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## Who is this guide for?

This guide is for families and carers of children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability. It will teach you about assistive technology (AT) that may support your child's independence at home and in the community.

## Why is supporting children at home and in the community important?

Supports are available to help children have independence at home for everyday tasks. For example, getting dressed, washing, going to the toilet, eating and drinking, and moving around.

AT can also support your child's participation in their recreation activities in the community. Engagement is important for your child's physical and mental wellbeing and helps them to participate and enjoy their life.

### What assistive technology support options are available?

Research is limited for AT that supports children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability at home and in the community. This does not mean AT is not a useful option to consider; just that there has been limited research in this area to date.

It is important that the selection of AT is matched to the needs of the child and the carer supporting them. A trial is always helpful to make sure the AT is going to work in practice. You may find the ATs listed below are available through your NDIS plan, or [mainstream and community supports](#). The supports listed are not exhaustive and there may be other supports available.

AT supports will look different for every child and family. Your child may use more than one AT depending on their needs. Your child may also change AT supports as they grow and develop and their needs and goals change.

The key to the successful use of AT in your child's daily life is taking a family-centred approach. This means working with a team of professionals and family members where your child learns and develops their everyday abilities and skills.

For more information about the family-centred approach, refer to [ECI Best Practice Early Childhood Guidelines](#).

## **Supporting your child at home with assistive technology**

There are a range of evidence-based AT products to support your child at home.

Does your child need support to get themselves ready for the day?

### **Independent grooming and dressing**

- Sock aids, shoehorns and adapted shoelaces (to help put on shoes or tights).
- Adapted fastenings such as velcro buttons or devices to assist with zippers and buttons.
- Long-handled combs, brushes, slip-on D handles or built-up handles for mainstream brushes and combs.

### **Cognitive supports to support daily planning and routines**

Cognitive support devices help a person with thinking, planning and learning skills for increased independence. Many children will develop their own way of learning, remembering, problem-solving and paying attention, and become less reliant on cognitive support devices. Others will continue to need cognitive support from their AT or others.

Devices to support cognitive tasks may include mainstream devices with attentional features (alarms, timers, visual displays), or specific disability-related computer software, smartphone Apps and specifically programmed robots.

Other cognitive support devices may be useful for supporting the development of age-appropriate skills such as:

- helping with food preparation and making simple food (drinks and snacks)
- following instructions (such as putting away toys, helping with household tasks, folding and putting away laundry or food preparation)
- remembering to move to the next stage of a task or finish and start a new task
- ability to engage intentionally visually with an object to develop ability to use eye gaze switches or learn to read
- safety – stranger danger, power points and home/school environments (street crossing)
- planning and reminders for tasks: homework, sports and chores.

Cognitive supports may also encourage socialising through:

- learning social skills (reasoning about where to sit)
- time perception (putting events or tasks in the right order)

- imagination (using objects in an irregular way)
- emotional orientation (asking children to empathise with the emotion of a character in a particular situation)

## **Does your child need support at mealtimes?**

### **Independent eating and drinking**

Special or customised cutlery, plates, cups, non-slip mats and bottles to support children to feed, eat and drink safely and independently. Speech pathologists and occupational therapists can help in this area.

### **Toileting and bathing**

Toileting and bathing devices help a child who needs additional assistance for these tasks. Equipment can also reduce the demands on parents and carers to lift and hold their child. A range of adaptive aids are available to help a child learn to be more independent when washing and cleaning. These devices include:

- specialised toilet seats and supportive over-toilet chairs
- sponges, and brushes with longer handles
- supportive bath seats and shower chairs
- non-slip mats
- bath seats and bath lifts
- custom change tables.

Another form of AT is home adaption devices. These include:

- grab rails
- handheld shower heads
- mixer taps
- platform steps to allow use of a basin
- large rocker light or wall socket switches.

Mainstream smart technology may also be useful for some families and they may wish to invest in it.

### **Continence products**

Children and young people with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability often use continence products (like nappies) for toileting. From birth you will generally look after your child's daily toileting support needs.

We may fund continence products if your child needs more help than other children of the same age without disability. We can only fund continence supports if we have evidence they are related to your child's developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability.

Evidence can include a continence assessment, which is completed by a continence nurse or other suitably qualified health professional. You can read more about [What types of continence supports do we fund?](#)

You can find information about continence nurse specialists and continence providers through the Australian Government Initiative, National Continence Program: [Incontinence prevention, management & support](#)

[\(Continence Foundation of Australia\)](#) . Helpful resources for when you need suitable continence products can be found on the [Continence provider list](#).

## **Does your child need support to be comfortable and independent in their own home?**

### **Supported seating, standing and lying systems**

There are many devices that can support children to sit, stand and lie down safely and comfortably.

- Specialised seating devices can provide postural support to a child while seated. They aim to promote an upright position of the child, encouraging good alignment, comfort, and enhanced communication, socialisation and participation. Seating systems are commonly used with indoor posture chairs and wheelchairs.
- Standing frames are used to support a child to stand safely. They are used when a child needs additional support to remain upright. A child will often need assistance to transfer into the device, and different postural supports may be used to assist your child to maintain a comfortable standing position. Standing frames can also aid participation for different activities in different settings.
- Supported lying systems are specialised cushions, foam covered brackets or other forms of contouring that are used with or without a specialised mattress. Supported lying systems are used on a bed to support a child's body during sleep and rest. There can be safety concerns when using sleep positioning devices, so you should always discuss whether this technology is suitable with an occupational therapist or physiotherapist.
- Specialised beds and mattresses are needed by some children to make sure they are safe and comfortable when sleeping and resting. Certain features may be selected for the child to promote comfort, safety and to reduce the risk of pressure injury. There can be safety issues with beds and mattresses, so you should always seek advice from an occupational therapist or physiotherapist before purchasing these items.

