

North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Procedural Guidance

Reference: Assistive Technology (AT) Policy, AT Loan Procedures, and iPad Procedures for AT Contacts

iPad Use as Assistive Technology in Early Intervention

Introduction

The development of new technology in recent years such as iPads, other tablet and touch screen mobile devices has changed the way we think about assistive technology. iPads are new and therefore there is often a great deal of interest among interventionists and providers to use this technology within intervention sessions. The North Carolina Infant Toddler Program (NCITP) emphasizes the importance of using an iPad and any type of assistive technology (AT) in the context of natural learning environment practices. This guidance document is created to outline how iPads and tablet technology fit within the NCITP's early intervention service definition of Assistive Technology.

Procedures

Natural Learning Environment Practices

Assistive Technology is an early intervention service. It is a requirement of Part C of IDEA and state policy that all early intervention services be provided in the natural environment to the maximum extent possible. In addition to a location, *natural learning environment practices* include use of everyday activity settings, child interests, and parent/caregiver responsiveness to the child. Everyday activity settings are used as the sources of early learning because they provide frequent opportunities for "child use" of existing abilities and development of new skills. Child interests are employed because children are more likely to focus on a person or activity longer if they are motivated and engaged. This in turn, provides more practice and learning opportunities. Parent responsiveness involves ensuring that parents know and understand what they do that supports their child's learning within and across activity settings.

Therefore, iPads should be used with the family related to a child learning within the context of everyday opportunities and in natural environments. The family with their child using an iPad only during scheduled intervention sessions would not support natural learning environment practices.

Selecting Assistive Technology

When selecting any type of AT for an enrolled child, it is important for the IFSP team to consider developmental skills infants and toddlers may need to learn. It is equally important to identify the activities and routines in which those skills will be practiced and used. IFSP teams should focus on how AT can be used to assist a child and family to be successful in a challenging routine or activity setting and to achieve an established IFSP outcome. For example, if a family is experiencing challenges within an existing routine or activity setting, adding adaptations may make that routine more supportive of the child's development. When

selecting any type of AT for an enrolled child, decisions are made by the IFSP team using the *Assistive Technology Framework* process. The framework will guide the IFSP team through a process that will lead to identification of the appropriate AT to meet the needs of a child and family and assist in meeting the established outcome. IFSP teams should consider the continuum of AT available and begin with environmental adaptations, material adaptations and moving up the hierarchy to higher technology only as needed.

Therefore, iPad technology will usually be the last AT consideration for most families and children.

See the following website for additional information about the NCITP AT Framework,

www.bearly.nc.gov

Assessment and Trial

The assessment and trial phase of the AT Framework process will help the IFSP team in determining the AT device that is the best match for a family and help determine the device that will best assist with achieving the IFSP outcome(s). If an iPad is determined to be appropriate for assessment and trial, the family (with guidance and support) will need to use the device within the context of daily routines and natural learning environments. This will determine if the use of the iPad is appropriate and functional for their family. An iPad will not be the best choice for every situation or for every family. The iPad and related apps available for loan through the NCITP are primarily used during the assessment and trial phase. *(See the NCITP Assistive Technology Policy and AT Loan Procedural Guidance for more information about the assessment and trial process.)*

When iPads ARE NOT Assistive Technology

There are many fun and educational activities for which a family can use an iPad. However, most of these uses are not considered the required early intervention service of Assistive Technology as defined by the NCITP. For example, families can use an iPad to read bedtime stories together, to play education matching games, and during long travels to entertain young children and siblings. For families that have an iPad for personal use, early intervention staff may offer ideas and suggestions or provide support and coaching to parents and caregivers on how to use their iPad in daily routines to teach cause and effect or to promote communication and fine motor development. This would be an example of intervention strategies that use the tools and resources already available to and used by the family to enhance natural learning opportunities and promote natural learning environment practices.

When iPads ARE Assistive Technology

To be considered an Assistive Technology service, as defined by the NCITP, the iPad and related apps need to be determined by the IFSP team to be a device that is needed by the family and a need that cannot be met through other supports and services. The IFSP team must determine that the iPad, after assessment and trial, is the device that will work best, based on the unique needs of the child and family, to meet the established IFSP outcome(s).

Resources:

Tots-n-Tech E-Newsletter – Integrating IPAD use into Existing Activities and Routines (March 2012), Arizona State University, Thomas Jefferson University; <http://tnt.asu.edu/files/March2012.pdf>

Resource Brief 5 – AT Implementation and Use (April 2009), Arizona State University, Thomas Jefferson University, http://tnt.asu.edu/files/Brief_5_ATUse_8-24-09_final.pdf

Rush, D. & Shelden, M. (2008). Script for Explaining an Evidence-Based Early Intervention Model. Briefcase, 1(3), http://fipp.org/static/media/uploads/briefcase/briefcase_vol1_no3.pdf