

## The Ins and Outs of Assistive Technology Safety



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of **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**  
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# Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Gain a basic understanding of the range of assistive devices used by people with disabilities
- Learn about the tactics of abuse using assistive tech
- Gain an understanding of how assistive technology can be used to enhance safety planning for people with disabilities

# Adaptive and Assistive Technology

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## Adaptive technology

**Adaptive technology** refers to special versions of already existing technologies or tools that provide enhancements or different ways of interacting with the technology. The adaptation helps individuals with a disability accomplish a specific task.

## Examples of Adaptive Technology:

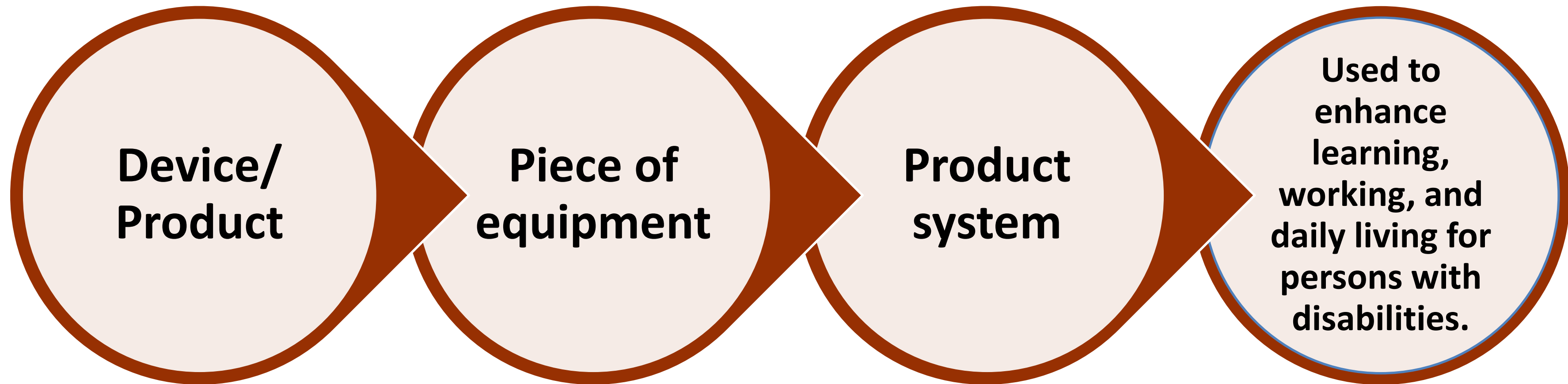
- Large print books
- Digitized text
- Good lighting
- Large monitors
- Software to adjust screen colors
- Computers with voice output
- Computers with visual output
- Electronic mail
- Word prediction software
- Adjustable tables
- Keyboard modifications
- Alternative types of keyboard and mouse
- Accessibility tools built into popular OS, browsers, and software

