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Department on
Disability Services

TECH FIRST

TOOL KIT

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Tech First Toolkit

DDS TECHFIRST
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What is Tech First?

Tech First is a philosophy that includes technology as a primary support option, not a last resort. At DDS, this means using Assistive and Enabling Technologies as tools and/or Remote Supports to empower people with disabilities to experience life on their own terms and achieve goals, whether it's living independently, being more productive at work, staying safe at home, or building social connections.

It's about starting with the person, identifying what matters most to them, and then exploring how technology can help get them there.

Why Tech First?

Tech First helps people live life on their own terms. By integrating technology into everyday supports, we create more opportunities for independence, privacy, and choice.

This approach also allows support teams to reallocate direct support, stretch resources, and build sustainable support models that grow with the person's needs and abilities. With the right planning, Tech First doesn't just meet needs, it unlocks potential.

What are Assistive& Enabling Tech and Remote Supports?

Enabling Tech (ET) & Assistive Technology (AT)

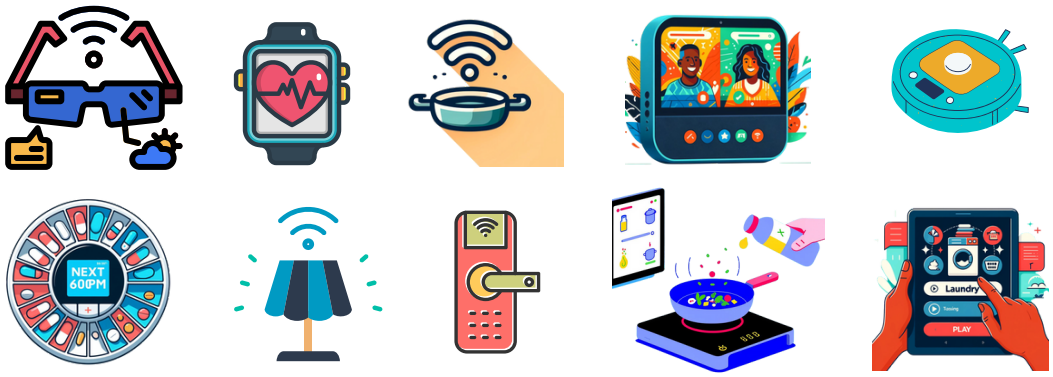
ET and AT are devices, apps, or software that empower people with disabilities to accomplish tasks with greater independence or achieve personal goals, whether at home, work, or in the community. People can get the tech tools they need through **AT Services under the IDD Waiver.**

Imagine controlling your home environment with smart speakers, or using a task management app that provides video modeling to help complete duties at work. Or using a wearable to navigate your community and to receive prompts to stay on top of fitness goals.

Remote Supports (RS)

Receiving assistance from a distance. RS enables people to stay connected through audio and video communication to receive the necessary support they need, without having to be in the same physical location as their support staff, job coach, or family caregiver. **It is not surveillance**

It empowers people to live more autonomously while still having access to real-time assistance when needed. This approach respects personal space and dignity, promotes self-determination, and helps people stay connected to support without relying solely on in-person staff.



AT is NOT RS

A common misunderstanding is that Assistive Technology (AT) and Remote Supports (RS) are the same thing. They are not.

AT/ET tools can be utilized by a person to achieve outcomes or goals with **or** without receiving remote supports.

AT includes Enabling Technology (ET), everyday tech that can be utilized by the person to reach personal outcomes and greater independence, even when there isn't a specific functional barrier.

Any tech the person requires to receive RS can be pursued via Assistive Technology Services. It does not cover the tech service providers need to deliver RS.

How to Access AT and/or RS?

Whether there's interest in Assistive Technology Services (AT) and/or Remote Supports (RS), it starts with requesting a discussion with your Service Coordinator and support planning team. AT Services can also fund a person's Enabling Technology (ET)

This guide explains the process and requirements for AT Services and RS. It also shares best practices for planning and implementation, and includes practical resources to support exploration and informed decision-making around AT and RS.

