

SELECTING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

For persons with a disability or those experiencing the effects of aging, assistive technology (AT) devices and services can be the key to greater independence and productivity. An AT device is any item used to maintain or improve a person's functional capabilities. An AT service is any service that helps an individual select, acquire or learn to use an AT device.

Selecting assistive technology involves



following a process which results in finding the “best fit” between person, environment and technology. Prospective end-users of AT devices and those assisting them must carefully evaluate information and make informed decisions. Using a process for device selection is important because it decreases the likelihood of bad decisions that waste time, money and patience. Poorly chosen equipment may be of little help to the user or even end up unused in a closet.

Considerations for Selecting Assistive Technology

Define Your Goal – What do you want the AT to accomplish?

What does the individual want the AT help them do? This defines the critical “feature match” between the end-user and the technology.

Consider the AT Team

Selecting an AT device requires input from the individual who is going to use it. It may also require input from family members, educational, medical and vocational professionals, co-workers and caregivers. A good rule of thumb is to include anyone who frequently works with the end-user or the technology. There may be formal requirements for team membership and documentation if funding is tied to educational or employment objectives or medical diagnosis. Having appropriate individuals on the AT team is vital to a successful outcome.

Consider the End-User

The individual's abilities and limitations, as well as, what assistance or accommodations are needed in sensory, cognitive and motor areas is necessary.

Consider the Environment

Will the technology help the individual achieve the desired functional goal? Who will be interacting with the person and the technology in the environments?

Consider the Technology

What device, adaptation or system is the “best match” for the identified needs and environments?

Device Factors to Consider:

Is the end-user comfortable with the way that the technology looks, feels and sounds? Is it age, gender and culturally appropriate? Is it easy to use?

Which device allows the greatest independence? Is it easy to transport from place to place? Does it require training prior to use? If training is required, where and how can one obtain it? What will it cost? Does the device pose any safety risks to those that may work with it?

Is the device reliable and durable? How and where are necessary repairs done? How difficult and time-consuming is it to obtain service?

Considerations when Selecting a Vendor

It is not enough that a particular vendor sells a piece of equipment that an individual needs. The dealer's consumer responsiveness, professionalism and service orientation should be a part of the decision process.

Questions to Ask the Vendor

How long has the vendor been in business? How long has the vendor supplied the device you are interested in?