## Assistive Technology

Adaptive technology also includes what is known as **“assistive technology.”**

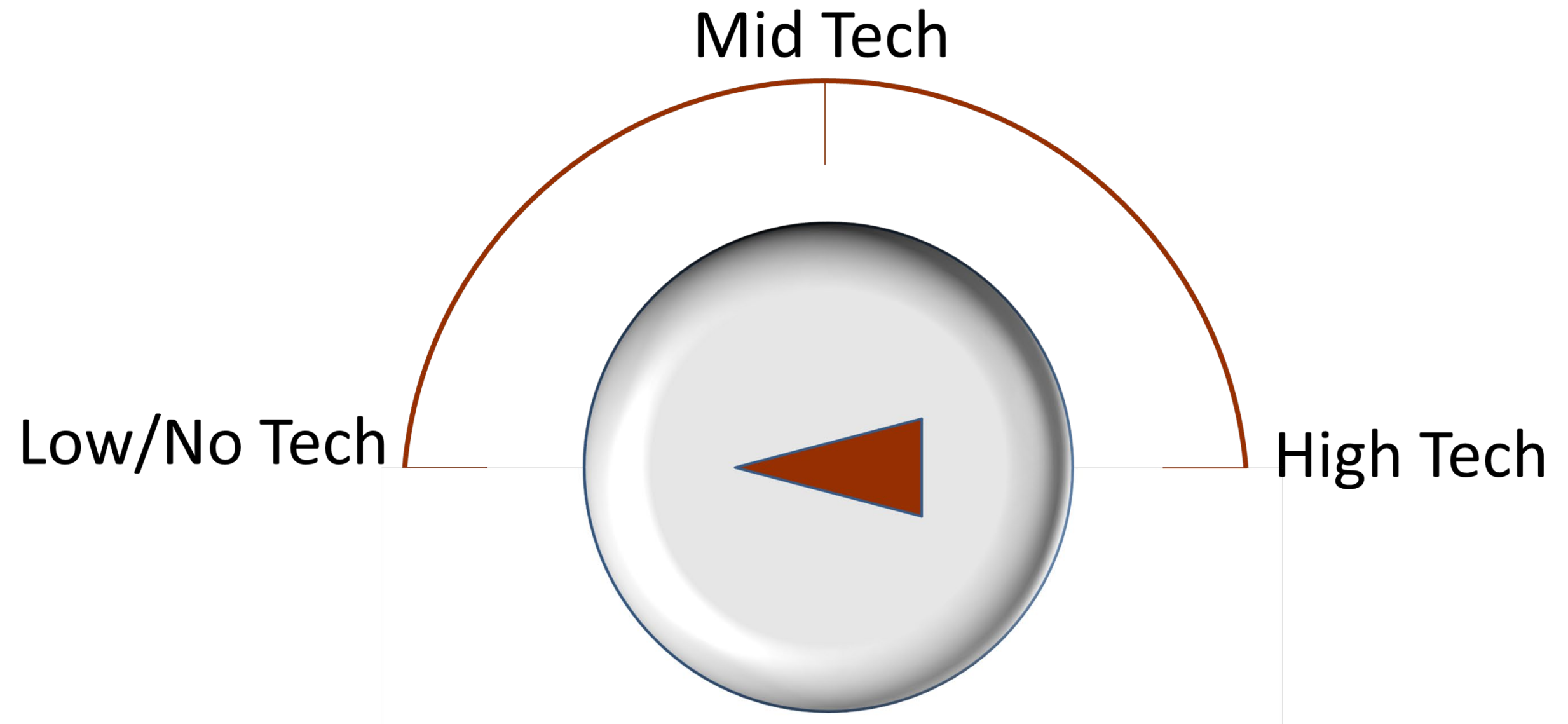
This term refers to any low-, mid-, or high-tech tool or device that helps people with disabilities perform tasks with greater ease and/or independence.

