**Five Quick Tips for Teachers in Supporting Families of Students with Disabilities in the use of Assistive Technology during Home Instruction**

1. Talk with families about components of the IEP and where to find critical information (such as accommodations, including [accessible instructional materials](https://aimva.org/) and assistive technology) that will support your student and family at home.

* Providing online instruction is a new skill for all of us.  Consider creating “office hours” to assist with scheduling times to answer questions from families.
* If possible, meet with families individually using the same online platform to help familiarize families with these online instructional tools and to answer questions.

1. Communicate often with your families.  Share classroom strategies that have

been effective and discuss ways to modify these strategies for home instruction.  We have all become used to using digital resources for classroom instruction. Now is a good time to help your families learn to use digital resources and to reconsider the use of simple strategies and low-tech assistive technology materials.

* You have a lot of experience crafting activities and supports that make your classroom a supportive environment for a variety of students. Some of these supports are inherent to your classroom and may not be listed in individual student plans. Be prepared to talk about some of these strategies and how they may be implemented or modified in distance learning environments. Additionally, be prepared to provide specifics for how individual students access these supports that may not be listed in their IEP.
* Help families recreate some of the most critical supports that benefit their child at school (for example: schedules, first/then boards, visual supports and reading frames).  Modify them as needed for home.
* Create short tutorials or send links to videos that model the use of these specific strategies and AT to use at home.

1. Familiarize yourself with the accessibility features of your online learning platform. Each online learning platform has its own unique set of built-in accessibility features.  Use the resources of your instructional technology school staff and online tutorials to familiarize yourself with some of these features to help you create accessible learning environments, and support families who may be less familiar with these features.

Resource:

[Tips for Staying Connected through Technology During COVID-19](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ta4G7sjpW5WGAcxgiBDoP-U9UYpjHDvNksOfs3nXMmw/edit?usp=sharing)

1. Create accessible learning materials for your students to use at home.

* It is far easier to create accessible learning materials from the start than to modify existing materials to meet accessibility standards. Commercially available products feature accessibility checkers and the Virginia Department of Education offers quick [checklists](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/a11y/a11y_resources.shtml) to assist in the development of accessible materials. It’s a little intimidating initially, but you will soon catch on to creating accessible documents and your students will be more successful.
* Partner with general education teachers to coordinate parent communications and instructional materials. Asking parents to manage multiple platforms and multiple sets of materials can be confusing. Additionally, many special education supports are most valuable in the context of instruction.

1. Help your families navigate the multitude of resources that are overwhelming all of us during this time.  While some resources are valuable, others are product-based and may not be evidence-based. Provide a limited set of resources that focus on the needs of your students and families.  Keep in mind the Internet access needs of your community when referencing materials that require online resources.

Resources:

[Virginia Department of Education’s Assistive Technology Network](https://atnetwork.ttaconline.org/)

[Virginia Department of Education’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers](http://ttaconline.org/regional-ttacs)

Distance learning presents challenges for both teachers and families, especially when designing instruction for students with disabilities. Teachers are known for their creativity and flexibility. Connecting often with other colleagues who are providing special education instruction online presents opportunities to share lessons, strategies and effective resources and problem solve about the use of assistive technology.