



Home, Sweet Home
(and Other Friendly, Welcoming Environments)



- Vision Supports -

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

People who *don't* have disabilities modify their environments and use tools to make life better. People *with* disabilities may also need modifications in their environments and tools to make life better. This is one in a series of articles about ways to create accessible, friendly, and welcoming environments for all.

Need some vision supports or accommodations? There are lots of great products on the market today, and others you can make at home!

When my son, Benjamin, was four, we got him started at the computer (recognizing that a computer would be his “pen and paper”). Even though his vision was “corrected” by glasses, we learned that magnification was still helpful, as were bright colors (black and white images were hard for him to identify), and he sometimes needed assistance with “finding things in space.”

Benjamin was excited about learning to type his name, but his eyes had to search for the keys he wanted. Instead of buying one of the (expensive) keyboards with colored keys, I modified the keyboard myself using a package of colored “dots” from the office supply store. Here’s how: I placed a yellow dot on each letter of Benjamin’s name, then put a different color on each row of keys (blue on the top row, green on the next, and so forth). I used a permanent marker to re-label each key with the right letter or number, and trimmed the dots to fit the keys.

When Benj sat at the keyboard, I’d say, “Look for the yellow keys,” to write his name. For other words and letters, I’d say, “Look on the red row...” (or the other rows, depending on the word). Before long, he had the hang of it and didn’t need any more prompts. Within a few months, he had learned where all the keys were, and no longer needed the colored dots! Also, he quickly learned to use 18-point type when

writing, so he could see the words on the screen and read them once his document was printed.

Today, he uses Dragon Naturally-Speaking voice recognition software on his computer, so he can simply dictate whatever he wants to write. Similarly, with his tablet and/or smartphone, he can skip typing altogether and use the built-in voice recorder to compose a note, email, etc. instead of typing.

We’ve ordered large print books from bookstores, and with his tablet (or computer), Benj can get most books or magazines electronically and adjust the type size to meet his needs.

When Benjamin reads, a tabletop easel brings the book, magazine, and/or tablet closer to his eyes and puts the reading material at a better angle. Easels can be purchased at office supply stores or you can make one yourself. And a desk lamp with the “sunlight” type bulb is really helpful. A digital watch and a digital clock, both with large displays, have enabled Benjamin to keep track of time.

Other great products can be found on store shelves, in catalogs, and on websites: oversized kitchen timers; page magnifiers and those cool “dome” magnifiers; TV/computer screen magnifiers; big button phones, remotes, and calculators; talking calculators, devices, computer software; oversized decks cards, dominoes, and dice; and so much more!

An Internet search using “low vision products” will lead you to a variety of helpful websites. The appropriate vision supports can enable children and adults to enjoy all that life has to offer!