

A **special need** is a term used in clinical diagnostic and functional development to describe individuals who require assistance for disabilities that may be medical, psychological or physical.

### **Role of Special educator:**

Special education needs are required whenever a child's education program is officially altered from whatever is provided for the other children. Some children may have special needs in their overall functioning or for some particular domain that is physical, behavioural, cognitive, social or emotional. Depending on their area of disability, they require different teaching strategies to help them to learn and to cope with their weakness.

It is always easier from the observer's point of view to list out the things that cannot be performed by a person with disability, like the child cannot see properly, child cannot write etc. There are some disabilities that are not physically visible or cannot be easily understood by another person like learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. There is no one universal method that can be used to analyse and label the people under various disability issues. Some children learn good coping mechanisms at an every early stage and might not even show any of the classical symptoms for that disability, but still have a lot of issues related to the spectrum of their disability. Hence early intervention is one of the greatest factors in teaching a lot of things to these children.

Whatever type of disability they have whether it is partial or total, temporary or permanent, physical or mental; they all have some concerns about carrying on their daily routine and in the learning process

A special educator's main role is to identify the abilities of the person, work on strengthening those abilities and to teach them coping skills to overcome their disability. The special educator also needs to work with the person for a longer duration of time, irrespective of the age of the person. They should periodically assess the progress of the person and then make a detailed individualised educational plan (IEP) after regular intervals.

The most common disabilities that require Assistive technology are:

- 1) ***ADD/ADHD - Attention deficit and Hyperactivity***
- 2) ***Autism spectrum disorder/ Asperger's syndrome***
- 3) ***Developmental delay***
- 4) ***Speech and Hearing Impairment***
- 5) ***Mental Retardation***
- 6) ***Cerebral Palsy***
- 7) ***Learning Disability***
- 8) ***Down's syndrome***

The most commonly affected areas of development in all these disabilities are Cognitive development, social development and emotional development. If the development is affected in one area then it can affect so many other related functions of that person. If cognitive development is slow it can affect the person's communication skills and in turn the life skills of that person. If social or emotional development is also not age appropriate then they will have difficulties in life management skills.

The different human functions that can get affected in a person with disability and that impact their learning capacity are:

- i) ***Slow speed of processing information***
- ii) ***Encoding of verbal and visual information***

- iii) Visual spatial processing*
- iv) Interpreting social situations*
- v) Speech impairment*
- vi) Gross and fine motor skills*
- vii) Memory*

### **Technology for Special Education:**

**Assistive technology is technology used by individuals with disabilities in order to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible.**

Technological development and innovation is a big boon to the children with disabilities. Most of their Assistive devices were created only because of the new technology. Incorporating technology into their lives increases their motivation to achieve something and gives them the flexibility of personalising the gadget according to their needs. These devices assist them to compensate on the limitations that they face because of their disability. It also facilitates in the functionalities of the individual for their daily living.

Technology can be a great equaliser for all the diversity in the society, especially for people with disabilities. When it is an Assistive device, it helps a lot in their skill enhancement, for children with physical disabilities, technology can give access to learning opportunities previously closed to them. E-readers help students turn book pages without applying dexterity, and voice adaptive software can help students answer questions without needing to write. Computers are engaging and more advanced than the typical modified lesson allows.

Assistive devices are usually chosen based on the type of disability they have, whether it is a motor impairment, speech impairment, hearing impairment and so on. There are specific devices even for the person with low intellectual functioning or cognitive impairment where there are devices which are designed to teach new concepts in the way they would learn them easily. Assistive Technology products can enable people with disabilities to accomplish daily living tasks, assist them in communication, education, work or recreation activities, in essence, help them achieve greater independence and enhance their quality of life.

What is augmentative or alternative communication? Augmentative, sometimes referred to as alternative communication (AAC) is a method of communication used by individuals with severe speech and language disabilities.

### **Types of AAC:**

**Unaided Communication system:** If the person has good functioning of body parts and has only hearing or speech impairment. Then he can rely on his body parts and use gestures or sign language to communicate his needs and emotions.

**Aided communication system:** This requires some sort of tool or device like one of the following:

- *Picture and symbol communication board*
- *Paper and pencil*
- *Communication boards with voice output ( speech generating devices)*
- *Electronic devices*
- *Common gadgets with adapted programs and accessories like computers, tablets etc.*