

El: Using Specialized Equipment

In a Nutshell...

In EI, the use of specialized equipment or assistive technology devices is promoted *only* when it directly influences successful participation in everyday routines and learning activities. The focus needs to be on “successful participation” ... will the equipment or device allow the child to be more independent or engaged within their immediate daily routines and activities? The promotion of a piece of equipment or device should always be done in relation to the activity the child wants/needs to do. For example, pictures are presented at meal time in order for the child to make choices. A “*Big Mac*” power button is used to help a child participate in a game with her siblings. A stander is used to enable a child to engage with friends at the sand table. The specialized equipment needs to be “the most normalized and least intrusive available which results in the desired function or outcome” *DEC Recommended Practices, 2014*.

The focus on *successful participation* often requires a shift in perspective for EI service providers. We frequently create decontextualized learning opportunities with specialized equipment to get a child *ready* to participate in their natural living/learning activities. For example, 20 minutes in a stander to increase a child’s strength, “brushing” the child’s body to decrease tactile sensitivity, working on producing a /p/ sound in a therapy room, or proficiency trials using a “*Big Mac*” in isolated settings before using it in circle time with peers. Recent research in early learning tells us that children learn better in real every day activities, doing things they need and want to do, with adults important to them. We don’t need to get children “ready” by working in decontextualized settings or using equipment that is not natural.

Key Principles to consider...

1. **Specialized equipment should aid inclusion not exclusion.** No child wants to feel “different”. Be sure the equipment supports the most natural successful participation in every day routines WITH family members or peers.
2. **Specialized equipment is not natural.** Families and teachers do not typically have bolsters and therapy balls in their homes or classrooms. Find naturally occurring supports to serve similar functions of the “unnatural” intervention equipment.
3. **The equipment is not the goal.** Getting the child to use the equipment should not be the desired outcome. The equipment is a tool or strategy that enables and supports the child’s participation, engagement and independence in everyday routines and activities.
4. **The equipment should be family-friendly and based on family preference.** If a device is necessary for the child to be more independent, engaged or social, make sure the caregiver can use it within the routine. Selection of assistive technology needs to be based on a family’s preferences and positive effects on children’s engagement and learning (*DEC, Recommended Practices, 2014*).

Specialized equipment can be very important.

Specialized equipment can be extraordinarily valuable and essential to support children’s participation and learning within every day teaching and learning opportunities. Let’s consider the least intrusive yet most effective equipment/devices possible, and consider the adult’s ability to comfortably and successfully use that equipment when offering suggestions for children and families.

NDE/NDHHS: *The EI Practitioner’s Guide* March 2018

Team Assessment Home-Based Item #13

Reference Materials

- [Research: Using Equipment with Young Children](#)
- [DEC Recommended Practices 2014](#)

Regulations

- [Rule 52](#)

Tools

- [How to Program for Equipment with Young Children](#)
- [Using Equipment Video: Go To “Janella”](#)