Many teens with autism love to use technology and are using a variety of everyday technologies such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers for entertainment and for schoolwork. These devices can also be powerful tools to increase independence, something that teens need to be working on as they prepare for adulthood. (Hedges, Odom, Hume, & Sam, 2018)

Examples of Technology Use to Promote Independence

Here are some tips for ways teens can use technology at home, school, and in the community to be more independent. Initially, it may take some practice to get used to some of these functions, but once they are learned, they can soon become a regular part of everyday life. If needed, a reward system may help to get things going.

Home

Sam’s mom used to wake him up every morning so he wouldn’t be late for school, but after trying the alarm function under the clock icon on his smartphone, Sam had no problem getting himself up and ready for school.

- Wake up in the morning by using the alarm on the clock function on a smartphone, iPod touch or tablet device.
• **Select clothes to wear** by checking the weather to know what to wear. There are many weather-related apps including ones that make suggestions for the type of clothing for the particular weather forecast that day.

• **Keep track of tasks** by creating checklists of things to do (list of chores to do on Saturday, or list of groceries to find at the store). There are a variety of checklist apps including specific ones for groceries.

• **Remember to complete tasks** like homework or walking the dog by setting a reminder alarm on a smartphone.

• **Communicate** by texting with parents at work when a student arrives home from school, or with teacher when having difficulty with an assignment.

• **Increase social interactions** by following friends on social media or joining an online community engaged in a special interest such as gaming, fiction writing, art, anime, astronomy, etc. The possibilities are endless.

**School**

_Aisha is a good student but some days she would forget to do her homework, and this was hurting her grades. Her resource teacher taught her how to put daily alerts into her smartphone, so she was reminded every afternoon at 4pm to check her planner._

• **Keep track of homework assignments** in a smartphone by adding them in the calendar section with an alert to remember to complete them at home. You can also write them in the Notes application on a phone or tablet, or you can take a picture of the assignments on the board. There are also a host of homework apps to help with keeping track of assignments.

• **Work on homework assignments** in one place where they can be found easily. _Google Docs or other free online word processors make it simple._ Google Docs and many of these tools save things automatically so no more “dog ate my homework” excuses. Also, these tools make it easy to share documents with others, so students can get help with editing a paper, for example.

• **Overcome handwriting problems** by using a laptop to take notes in class or you can take a close-up picture of the notes on the board or take a picture of another student’s note (just be sure to have permission from both the teacher and the student first).

• **Record a lecture** using the audio record or video record function on a smartphone or tablet so it can be replayed at home.

• **Ask questions** by texting or emailing the teacher about things you do not understand in-class or about homework assignments, (can even do it during class). Make sure that you get permission from the teacher in advance.

• **Decrease anxiety** by texting or emailing parents when feeling worried at school or if you have an important question.

• **Reduce stress** by listening to music using headphones or earbuds when walking in the busy hallways or sitting in the noisy cafeteria.

• **Find social events** by checking club Facebook pages or websites about upcoming events.
Cooperate with other students on projects using Google Drive, Skype, Zoom or other collaborative tools.

Attend an IEP meeting from a less intimidating location by phoning or video-calling in from a nearby room to avoid sitting at a table with so many adults.

Use alternative forms of communication for students who are non-verbal. There are apps available for tablet devices (some free) that use pictures and will generate sound to help communicate a student’s wants and needs.

**Community**

John’s mom does not drive so John had to learn to take the bus by himself to get to his job at the grocery store on Saturdays. His mom taught him how to do a video chat with her so he could see and talk with her while he was taking the bus. This helped relieve his stress and after a few times doing it, he was able to do it without the support of the video chat.

Stay safe by using video chat with a friend or parent while taking the bus or any other time navigating a place alone until you get used to the routine.

Communicate with an employer about any concerns or difficulties by using text, phone, or email. It can be as simple or complicated as needed. Sometimes an emoji can say it all.

Find directions to the nearest bus stop using GPS or a map app on a smartphone.

Complete multi-step activities using video modeling on a smartphone or tablet to have step-by-step visual instructions.

Increase fitness using an app or an electronic device to keep track of movement during the day by counting your steps or recording distances walked, run, or biked.

**Tips for Selecting Apps, Software, and Technology Tools**

Read the reviews—many apps have ratings so take the time to read the ratings to find out what others’ experiences have been.

Google it-type what you are looking for in the search bar on your browser. For example, type in “best app for making a checklist” or “best app for teens with autism to learn ....” You may be surprised to discover you are not the first one to ask the question.

Resources

AFIRM Modules: Task Analysis, Reinforcement, Visual Supports, Prompting, Modeling, Self-management, Video Modeling, and Technology-aided Instruction & Intervention

Daily Living Skills

Key to Independence

Supporting Adults with ASD through Uncertain Times

Transition Toolkit

References