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# BIRTH through 5 NEWS

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## Tots and Tech: Making Children's Lives Fun and Productive

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*This article is translated into Spanish on page 2. Ver la versión española de este artículo en la página 2, y todos los artículos a [www.birth23.org](http://www.birth23.org)*

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For all of us, technology makes things easier. But for people with disabilities— even infants and young children— technology often makes the seemingly impossible, possible. Remember what life was like before we used cell phones, sent email, or quickly found information on the Internet? We all depend on “assistants” – some which involve computers and high technology but others which are just simple aids that make life easier. For all of us, technology makes things easier – but for people with disabilities, even infants and young children, technology often makes the seemingly impossible – possible.

Think about a child who cannot hold onto a thin crayon or marker but who can enjoy drawing when the crayons are larger than normal or if the marker is held onto his hand with a simple strap device. Consider a child who is unable to walk, crawl, or roll but can get around independently in a walker or a motorized car bought off the shelf in a toy store. Often a child who does not communicate well with others can “talk” with a simple picture board or by pointing to objects, using a picture exchange system or gestures or sign language systems. Even the simplest of adaptations can help children participate in routines and activities in all the different places where they spend time during their early years.

### What is Assistive Technology (AT) for Young Children?

Technology is a broad term that relates to the application of science to a situation. When paired with

“assistive,” the term generally means that the technology is being used to help a person in some way. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) divides the term “AT” into two categories: devices and services. Devices are the things used by a child to perform a particular function or participate more independently in a routine or activity. Examples include:

- adaptations like adding a strap or thickening a handle
- switches on toys and materials
- wheelchairs, walkers
- special spoons, covered cups
- communication boards or talker toys

AT services are the strategies used to:

- help a child learn to use a device effectively, or
- determine the best device to try, or
- evaluate how well the device works in helping a child participate.

AT services may be provided by anyone who is knowledgeable about how to select devices that match a child's abilities and needs, help train the child to use them, and evaluate their effectiveness.

### Is AT for ALL children?

Just as all adults can find technology helpful, all children can benefit from its use. The same devices that help typical children do something more easily or more safely may make it possible for a child with a disability to do things in different













