

# Assistive Technology



## How the Technology Works

Assistive Technology is an umbrella term that includes any device, equipment, product, or service that: increases, maintains, or improves access; decreases or removes systemic barriers; and supports accessibility, autonomy, and self-determination for individuals with disabilities or who are Deaf.

Assistive technology can be any technology that is used to increase safety and accessibility for people who:

- Are Deaf or hard-of-hearing
- Are blind or have low vision
- Have mental or psychiatric disabilities
- Have cognitive/development disabilities
- Have physical/motor disabilities
- Have multiple or invisible disabilities

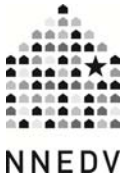
Assistive technology can include mobility devices, such as wheelchairs, or computer software and equipment to facilitate communication and daily living. For example, video phones and TTYs (teletypewriter or text telephone) are commonly used by people who are Deaf. Hand-held devices that bring up emails via a refreshable Braille keyboard under someone's fingertips and screen readers that speak text aloud can increase accessibility for people who are blind or have low vision. Voice synthesizers enable someone's computer to speak what they type; speech recognition and point-of-gaze software supports hands-free computer access. Any popular technology can also be considered assistive technology if it increases access.

## How Are Agencies and Partnerships Using It?

- Increasing overall agency accessibility is necessary in order to support survivors and is legally mandated.
- Many agencies use assistive technology to increase accessibility. For example, door bells and fire alarms can be set to either flash lights for people who are Deaf or to make sounds and disable the lights for people with epilepsy.
- Many agencies use TTYs or relay services to ensure that their agency's services are accessible. For example, agencies proposing or enhancing phone hotlines should provide alternative accessible forms of communication that meet the needs of people who are Deaf, hard-of-hearing, or have a speech disability. Alternative options, like a TTY line or other service should be publicized along side the regular hotline number. In addition, agencies can use relay services or remote video interpreter services to communicate with survivors and advocates who are Deaf.
- Agencies offering computer services, websites, and online information should ensure that they are accessible to all clients and provide software or assistive devices that enable accessibility. For example, agencies can set their website to allow the user to increase font size, magnify a webpage, or change colors. (See also: *Web Accessibility tip sheet.*)

## Benefits and Risks

Abusers may monitor or intercept communications and break or tamper with assistive technology devices. Abusers may also purposely hurt the victim so that they cannot use their assistive technology device (such as breaking the victim's fingers or hand).



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### Benefits and Risks (continued)

- Perpetrators also misuse communication devices to impersonate the victim. For example, an abuser may contact an agency through a TTY or a relay system, pretend to be the victim, and request a protection order or other charges be dropped. Agencies can plan for this possibility by creating code phrases that only the victim knows to ensure that it really is the victim. Agencies staff should be trained to safety plan on all ways abusers misuse assistive technology.

### Things To Consider

- What is the agency doing to continually assess and address broader accessibility of services for all victims? Has the agency done an accessibility audit, have they talked to people with disabilities, and do they have a plan? Are they requesting sufficient funding for AT equipment, changing program policies, and providing ongoing training for staff?
- How will the agency ensure competent, appropriate, safe and secure use of a service or device? For example, if they want to install video phones, are they working with a Deaf advocacy center and video interpreter services? If they have a TTY or take relay calls, can they safety plan about the relay services and device usage?
- Will the agency partner with local Deaf advocacy and disability service providers for cross-training, referrals, and assistance? If a partnership already exists, what steps have been taken to improve their services in order to increase accessibility and decrease barriers?
- How will the agency ensure that any equipment they use or purchase is current and will be effective for communicating with survivors?