### **Switches/buttons**

- Switches are devices to help control technology and electronics. They are activated and controlled by body movements or actions such as moving a finger or arm, head turning, touching or pushing, or chin movement. These movements enable children to access communication devices, environmental controls and computer software.
- Environmental controls are switches for things like lights, to open and close doors, or turn on and off air conditioning, music and call buttons. Mainstream smart home technology gives the opportunity for all people (not just those with disability) living in a home the ability to operate environmental controls through their voice or a noise they make. For example, a child may use a switch by pushing an adapted button to turn on a device or use voice-activated speakers if a switch or button is not appropriate for your child. Switches can also be found on toys to enable children to have increased independence and interact with their environment.

### **Home modifications**

Home modifications may also be considered as your child gets older. They may include things like a ceiling hoist or home automation. For more information, you can read [Home modifications explained](#). You may want to discuss this with your MyNDIS contact (who is your child's early childhood partner or planner), or the occupational therapist providing supports to your child. You can read more information about supports we fund on the [Would we fund it webpage](#).

## Mobile applications

There are a growing number of mobile and tablet applications (apps) available to support children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability.

Mobile and tablet apps for children are generally used for:

- communication
- increasing function like moving and play
- cognitive functions like planning and organising
- providing education and information
- communicating with other parents and families
- skill development for children like improving visual recognition of numbers.

Not all apps that could be helpful will meet the requirements to be funded through your child's NDIS plan.

## Supporting your child's recreation activities with assistive technology

Participation in recreation activities provides children the opportunity to get involved and play with their family, peers and others. This may include riding a bike through their local community, playing outside or in a team sport, reading books, playing games, doing art or drawing.

These activities may positively affect your child's independence, social connections and confidence. It is important that your family considers your child's support needs and interests when making decisions about AT for participation in recreation activities.

Devices that assist children to participate in recreation activities may need to be adapted or altered to support children with play and engage in activities such as sports, hobbies and social activities.

These may include bikes or tricycles, frame runners (or race runners), switch-adapted toys (or game controllers), bell balls, tactile books or sports wheelchairs.

## Who should you talk to about supports for children at home and in the community?

You should talk to your MyNDIS contact (who is your child's early childhood partner or planner), providers, AT Advisor (early childhood professionals e.g., occupational therapist, orthoptist orientation and mobility specialist, early childhood educator or psychologist), organisations who support people with disabilities and their families, peer supports or other friends and family about AT to support your child at home or in the community. [Read more about Questions to ask providers.](#)

## Understanding when your child's AT may be a restrictive practice

When your child is provided with AT, it is intended to support their abilities and help them develop their skills and independence. In some cases, using AT or other methods to stop or prevent a person from moving or doing something against their will is called ‘restrictive practices’.

It is important that family members and other people that care for your child understand the rules and regulations of restrictive practices. You can discuss these with your allied health professional.

They can help you understand which rules or regulations need to be followed. You can read more about restrictive practices on our webpage [Understanding behaviour support and restrictive practices – for participants \(ndiscommission.gov.au\)](#) and in the report [Regulated Restrictive Practices with Children and Young People with Disability: Practice Guide 2021](#). ??

## Where else can you go for more information?

### NDIS resources

- [Our Guideline - Assistive technology](#)
- [‘Would we fund it’](#)
- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
  - Speak Up Resources
  - [NDIS Workforce Capability Framework](#)
- [NDIS Support Coordinators](#)
- [What do we mean by advice or an assessment?](#)

### Other resources

- [Disability Gateway](#): has information and services for people with disability, information specific to AT. These include:
  - Government programs and organisations that provide equipment
  - Communication aids and services
  - Using technology and staying connected
- [ARATA](#): Australian Rehabilitation & Assistive Technology Association has information about supporting and promoting best practice for rehabilitation and AT provision.
- [Vision Australia](#): has information about technology, products and supports to assist with daily tasks, school and play.
- AT databases: have information about all forms of AT available in Australia (and sometimes internationally), with information and links to suppliers across Australia.
  - [AskNED](#)
  - [AT Chat](#)
  - [Kindred](#)
- [Raising Children Network](#) : provides parents and carers with free, reliable, scientifically validated information. This information helps parents and carers keep their children healthy and developing well.

## References

1. National Disability Insurance Agency 2023. 'Assistive technology interventions to support children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability with their communication, mobility and independence. An Evidence Snapshot. Australia. Prepared by Armstrong R, Garrubba M, Sandford-Morgan E and Chandrakumar D.
2. [Raising Children's Network](#) .

## **Disclaimer**

This guide is designed to help you understand the range of AT supports for children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability. It does not imply that a specific support will automatically be included in your NDIS plan. Some supports may be provided outside of the NDIS. All of the supports included in your NDIS plan must meet the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#). You should read this guide alongside [Our Guideline - Our Guideline - Assistive technology](#).