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NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEARING ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT
(NCHAM) WEBINAR

"Debunking Common Myths About Using
Assistive Technology With Young Children"

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>> WILL: Well, I see that we are at the top of the hour and we want to honor everybody's time. We appreciate everybody's enthusiasm about joining today's webinar series honoring Better Hearing and Speech month. My name is Will Eiserman and I'm with the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management and we are using our platform today to be able to share the information throughout this webinar series. So, we're going to kick it off today with our first webinar in this series of five, which is entitled debunking common myths about using assistive technology with young children. And I'm going to allow our presenter today to introduce herself.

After she has completed her presentation of about 15 minutes, I will reveal a questions field, through which you'll be able to make a comment or question, and then have an opportunity to communicate back and forth with our presenter.

And we'll stay on for as long as an hour, if needed, to be able to complete any questions. But the presentation itself will be about 150 minutes in length, so without further ado, this is Bridget Gilormini.

>> BRIDGET GILORMINI: Hi, thanks, Will, my name is Bridget Gilormini and I am the director of the Simon Technology Center and I am a speech therapist by training and a training geek by choice and been in the field for about 20 years and I love what I do, so I'm excited to be able to share with you some information about debunking assistive technology myths and these are some of the things that keep people from starting, using assistive technology at a young age.

And so some of the terminology that you may have heard around assistive technology includes universal design or inclusive design, which is how we design or set up our classrooms, our environments.

Then it's also made up of the stuff, the technology, and the services that help us and parents and providers use this stuff.

And there's lots of information out there about assistive technology, but commonly most of the people that understand assistive technology do what I do, they're in the field, and the assistive part is a little bit elusive and so we talk -- one of the things that's kind of brilliant about what's happening the past ten years is we're getting more and more commercially-available things that are well designed that parents and providers can go to, Amazon and Best Buy and just your local toy stores to meet the needs with kids with disabilities and that's exciting.

In the project work I do at PACER is one of the things we find is presenting people with using assistive technology and so I just wanted to lay the foundation for the very positive benefits that assistive technology can provide that can be a bridge between what a child is unable to do, but with the support of assistive technology, is able to show or do and accomplish some of those things.

It helps a child do something that they could otherwise do something they can't do and often levels the playing field which is exciting and helps a child get from here to there and sometimes literally in mobility, and really supports the inclusion of children with disabilities.

So, what I'm going to talk about in our time together here are some of the myths that really impact our understanding and willingness to use assistive technology, and hopefully knowing what some of these myths are will help you debunk them with the folks you work with or give you an ah-ha moment about assistive technology and how it can be leveraged to support children

So the first method we're going to talk about, when people hear the word "technology" and assistive technology they often think of computers and tablets and I have a little video that will talk about that myth.

And Will, can we cue that up? There we go.

[Video played].

>> When parents of young children hear the words assistive technology, the first thing they may think of is computers and tablets. Often, the first reaction is my child is too young for computers and tablets. The truth is, assistive technology or AT consists of a range of items that includes computers and tablets, but is certainly not limited to computers and tablets.

For this family, Alex's teacher mentioned that assistive technology might benefit him, but his parents are not sure how they feel about using computers with their toddler.

I understand their concerns. The part that was left off the message is that assistive technology represents a range of technology to meet a wide range of needs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Let's take a look at what I'm talking about.

Here at the Simon Technology Center, we have a wide range of technology items to meet needs. Some we can purchase, make, or modify, it all depends on what the child needs. These are just a few examples.

Bottle holders can help babies hold bottles mother independently. The grow clock can help young children learn when it's time to sleep and when it's an okay time to get out of bed. Drawing and writing are fun activities but can be difficult on flat surfaces for some kids. This ordinary clipboard has been modified into a slant board to make it easier for kids to do art, write, or view a book.

This is a rattle that helps youngsters associate cause and effect through sounds.

Sound boxes combine matching skills and sound. The child matches a block to another block that makes the same sound

We also have switch-enabled toys like this. These toys help children with disabilities access and play with toys.

And yes, AT includes computers and tablets that offer many accessible features, apps, and software that can make them great tools for children when appropriately matched with the need.