# Assistive technology (AT)



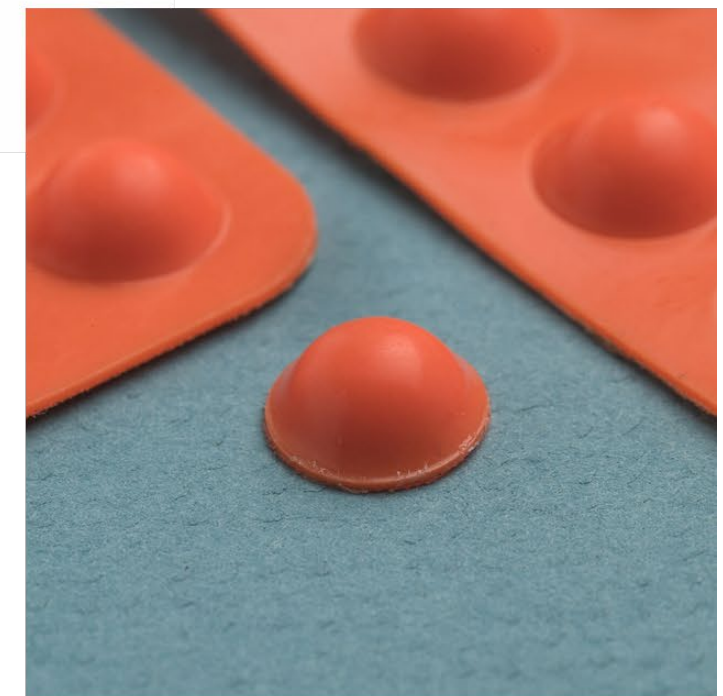
## Low/No Tech

**Low or no tech** devices are non-electronic, typically low cost, they are easy to use and are readily available.





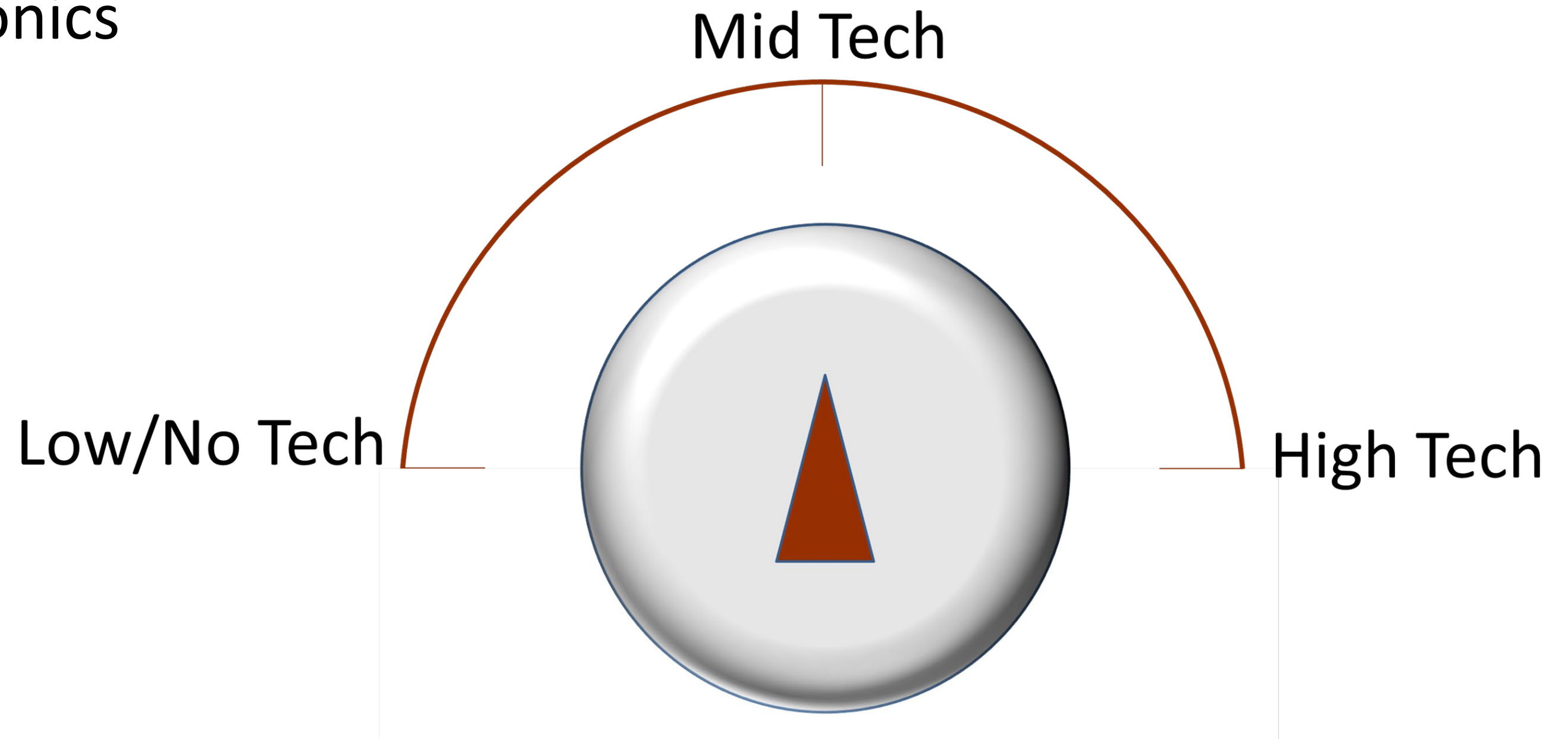
# Low/No Tech Examples



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## Mid Tech

**Mid tech** is more complicated, it might require some training, will require maintenance, is of medium cost, it can be harder to find and may involve electronics