Tech First Toolkit Overview

Section 1:

Tech First Assessment & Planning

- ✓ Assistive Technology and/or Remote Supports: Person-Centered Alignment.
- ✓ Remote Support Assessment Process & Best Practices.
- ✓ Understand AT Services & Tech Plan Development.

Section 2:

Provider Preparedness: Are You Ready to Deliver AT and/or RS

- ✓ Evaluate your agency's readiness to provide Assistive Technology and/or Remote Supports.
- ✓ Identify staffing, training, and infrastructure needs.
- ✓ Understand DDS requirements for providers who wish to deliver AT or RS.

Section 3:

RS Provider Models, Agreements & Data Security

- ✓ Learn about Direct, Subcontracted, and Hybrid Remote Support delivery models.
- ✓ Understand typical roles, responsibilities, and agreements for Remote Support delivery models.
- ✓ Review best practices to ensure data privacy and compliance with HIPAA.

Section 4:

Tech First Resources for Learning & Action

- ✓ Videos for support planning teams that show real-world uses of AT & RS.
- ✓ SHIFT training: a provider capacity-building resource & DDS-required credential for delivering AT & Remote Supports.
- ✓ DCATP: A community resource for tech exploration & informed decision-making.

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Person-Centered & Desired Goals

📌 Purpose:

This section ensures Assistive Technology and/or Remote Supports are person-driven, not just risk-driven. It captures the individual's preferences, goals, and comfort level. This section helps answer:

✓ What is important to the person?
✓ What does the person want to do more independently?
✓ What does the person want AT and/or RS to help them achieve?
✓ What types of Remote Supports are they comfortable with?
✓ What personal preferences or privacy considerations should be factored in?

1. What does the person want to achieve with Tech and/or RS?
(Check all that apply.)

□ More independence (e.g., managing daily routines, safety)
□ Support for health & medication management
□ Privacy while still receiving needed support
□ Community access & safety (e.g., GPS support, remote check-ins)
□ Remote job coaching/workplace support
□ Other: _____

2. **What types of RS is the person most comfortable with?** (Check all that apply.)

□ Verbal reminders/check-ins (phone, video)
□ Sensor-based monitoring (e.g., motion sensors, door alarms)
□ Smart home devices (e.g., stove shut-off, medication dispensers)
□ Video-based coaching or support
□ None—the person prefers only in-person support

3. **Are there any privacy or personal preferences to consider?**

(Example: Only wants RS during certain hours, no video monitoring, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Using PCT Tools to Inform Planning

Person-Centered Thinking (PCT) tools are foundational to planning the use of Assistive Technology (AT) and/or Remote Supports (RS).

They ensure that tech solutions are aligned with the person's goals, routines, and values, not just needs.

One Page Description - Provides a clear, at-a-glance view of what's important to/for the person and how best to support them. It helps ensure AT/RS solutions respect preferences, communication styles, and supports key routines.

Good Day/Bad Day - Reveals what contributes to positive or challenging days, helping the team identify where tech can enhance good routines, support emotional well-being, or prevent known stressors (e.g., reminders that reduce anxiety, alerts that avoid crisis).

Important To/For - Clarifies the balance between the person's values (e.g., privacy, freedom) and health/safety needs. This tool helps teams select tech that supports independence without compromising dignity or over-restricting.

Rituals & Routines - Highlights specific times and habits in a person's day where AT/RS could increase independence, offer prompts, or automate tasks (e.g., morning routine, mealtime, medication).

Relationship Map - Identifies people in the person's life who may play a role in supporting, responding to, or setting up tech. It informs backup responders, training needs, and natural support connections for AT/RS.

