

AN OVERVIEW

Assistive Technology (AT)

What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive Technology (AT) refers to any item, tool, or system that helps individuals with disabilities perform tasks they would otherwise find difficult or impossible. AT supports independence, communication, learning, mobility, and participation in everyday life.

Definition

According to federal law, AT includes:

- **Devices:** Any equipment or product system used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.
- **Services:** Any service that directly assists an individual in selecting, acquiring, or using AT devices effectively.



Examples of Assistive Technology

- **Aids for Daily Living:** Adapted clothing, grab bars, jar openers
- **Mobility Aids:** Wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes
- **Communication Aids:** AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices, voice amplifiers
- **Low Vision Aids:** Magnifiers, screen readers, large print materials
- **Assistive Listening Devices:** Hearing aids, alerting systems with flashing lights
- **Computer Access:** Adapted keyboards, alternative input devices, screen readers
- **Environmental Control Units:** Devices to control lights, doors, or appliances
- **Recreational Tools:** Braille board games, visual schedules, adapted sports equipment

Key Aspects of Assistive Technology

- **Low-Tech to High-Tech:** Ranges from simple tools like pencil grips to advanced systems like powered wheelchairs or speech-generating devices.
- **Individualized:** There is no one-size-fits-all. Devices must be chosen based on a person's unique strengths, needs, and environments.
- **Broad Applications:** Used in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities to support learning, communication, self-care, mobility, and more.

AN OVERVIEW

Assistive Technology (AT)



Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

AAC refers to methods of communication other than verbal speech used to express needs, thoughts, and emotions.

Types of AAC:

- No-Tech: Gestures, facial expressions, body language
- Low-Tech: Picture boards or schedules, communication cards
- High-Tech: Speech-generating devices, communication apps



Who Needs AAC?

Individuals with complex communication needs, including those who are non-speaking or minimally verbal, may benefit from AAC. It can supplement spoken language or serve as a primary mode of communication.



Consideration Process

AAC assessment is a collaborative team effort involving educators, therapists, the family, and the individual. It focuses on identifying the most appropriate communication method and how it will support educational, vocational, social, and functional goals. This can include trials that allow the individual to test various AT options to see what works best for their specific needs. The time it takes to get a device can vary greatly, and could even take 6 mo. to a year, depending on many factors. These factors include the type of device, trial periods, funding sources, whether the device is customized, and the availability of the assessment team.



Tip: Check out the resource "[Five Signs Your Child May Need AAC](#)" to better understand AAC candidacy.

ACQUIRING AAC DEVICES

Assistive Technology (AT)

Once a team agrees on the appropriate AAC tool, the next step is to explore options for acquiring the device.



Funding Sources

- **Public Schools:** May cover devices if included in an IEP.
- **Health Benefits Programs:** Private insurance, Medicaid, Virginia Medicaid Waiver Assistive Technology and Electronic Home Based Services funds, Medicare, and TRICARE.
- **State & Community Resources:**
 - *Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS)*
 - *Children's Assistive Technology Service (CATS)*
 - *Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center*
 - *Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority*
 - *Easter Seals*
- **Charitable Foundations**
- **Out-of-Pocket:** Some families may contribute personal funds or combine resources from several sources.

Note: Often, more than one funding stream is needed. Early planning and documentation during assessment and IEP/IFSP meetings can help streamline the funding process.

Assistive Technology opens doors to greater independence, inclusion, and quality of life. Whether simple or complex, these tools help individuals with disabilities achieve their full potential.

“AT isn’t just about the device—it’s about empowering people to thrive.”