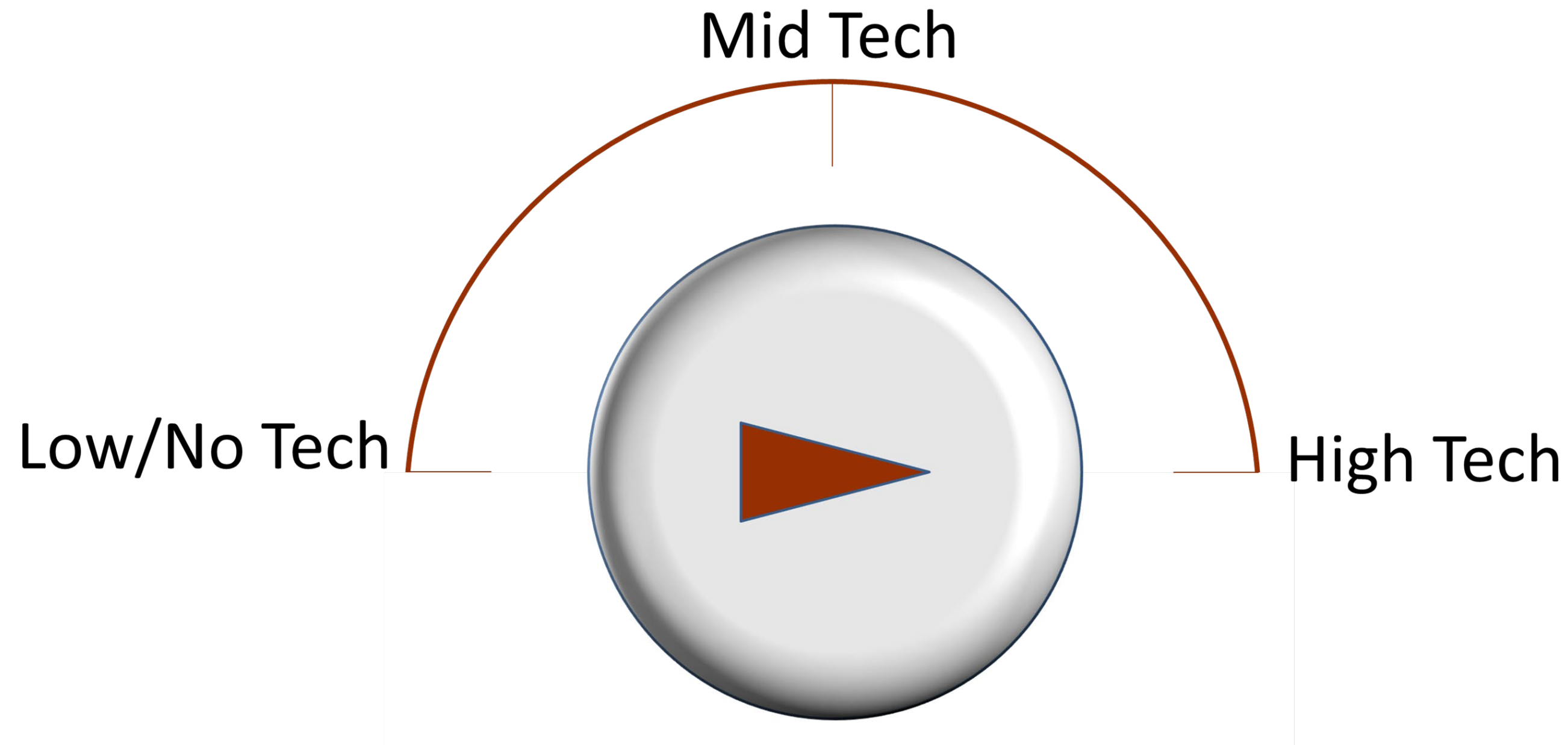
# Mid Tech Examples



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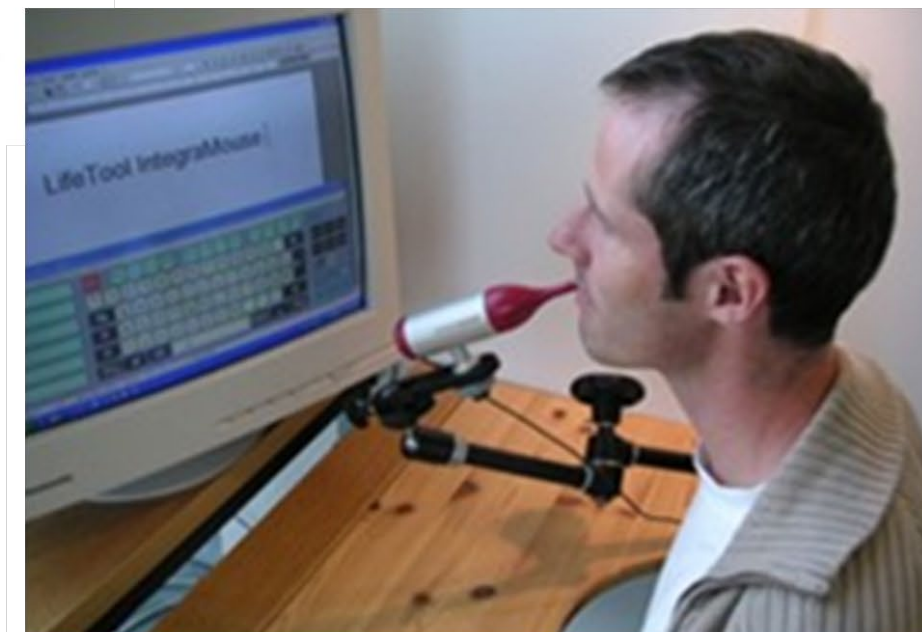
## High Tech

**High tech** devices are sophisticated, cost more, they are not readily available, have more features and functions, can be complicated to learn, electronic and have high maintenance.





# High Tech Examples



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## How Assistive Technology Helps

Helps people to:

- Communicate,
- Read,
- Get around (mobility),
- Perform activities of daily living
- Learn, and
- Work

## Communication: AAC

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices are a way for people to communicate when they do not have the physical ability to use verbal speech or writing. AAC systems **help people with communication disorders to express** their thoughts, needs and ideas.

AAC is used by those with a wide range of speech and language disabilities due to cerebral palsy, autism, spinal muscular atrophy and head injuries. These devices can range from a simple picture board to a computer program that synthesizes speech from text.



