to contact with questions you may have about the devices while you are using them. AT services provided by the school district may include the training of family members.
- Ask your child for feedback about the AT he or she is trying, and compare that feedback with your observations of how the technology impacts your child's schoolwork. Remember that your child's level of comfort with the AT is an important factor and may make the difference between his or her use or abandonment of it.

**Step 6: Work with your child towards your shared goals of independence**

- Even with the right assistive technology and accommodations in place, your child will need parental support and encouragement to expand his or her independence.
- You may have to change your role from being a schoolwork assistant (playing a major role in completing assignments, such as writing a student's spoken thoughts for a paper) to being more of a supporter (providing guidance, but letting the student take the necessary steps on his or her own).
- Consider a "schoolwork contract" that helps you and your child define where your support is needed and what new skills your child will complete independently. This discussion can be especially helpful if completing homework is a source of conflict because a contract helps establish a homework routine and eliminates grey areas about expectations.
- Share with the IEP team the strategies that are working at home to increase academic independence and ask that those strategies be repeated at school.



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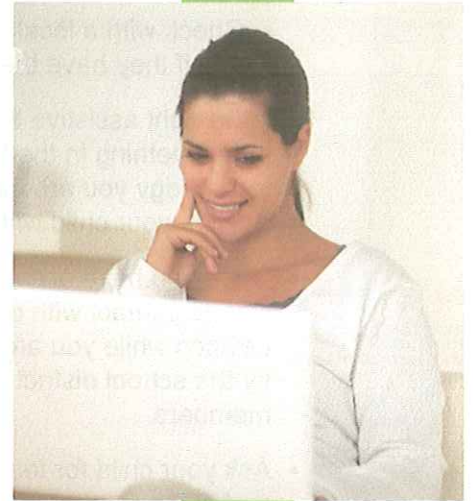
## Example

Josh Martin is a 7th grader who always seems to have a funny joke or an interesting insight to a question. When it comes to homework, however, he has trouble organizing these insights into written work for school assignments. Josh also struggles with concentration and appreciates the support of his parents and teachers who help him organize his thoughts and stay focused. To prepare Josh for high school and beyond, his parents let him complete his school work with less assistance. Despite his best efforts, Josh is routinely off task and struggles to independently complete most written assignments on time.

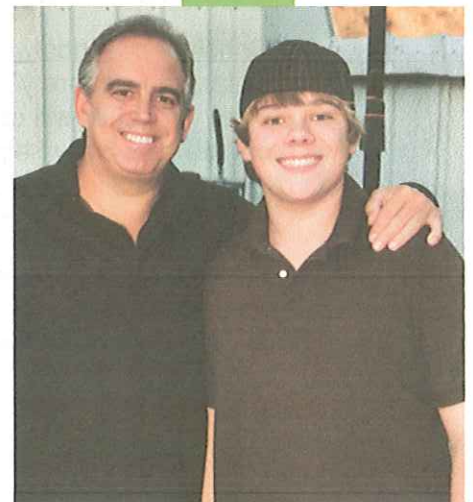
During Josh's IEP meeting, the Martins explained how they are trying to encourage Josh's independence but expressed discouragement at his lack of progress. A member of the IEP team suggested that assistive technology could provide supports similar to those Josh's parents were giving to help organize his ideas, set boundaries to minimize distractions, and focus. Josh agreed to try AT as part of a new homework strategy.

His parents showed Josh how to break down the goals outlined in his writing assignments, and organize these using a free online tool that showed him how different ideas or information connect to larger topics. Josh liked the way he could organize his thoughts visually to see what information belongs where, and where he needs to add more detail. They discussed the things that distract Josh the most when he is doing homework — his favorite websites, smart phone, and noise in the kitchen were the top three. Josh learned about technology that could block distracting websites, messages, or apps while he was studying. Next, they created a separate study area in a corner of Josh's room that was free from distracting noise. At the beginning of each study session, one of his parents now help Josh create a list of things to do and a goal of what time he will complete his homework. They use a kitchen timer to schedule short breaks for Josh every 25 minutes or so.

These strategies have worked well for Josh and at their next IEP meeting, Josh and his parents shared some of the strategies that are working at home and asked that these be used at school during Josh's study hall hours. Now Josh is learning skills at home and in school that will help him achieve greater independence in high school and beyond.