Alex's parents brought their concerns to his teacher. Her explanation that assistive technology is more than computers and tablets help them feel better about trying something called assistive technology.

Now, they're both excited to talk about it at their upcoming meeting and explore things that might help Alex.

[Music playing].

>> Assistive technology is not only computers and tablets, it represents a range of items including computers and tablets --

>> BRIDGET GILORMINI: Okay. We'll stop that now, because we're short on time. So that gave you kind of a nice overview of not just what the myth is, but also there's this array of technology from low tech to high tech that's available to help young children.

And so AT consists of a range of items, things that we can make, things that are low tech, all the way up to the high tech.

And this is also an important message in light of the fact that we have the American Academy of Pediatrics position statement on screen time and we should absolutely thoughtfully consider that when we're including technology but there are so many benefits that it's absolutely worth considering.

And so those are parents from -- so, this is a little story of AT for Maya showing the range of communication that she uses. She uses an app called Speak For Yourself to communicate her needs, but she also uses a word book, she uses simple -- symbols, she uses a low-tech key guard made out of glue.

So, she uses a wide range of technology to meet her needs.

We also have Max who uses a wide variety of things to support his writing. He uses a pencil grip or crayon grip in this case and he uses a large keyboard with large keys and an iPad he can use and interface with it with single fingers.

Our next myth is about who supports assistive technology and who can be that person.

And the myth is that it can only be used in a setting that has an AT specialist.

The truth is that not every organization or system has an AT specialist, and so AT literally is everybody's responsibility. Just knowing a little bit about assistive technology and the power that it has to support children can make a big difference so it can and should be used to support the whole team, family members, professional members, communicate members, and one story I like because we're short on time how the janitor and kitchen staff use assistive technology throughout the day with the children that they interacted with, so that's pretty exciting.

So now you know a little bit about assistive technology, you can start the conversation about the benefits and then tap into if you don't have the knowledge about what assistive technology might help, finding who those people are to help you identify that technology

One of my favorite stories is about children who come into the center who oftentimes have not yet been exposed to assistive technology and this is, we're looking at elementary/middle school/high school We have such a unique opportunity with little kids to get them started on a wonderful journey of how leveraging technology is going to impact and possibly change their lives, but we worked with a child who came into the center very hesitant about what we were showing him, and not very excited about his future. And got really excited when he discovered some of the things that he could do

with supportive technology and he said "I can do this" and he was talking about school, I can do this school thing, I can do this learning thing, in a way that was very similar to his brothers and sisters.

Another myth is that a child must be old enough or demonstrate prerequisite skills in order to benefit from AT, and all of the research even supports that in just a short amount of time, assistive technology can make a very big difference in a lot of ways. And actually, Will, I think I'm not going to show the video just for the sake of time, but let me talk people through what this video example was talking about.

I get a lot of hesitation, especially as a speech therapist, in introducing higher tech education to little kids and this is an example of Pax who is 16 months old, he is a twin, his twin is developing along normal lines, developing speech and language, and Pax is not, and his mother, who is a speech therapist, in this video is introducing him to very complex communication symbols, she's blocked off everything except one word "eat," and she's doing what we expect any parent or therapist to do with a child, she's modeling how to use language to get his needs met and how he can use and find the word for "eat" and I will put that video link up for you at the end so you can see it. Another myth is that AT is primarily for children with severe or significant disabilities, and so these are some examples of some of the AT that people are more commonly familiar with, so communication devices, mobility, switches, eye gaze.

But AT can provide benefits for all disabilities, and this includes children who may need help with reading skills, scribbling and writing, behavior, and all sorts of things. And so AT can look like this, visual supports, which are probably the most common underrepresented category of assistive technology that we're finding in the work that we're doing. People are using it, but they're not identifying it as assistive technology, so something to think about.

But AT includes all of these things.

So, as we're wrapping up and getting to the question and answer part of this, AT for young children is really important and it looks different than AT for students and adults. We're using it for child development and in natural and community environment.

We really want to -- part of the use is really focused on supporting participation and daily routines and activities, especially for those really young little ones from birth to three

Remember, that AT is everyone's responsibility and so now that you know, there are lots of resources.

