

# What is Assistive Technology?

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Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a division within the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). ECI programs provide services to families with children birth to 36 months of age with developmental delays or disabilities. For more information about DARS/ECI, call 1-800-628-5115 or visit [www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis](http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis).

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**A**ssistive Technology (AT) is any material or piece of equipment that allows people with disabilities to perform tasks and participate in everyday activities that their peers can do without assistance. Examples: A wheelchair used for mobility, a communication device to speak, digitized books or Braille to read, hearing aids to hear, and an oversized switch to activate a toy.

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## TECHNOLOGY IS A POWERFUL TOOL.

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ECI understands that families and professionals are increasingly using the Internet and technology to access information. Technology is a powerful tool that can help children be more independent, participate in games and other activities with peers, and communicate preferences. Here are resources that provide tips, tools, demonstrations, and information on how to use assistive technology in your classroom.

### **SNApps4Kids**

SNApps4Kids is a volunteer community of parents, therapists, doctors, and teachers who share information on how they are using the iPad®, iPhone®, iPod touch®, and Android™ devices with children who have special needs. The group has found that these mobile devices provide accessibility for children who may have been previously disengaged from the world because of challenging language, motor, or other developmental delays.

Given the rising number of apps on the market and the diverse skills of children with special needs,

parents have found each other to be among the best resources for choosing apps to enhance everyday life for their children. While this group is primarily parent-driven, their efforts naturally mesh with the people who help their children develop particular skills—therapists and educators.

Visit [www.snapps4kids.com/about/](http://www.snapps4kids.com/about/) for more information on creative and useful ways to incorporate technology into learning and development.

### **Tots 'n Tech**

The Tots 'n Tech Research Institute (TnT) is an inter-university collaboration of Thomas Jefferson University and Philadelphia University, both in Philadelphia, and Arizona State University in Tempe. TnT's mission is to provide up-to-date information and resources about using adaptations, including assistive technology, to early intervention providers of all disciplines and families across the country.

To achieve this mission, TnT provides technical assistance to states to help them enhance the use of adaptations with infants and toddlers and conducts a national research program about use of adaptations and assistive technology.

Visit <http://tnt.asu.edu/> for additional resources and information. Access online newsletters covering such topics as SMART™ boards, assessing the need for assistive technology, and using assistive technology to support socialization.

### **Center for Early Literacy Learning**

The goal of the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) is to promote the adoption and sustained use of evidence-based early literacy learning practices. This site has resources for early childhood intervention practitioners, parents, and other caregivers of

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children, birth to 5 years of age, with identified disabilities or developmental delays and those at risk for poor outcomes. The CELL is a major initiative of the Center for Evidence-Based Practices at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute in North Carolina.

The CELL has published 15 new practice guides with adaptations for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, which show how to adapt early literacy activities for young children with disabilities. The guides can be used by practitioners or parents, or by parents in collaboration with practitioners. They describe everyday home, community, and child care learning opportunities that encourage early literacy learning.

All are available online at [www.earlyliteracylearning.org/pg\\_tier2.php](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/pg_tier2.php).

## **Head Start Center for Inclusion**

For inclusion to succeed, everyone needs to realize that it involves more than children just being present in the classroom. Inclusion is the full and active participation of young children with disabilities in programs with typically developing children. For 30 years, research findings and public policies have promoted preschool inclusion as an important element in producing positive outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families (Guralnick 2001; Smith and Rapport 2001; Strain, McGee and Kohler 2001).

The Head Start Center for Inclusion systematically addresses existing barriers to effective inclusion and seeks to increase the competence, confidence, and effectiveness of personnel in Head Start programs to include children with disabilities.

In particular, the center supports teachers in the classroom with a Classroom Visuals and Support page on its website, <http://depts.washington.edu/hscenter/classroom-visuals>.

The center has created an ever-growing library of commonly used pictures to help teach and support all students. Subjects include toys and games, art materials, daily schedule, problem solving, and classroom certificates. Even better, by having all these visuals in one place, teachers can download the ones they need and use them immediately in the classroom. ■