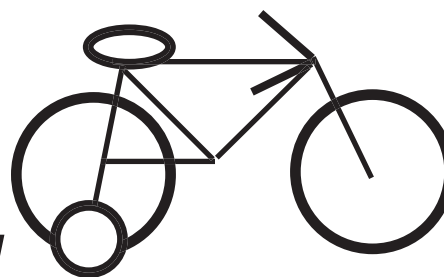


Remember the Bicycle!



by Kathie Snow

While traveling around the country doing presentations, I've been amazed (and dismayed) to learn how many children and adults with disabilities don't have the tools they need for success (assistive technology devices). For a variety of reasons, professionals, parents, therapists, and others who have great influence over the lives of children and adults with disabilities say things like, "Well, Johnny isn't able to use [a power wheelchair, communication device, or whatever]."

In too many cases, however, the person with a disability has never been given the opportunity to try the device! Those around him presume incompetence. Other times, we give a person one brief opportunity to try out a new device (or accommodation), and if the person doesn't "get it" immediately, we assume she's incapable of benefiting from it. We don't consider that she might

need more time or a different device. The "bicycle story," however, enables many to gain a new perspective.

When your parents bought your first bicycle, did you know how to ride it? In most cases, the answer is NO! But they bought it for you anyway, with no

guarantee you would be successful at mastering the two-wheeler. They presumed competence!

As adults, we buy computers and other tools before we know how to use them. We presume competence in ourselves. How would

it feel, though, if a salesperson gave you the once-over and said he would not sell you a computer because he didn't think you'd ever learn how to use it?

So when thinking about what tools and accommodations would enable a person with a disability to achieve success, remember the bicycle and *presume competence!*

People who don't have disabilities buy things before they know how to use them. Why don't we do the same for people with disabilities?