# Example Communication Devices

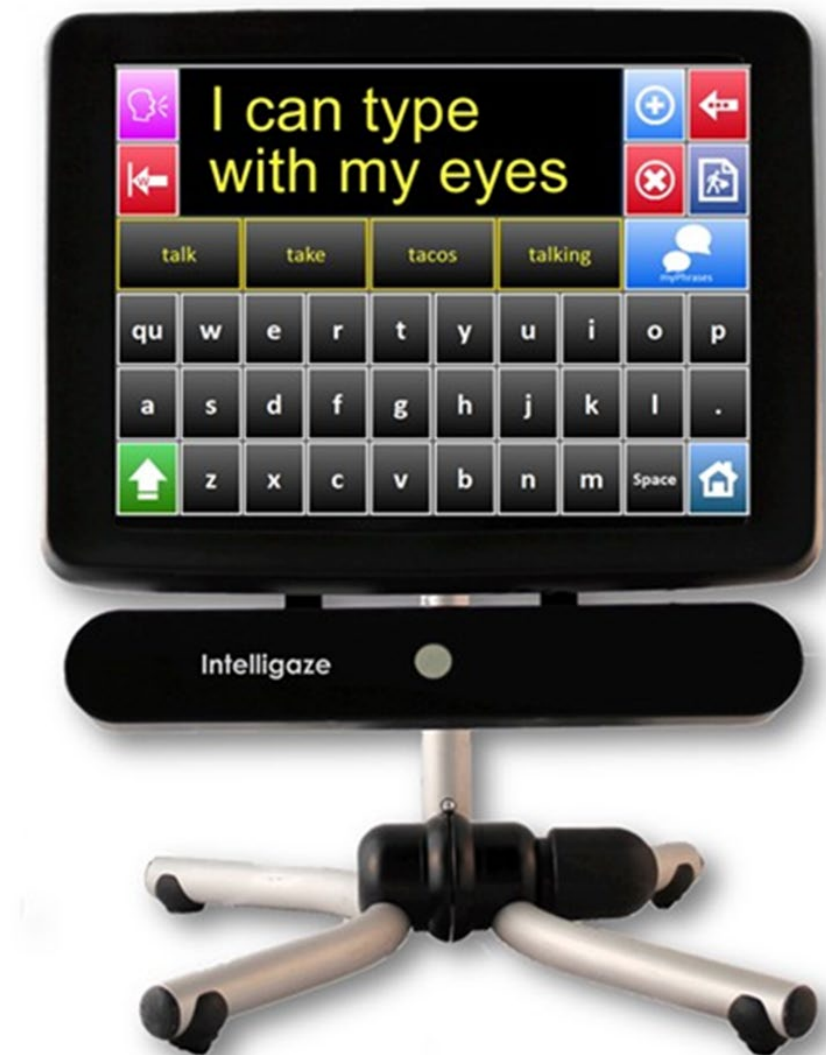
## Low/No Tech



## Mid Tech



## High Tech



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## Reading

There is a wide range of assistive technology (AT) tools available to help individuals who struggle with reading. While each type of tool works a little differently, all of these tools help by presenting text as speech. These tools help facilitate decoding, reading fluency, and comprehension.

These systems can display and read aloud text on a computer screen, including text that has been typed by the user, scanned in from printed pages (e.g., books, letters), or text appearing on the Internet.

# Example Reading Devices

## Low/No Tech



## Mid Tech



## High Tech



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## Mobility

Devices intended to help with mobility include **wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, crutches, canes, and orthotic devices.**

Adaptive tools, like utensils, keyboards or switches allow those people with physical disabilities that limit their motor skills to eat, write, cook, dress, groom, play games or use their smartphones, tablets and computers.



# Example Mobility Devices

Low/No Tech



Mid Tech



High Tech



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# Activities of Daily Living (ADL)

The activities of daily living (ADLs) is a term used to collectively describe fundamental skills required to independently care for oneself. The basic ADL include the following categories:

- Walking and moving about,
- Feeding,
- Dressing,
- Personal hygiene,
- Continence, and
- Toileting



# Example ADL Devices

## Low/No Tech



## Mid Tech



## High Tech



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## Learning/Working

Assistive technology enables people with disabilities to participate more fully in all aspects of life (home, school, work and community) and increases a person's opportunities for education, employment, and social interactions. It also supports a person's participation in learning and working experiences in the least restrictive environment. Assistive technology is a tool to help the person benefit from the general education curriculum, and access extracurricular activities in home, school, and work environments.



# Examples of Devices for Learning/Working

## Low/No Tech



## Mid Tech



## High Tech



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# What does the Assistive Technology misuse look like?

## Misuse of Assistive Technology

The misuse of assistive technology and devices **can prevent a survivor from navigating tasks of daily living and can pose serious safety risks for a survivor.** Advocates should have a basic understanding of how these devices might be misused and ask survivors about specific concerns and experiences they may have.

# Tactic 1

## Monitoring or Intercepting Communications

- Accessing entire, verbatim conversations by printing or retrieving the history from the device's memory.
- Monitoring all computer/tablet/device activity through spyware or other monitoring software.
- Using technology like GPS to monitor and track the person's movements.



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## Tactic 2

### Misusing Communication Devices to Impersonate the Survivor

- Impersonating the survivor and misleading those close to the survivor. For example: contacting an agency through a TTY or a relay system, pretending to be the survivor, and requesting a protection order or other charges be dropped.



