

Voices from the Field: Amanda Arevalo



Q1: What are some examples of assistive technology supports for young children?

As an early interventionist, the ultimate goal is to provide a child every opportunity to develop age-appropriate skills and keep up with their peers. However, there are times when children have special needs and are not able to develop those skills without assistance. It is crucial to consider assistive technology when therapy alone will not help the child achieve his/her goals. Assistive technology (AT) can include an array of items something as simple as an adaptive pencil, crayon, scissors, utensils; or mildly complex such as an adaptive chair or tray; to something more complex, a walker, stander, orthotics, hand splints, augmentative communication, etc. Assistive technology can also include thinking outside of the box, like using household items or other items for different purposes than what they were intended to do. For example, using a pool noodle or 3-ring binder for positioning, Velcro for fine motor adaptations, or make-up wedges to adapt a book for easier page turning. These are just some ideas of how assistive technology can be simple, complex, but also may require creativity.

Q2: What considerations should a practitioner keep in mind when discussing assistive technology with people involved in the child's environment?

Let's consider a child that is 30-months-old crawling on the floor in a daycare/preschool environment, meanwhile the child's peers are walking in this setting. This might seem satisfying for the parents because they have waited so long to see their child move independently, yet he/she is not keeping up with his/her peers. How many 30-month-old children do you see crawling at a daycare? Can this child explore his/her environment fully when he/she is on the floor versus upright? What learning experiences is he/she missing out on? Remember the child's parents are happy with the child's development, so what do you do now? How do you approach a family that might be oppose to assistive technology? How do you begin to discuss assistive technology to this family? What kind of assistive technology would you consider? And, is the physical environment (i.e. daycare/preschool) lend itself for the use of assistive technology within the physical space?

There are so many factors that need to be considered when discussing assistive technology with people involved in the child's environment. Yet, these factors should not be the cause of intimidation or avoidance for an open discussion about assistive technology. After all assistive technology is intended to improve the child's independence, learning experiences, and help meet his/her developmental goals in various environments.