My contact information is up in the upper left corner. If you are interested about more information about assistive technology, I would encourage you to really attend the next sessions, because they're going to take a little bit of a deeper dive into some topics, some specific topics.

>> WILL: Thank you, Bridget. That's awesome!

So, I have revealed the Q and A field over on the left there, if anybody would like to make a comment.

>> BRIDGET GILORMINI: Okay.

>> WILL: Or add a question, Bridget is welcoming those right now.

I'm also going to be -- to come back and post our next series of webinars -- if I can find it [chuckles] -- Jeff, maybe you can help me, see if you can locate that other PowerPoint slide, if you're able to do that.

>> JEFF: Okay, will do.

>> WILL: There is one question about whether these slides and videos will be available online. This -- I'm sure that if you contact Bridget, she's willing to share the resources

with you directly, correct?

>> BRIDGET GILORMINI: Absolutely, absolutely.

>> WILL: Yeah. And we'll also be posting these -- that's a great suggestion, so during our next webinar, we will post the slides for this one and the one that is coming up so that you can have a copy of those that way.

This webinar is also being recorded and will be posted on infanthearing.org and we will be sending out an e-mail, the same way you heard about today's webinar, with where you can access the recorded versions of this presentation today.

Our intent was to provide you with a quick and easy access to some information in a coffee break format so that you weren't disrupted too much from your daily activities but could have the opportunity of a new injection of information and perhaps some resources that you didn't know about.

On your screen, you'll see the upcoming webinars that are included in this.

Somebody just said can you post those links again, and I will, I will do just that. I'll move this out of the way. Let's see... where was that? There we go.

>> BRIDGET GILORMINI: And so I'll just, as we're waiting for any questions that might come up, just walk you through some of these resources.

So the TIKES project is an early childhood birth to five specific project that I direct that has a vast amount of resources available there, including a longer four-part video series on introduction to assistive technology.

Lindsey Cargill is the speech therapist whose 16 month old son Pax was in the video that I was talking about and this is a whole channel of videos that she posted of her child and other children she's worked with and a great example of modeling with young children and communication strategies.

Maya is a young child I mentioned briefly and she has many strategies on a continuum and her mother keeps a blog called Uncommon Sense and documenting their journey. Just another great case for starting young and starting early.

And then Dana's YouTube channel is up there as well.

And the Center on Technology and Disability is a project that, again, houses a vast number of resources that you can search and filter down through the specific area of interests you're looking at, so early childhood and other areas.

>> WILL: We have a question here and it reads: What's your take on our focus of a deaf child's weakest sense, their hearing, rather than focusing on their strength, which is often visual? Blind people focus on their other senses, not their sight.

>> BRIDGET GILORMINI: Okay. That's a great question.

Oftentimes when folks come in and ask me about matching technology with need, which is the most common thing that I do, we don't necessarily look at what the disability label is, but what is the difficulty that the child is having? And kind of trying to hone in that way to what technology might help meet that need, and so it's kind of a different way of approaching it versus looking at the disability as deafness and what technology is there to meet that need. We look at it from a need aspect, what need does the child have? It could be social interactions, it could be literacy skills, and looking at all of the options that are available that might meet that need.

And there's a whole process for how we might do that.

>> WILL: Great. Thank you.

Well, Bridget, I want to thank you for delivering such a concise and clear presentation as a part of our kickoff for our coffee break webinar series.

We invite you to come again tomorrow, same time, same place, for the topic of don't wait to communicate, augmentative and alternative communication.

So we're going to be expanding upon today's conversation with Jacqueline Hess's perspective and resources about this.

And then on Friday, we'll have a presentation on quality hearing screening practices for children birth to five years of age

On Monday, same time, same place, the topic is using a multi-modal approach to supporting children with hearing loss.

And then our last webinar, coffee break webinar will be next Tuesday at 2:00 o'clock eastern time, same time, same place, and that topic is going to be about resources from the Center on Technology and Disability, free resources to support the use of assistive technology and young children with disabilities.

So, once again, thank you, Bridget, and to all of you for participating in this webinar series.

This webinar has been recorded and you will be learning about where to find it later to review again or to share with others who weren't able to join us live.

Thank you!

[Concludes at 2:20 p.m. EST].

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