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## Tactic 3

### Misusing Communication Devices to Harass the Survivor

- Using communication devices to threaten or taunt the survivor. For example:
  - calling or texting repeatedly or
  - sending unwanted messages

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## Tactic 4

### Breaking or Tampering with Assistive Technology Devices

- Disabling or breaking the assistive technology to control the survivor. For example:
  - altering an electronic device's settings so that it doesn't function properly or
  - destroying a wheelchair to limit the survivor's mobility.



## Tactic 5

### Denying Access to Assistive Technology Devices

- Isolating the survivor by limiting, withholding or removing assistive devices so that they are not accessible.





## Tactic 6

### Injuring the Survivor to Prevent Use of the Assistive Technology Device

- Physically harming the survivor so that they can't use the technology. For example: purposely breaking the survivor's fingers so that they cannot use a touchscreen.





# Safety Planning and Assistive Technology

# Integrating AT into Safety Planning



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# Safety Planning

Advocates should know how to safety plan with survivors about the misuse of assistive technology. This may include:

- Help survivors identify safer or more private devices for communication.
- If impersonation is a concern, advocates and survivors can agree on code phrases that only the survivor knows to ensure that it really is the survivor.
- Help survivors find replacements or repairs for technology damaged by an abusive person.
- Include assistive technology planning when survivors are seeking services or relocating. If a survivor is not able to bring their technology with them, strategize about finding replacements.

## Safety Idea

When safe to do so:

- Clear internet and phone memory
- Turn off location finding
- Position monitors in a way that someone is unable to read or see what you are looking at
- Use headphones for programs that speak (i.e., screen readers)
- Scan computers before and after use for spyware and other unwanted programs

Clear browsing data

Basic Advanced

Time range All time

- ☒ Browsing history  
Clears history, including in the search box
- ☒ Cookies and other site data  
Signs you out of most sites.
- ☒ Cached images and files  
Frees up 319 MB. Some sites may load more slowly on your next visit.

G Other forms of activity may be saved in your Google Account when you're signed in. You can delete them anytime.

Your search engine is Secure Search. See their instructions for deleting.

Cancel Clear data

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## Preparing to Leave

Put AT related items in a safe place:

- Extra batteries/charging cords for devices
- Contact information for service dog's vet/service dog records
- Copies of reference cards/equipment manuals and
- Phone numbers for equipment repair services/replacement parts

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## During the Violence



- Obtain a second cell phone for emergency calls
  - Hide a phone between the cushion and armrest of a wheelchair
- Pre-record an emergency message.
- Create safe words to let others know that you are unable to talk on the phone or video phone
  - Create a signal for neighbors to indicate they need to call the police
- Use low tech devices and keep devices out of sight when the person hurting you is angry or using substances.
- Transfer into wheelchair to keep yourself mobile

## Safety Planning: Protecting Yourself

- Remove armrest from manual wheelchair or use canes/crutches to protect self from blows
- Use wheelchair to cause attacker pain
- Use assistive device to create a barrier between yourself and the person abusing you.



## Questions to Ask Survivor

- What is their device?
- How does it work?
- What task does it help you with?
- Where is it available (i.e. independent living center)?
- Where can you keep it, so it is safe when not in use?
- Have you used anything else for that task?



## Collaborating on Safety Planning

Disability and/or assistive technology providers can help by:

- Adding emergency words to communication devices
- Finding alternate means of communication
- Creating alternate voice command to contact police for speech activated devices
- Recording an emergency message for someone with a communication disability.
- Identifying other devices that increases a person's safety

# Other Safety Planning Tools

# There's an App for that



- Voice4u AAC
- Emergency Chat
- Red Panic Button

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# AT Funding

[Assistive Technology Industry Association Funding Resources Guide](#)

[Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America](#)

[National Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance and Training \(AT3\) Center](#)

[Medicare](#)

[Medicaid](#)



## Resources

- [SafetyNet](#) for more information on technology safety.

# Questions



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