

Top Tips – ICT Early Skills

Pupils in the Early Years may need preferential access to technology as soon as possible in order to develop alongside their peers. Remember to always start with what is available to everyone else and then move towards more specialist things.

Seating and Posture: as important for the very young as for everyone else. For those with a movement disorder, concentrating on a screen may be very difficult if they are concentrating on sitting still or holding their head up at the same time.

Screens: Are they at the right height? Both looking up and looking down can be just as bad for the neck. The default font size may need to be increased and made more suitable for the target audience - **Comic Sans** or **Sassoon Primary** are often recommended.

Keyboards: Upper or lower case? Regular keyboards can be adapted by using lower case stickers or high visibility ones for those with visual impairment. There are both larger and smaller keyboards, some with additional keyguards for those who cannot isolate one finger or hold their hand up above the keyboard. Adding an additional keyboard to a laptop can help those who cannot reach the regular one or keep knocking the touchpad. The repeat can be taken off the keyboard using **Filter Keys** and the keyboard set up for one handed use with **Sticky Keys**.

Mice: Trackerballs, joysticks and other mouse substitutes are often easier to use than a regular mouse, especially for dragging activities. Pupils may need to learn to control the mouse before they are asked to do anything too cognitively demanding. The size of the cursor can be increased and the movement slowed down.

Touchscreens: These have the advantage of being directly responsive but may not be accessible to everyone. Some pupils may be able to use a tablet computer for some activities but not all. If the pupil has mobility difficulties and is using a tablet, where is it positioned?

Augmentative and Assistive Communication (AAC): Term used to describe a range of high and low tech devices that allow those with speech difficulties to communicate. For the very young, start out devices such as the **BIGmack**, **GoTalk 9** and **Step by Step** can be very useful and allow participation in the classroom. Top of the range equipment can be expensive.

Switches: For pupils who cannot use a mouse, keyboard or touchscreen but have some voluntary movement. A single press can allow access to a vast range of activities, given the right hardware and software. For pupils with very complex needs, you will need access to specialist support.

Eye Gaze: Allows people to access a computer using eye movements only. Now being developed for early learners as well as for those who are cognitively able and

need a communication aid. Very expensive and pupils needing this will need a specialist assessment.

Useful addresses

Inclusive Technology: (www.inclusive.co.uk) Sell almost everything listed above including stickers for keyboards. Also have advice sheets and the Switch Progression Road Map.

Ace Centre: (<http://acecentre.org.uk/software>) Free downloadable large cursors.

My Computer My Way: (<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/mcmw/>) Site with helpsheets on how to adapt your computer for various disabilities.

Flo Longhorn: (<http://folonghorn.co.uk/>) Independent consultant who publishes an online magazine about iPads for early learners.

Communication Matters: (<http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/>) Charity for those working with people who use AAC.

1Voice: (<http://www.1voice.info/>) Charity for children who use AAC and their families.