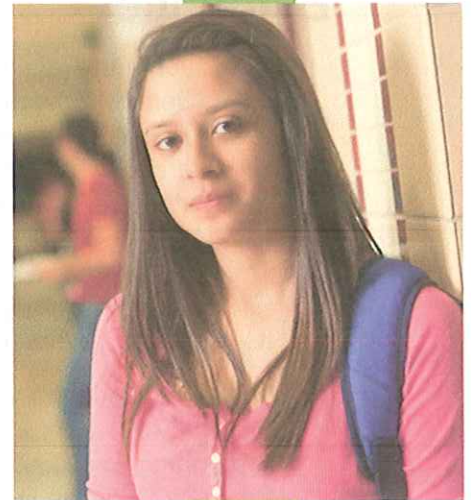


***Assistive technology can provide supports to help organize ideas, set boundaries to minimize distractions, and help maintain focus.***

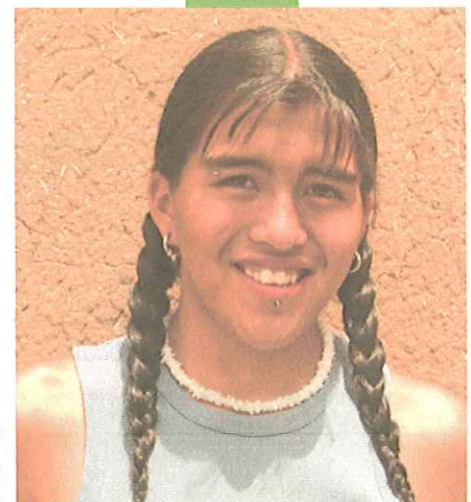


## Resources

- CTD Library Transition topics – [ctdinstitute.org/library/transition](http://ctdinstitute.org/library/transition)
- PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment – [PACER.org/transition/](http://PACER.org/transition/)
- Free or Low-cost Assistive Technology For Everyone – [augsborg.edu/class/groves/assistive-technology/everyone/](http://augsborg.edu/class/groves/assistive-technology/everyone/)
- Bridging Apps (Find an App) – [bridgingapps.org/dashboard](http://bridgingapps.org/dashboard)
- How to Help Your Teen Develop Good Study Habits – [understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/homework-study-skills/how-to-help-your-teen-develop-good-study-habits](http://understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/homework-study-skills/how-to-help-your-teen-develop-good-study-habits)
- Self Determination information, PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment – [PACER.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/self-determination.asp](http://PACER.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/self-determination.asp)



**To learn more  
about assistive  
technology,  
go to  
[ctdinstitute.org](http://ctdinstitute.org)**



## Evidence

- Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 2005 “Self-determination is what it’s all about”: What post-secondary students with disabilities tell us are important considerations for success” By Colleen A. Thoma and Elizabeth Evans Getzel [http://www.daddcec.org/Portals/0/CEC/Autism\\_Disabilities/Research/Publications/Education\\_Training\\_Development\\_Disabilities/2005v40\\_Journals/ETDD\\_200509v40n3p234-242\\_Self-Determination\\_What\\_Its\\_All\\_About\\_What\\_Post-Secondary.pdf](http://www.daddcec.org/Portals/0/CEC/Autism_Disabilities/Research/Publications/Education_Training_Development_Disabilities/2005v40_Journals/ETDD_200509v40n3p234-242_Self-Determination_What_Its_All_About_What_Post-Secondary.pdf)
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- Teaching Exceptional Children, 36 (3), 2004 “Promoting student self determination skills in the IEP” By Wendy Wood, Megan Karvonen, David Test, Diane Browder, Bob Algozzine. <http://transitionresponse.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2011-11-14-Promoting-Student-Self-Determination.pdf>
- Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 31 (2), 2008 “Experiences of College Students With Disabilities and the Importance of Self-Determination in Higher Education Settings” by Elizabeth Getzel and Colleen [http://jennyhatchjusticeproject.com/sites/default/files/experiences\\_of\\_college\\_students\\_with\\_disabilities.pdf](http://jennyhatchjusticeproject.com/sites/default/files/experiences_of_college_students_with_disabilities.pdf)



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