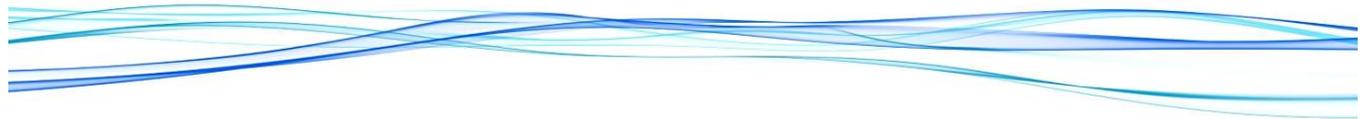# Help is Here: Assistive Technology

For a person without a disability, technology makes life easier.

For a person with a disability, technology makes life possible.

If your child has a disability, you will want to know about assistive technology (AT). AT enables individuals with disabilities to perform things they were formerly unable to accomplish at home, in school, in the community and on the job. AT can lead to increased independence, self-confidence and participation in everyday life. Understanding what AT is and how it works is the first step toward finding the right tools for your child.

Assistive Technology Act

The Assistive Technology Act was first passed by Congress and signed by the President as the Technology-Related Assistance Act of 1988. It's often called the Tech Act for short and has been reauthorized in 1994, 1998, and 2004.

A Look at Key Definitions

The Assistive Technology Act of 2004 defines an *assistive technology device* in the following way:

> …any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

AT devices can be "low tech," "medium tech," or "high tech." Devices can include, but are not limited to…

- accessibility adaptations and modifications at home, work and in the community
- augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices
- every day items – something as simple as a calculator, cell phone, computer, software, etc.
- mobility aids
- orthotics and prosthetics
- specialized equipment to help a person work, study and participate in social and recreation activities

An *assistive technology service* is defined as:

> …any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.

Examples of AT services include:

- an evaluation of the AT needs of an individual, including a functional evaluation of how AT would help the individual
- purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing an AT device
- selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, replacing, or donating an AT device
- coordinating and using therapies, such as occupational therapy or physical therapy, with AT devices under an educational plan or rehabilitative plan
- training or technical assistance for an individual with a disability, or his or her family members, guardians, advocates, or authorized representatives
- training or technical assistance for educational or rehabilitation professionals, manufacturers of AT devices, employers, providers of training and employment services, and others who help individuals with disabilities
- a service that expands access to technology, including email and Internet, to persons with disabilities.

What are the Benefits of Assistive Technology?

Any technology that enables someone to do something they otherwise couldn't facilitates access and the opportunity to achieve a task previously determined unreachable. It provides new ways to,

- accomplish day-to-day activities
- communicate
- control the environment
- demonstrate understanding
- learn

- move about
- play
- receive instruction
- work
- access life

How do I Know What Assistive Technology I Need?

You may want to have an assistive technology evaluation. The evaluation will determine what your needs are and how assistive technology devices and services can help you to function more independently in your daily life.

For every student who receives special education services, the ARD/IEP committee must consider whether the student needs assistive technology devices and services.

Who Pays for AT?

- Charitable Organizations – here are a few… Fund It Forward, Variety the Children's Charity of Texas , Lexi Kazian Foundation, Texas Elks Special Grants … there are many more
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – (IDEA)
- Medicaid
- Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver Programs
- Medicare
- Private Medical Insurance
- Social Security Administration Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) Program
- Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP)

Arc Greater Mid Cities – W) www.arcgmc.org – F) @ArcGMC – E) info@arcmgc.org

- Texas Technology Access Program (TTAP)
- Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program

Where Can I Learn More?

RESOURCE	RESOURCE DESCRIPTION
AAC Institute	This is the website of the AAC Institute, a non-profit organization "dedicated to the most effective communication for people who rely on augmentative and alternative communication."
AbleData	This site provides access to a database of products; a consumer forum for product review; assistive technology information and conferences; web links and more.
Assistive Technology, Strategy, Tools, Accommodations, Resources – ATSTAR	ATSTAR is an online curriculum designed to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities by helping teachers learn to use assistive technology in the classroom.
Bartleby	An internet publisher of literature, reference, and verse that provides students, researchers, and the intellectually curious with unlimited access to books and information on the web, free of charge.
Benetech - Accessible Books for Texas	The Accessible Books for Texas project that conducts trainings for educators, districts, schools, as well as webinar support.
Bookshare	Bookshare is free accessible online library for individuals with print disabilities. People of all ages, as well as schools and many organizations around the globe can access the books they need for school, work, career advancement, skill development and the simple love of reading in formats that work for them.
Center for Applied Special Technology – CAST	CAST works to expand educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities through the development and innovative uses of technology. Their focus is on the "Universal Design for Learning" model and their National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum.
Center for Parent Information and Resources – CPIR, Considering Assistive Technology	Information, including a checklist, found on this page is designed to help ARD/IEP teams consider the assistive technology needs of students with disabilities.
Center on Technology and Disability – CTD	The CTD provides a wealth of free resources – personal and professional development webinars, articles, guides, training materials and more.

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology – DO-IT	The DO-IT Center promotes awareness and accessibility—in both the classroom and the workplace—to maximize the potential of individuals with disabilities.
International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication – ISAAC	ISAAC is a membership organization working to improve the lives of children and adults with complex communication needs.
National Assistive Technology Research Institute – NATRI	NATRI conducts assistive technology (AT) research, translates theory and research into AT practice, and provides resources for improving the delivery of AT services.
National Center on Accessible Educational Materials	The AEM site provides resources for educators, parents, students and others interested in learning more about and implementing Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) and the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS). The website features FAQs for families, decision-making tools and videos to assist students who have difficulties with traditional print-based instructional materials.
Pass It On Center	The National AT Reuse Center creates national and state resources to foster the appropriate reuse of AT so that people with disabilities can get the affordable AT they need in order to live, learn, work and play more independently.
PrAACtical AAC Facebook Page	This Facebook group is a safe place for parents and professionals to gather & share information about AAC.
Santa's Little Hackers	Santa's Little Hackers is a seasonal toy drive to adapt toys. They make simple modifications to the electronics of toys and give them away. These adaptations make the toys accessible to individuals with disabilities so they can play independently.
Seedlings Braille Books for Children	Seedlings Braille Books for Children is a dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy by providing high quality, free and low cost Braille books for children.
Texas Assistive Technology Network – TATN	The TATN website has online training modules regarding AT assessment and implementation, as well as a wealth of AT resources and AT Links. They also host the Annual Texas Assistive Technology Network Statewide Conference.
Technology and Media Division – TAM of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)	TAM provides links to online publications including the Journal of Special Education Technology, the TAM Connector, and other resources.

Texas Technology Access Program – TTAP	TTAP leads the state's efforts to carry out the federal Assistive Technology Act of 2004. Their programs are designed to improve access, advocacy and awareness of Assistive Technology.
Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative – WATI	The WATI site offers publications and resources regarding assistive technology, the assessment process and more.
Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Connecting Young Kids – YAACK	YAACK provides a great deal of information about AAC and related issues for children and includes: Getting Started, Choosing an AAC System, and Teaching.

Assistive Technology is limited only by our imagination!