📌 Final Thoughts (PCT Tools)

The person supported Person-Centered Tools should also be reviewed and considered during Tech Exploration and/or the Remote Support assessment and planning process, as they provide essential insights into what matters most to the person, their strengths, and how they prefer to be supported.

Introduction to the Remote Support (RS) Assessment & Planning Tool

📌 **As we explore the Remote Support Assessment & Planning process, it is important to understand its role in ensuring that Remote Supports (RS) align with the person's goals, needs, and safety.**

Assessment and Planning serves as a structured, person-centered evaluation designed to:

✓ Assess the individual's interest, comfort level, and goals for Remote Supports (Person-Centered & Desired Goals Section).

✓ Identify risks that must be addressed before transitioning from direct to remote supports (Initial Risk & Feasibility Screening).

✓ Determine how risks can be reduced using technology and Remote Support Professional (RSP) strategies (How LON Helps in the Remote Support Assessment).

✓ Provide a final decision on Remote Supports feasibility (Final Determination & Next Steps).

🔹 **Who Conducts RS Assessment & Plan?:** When Remote Supports are of interest, the team should determine whether the current provider, a national vendor, or another local provider is best suited to deliver the service remotely, whoever is selected will be required to conduct and submit the Remote Support Assessment & Plan for approval. **Assessment and Planning only is required of residential based supports being delivered remotely.**

📌 LON RS Best Practices

The Level of Need (LON) is a quick snapshot of how much in-person support someone uses today; in RS assessment it's a starting point, not a decision

The LON should never be used to automatically approve or deny someone's access to RS.

Example: A high LON score in behavioral support does not mean the person is ineligible for RS, it just means we need to explore strong strategies or safeguards.

The assessment is not just about identifying risks, it is a process to determine how RS can be implemented safely and effectively by combining technology, professional strategies, and backup planning.

LON reflects the current level of direct support, but RS or tech may be used to help reduce that need over time. Don't assume someone needs full in-person support forever just because their LON says so today.

It must be used alongside person-centered tools, team knowledge, and real-world observations. Relying solely on LON ignores the person's goals, preferences, and capacity to succeed with the right support.

A Shift from Risk-Based to Person-Centered Planning

📌 Unlike traditional risk assessments that focus only on potential barriers, this tool takes a problem-solving approach by asking:

- What does the person want to achieve with Remote Supports?
- What risks exist, and how can they be addressed using technology and/or remote support professional strategies?
- Can Remote Supports be implemented in a way that ensures safety and independence over time?

To complete this assessment accurately, the assessor should review:

✔ The person's Level of Need (LON) assessment to identify existing supports and potential risks
✔ Person-Centered Thinking (PCT) tools to ensure the plan aligns with the individual's goals and preferences
✔ Direct observations, team discussions, and previous assessments.

📌Understanding Remote Support Professional (RSP) Strategies & The "If This, Then That" (IFTTT) Model

Remote Support Professional (RSP) strategies play a critical role in responding to alerts, monitoring safety, and providing real-time support. This process can be understood through the **"If This, Then That" (IFTTT)** model commonly used in technology.

Example of IFTTT in Remote Supports:

- **If This**: A motion sensor detects movement at night when the person is usually asleep.
- **Then That**: The Remote Support Professional (RSP) receives an alert and follows the person's support plan (e.g., calling them, requesting video chat, or notifying a backup contact).

By adopting the IFTTT approach, Remote Support Professionals can provide timely, individualized interventions to support safety and independence from a distance.

📌 Final Thoughts

This process is designed to guide thoughtful, person-centered decision-making about Remote Supports. The goal is to ensure that the transition from direct to remote supports is safe, effective, and aligned with the person's needs and preferences.

If the person and their team opt to use their current provider ("local provider") and are having trouble identifying technology options, please consider making a request for Assistive Technology Services to receive assistance.

Initial Risk & Support Need Screening

📌 Purpose:

This section helps identify key areas where the person may need support if direct staff are reduced. It is not a final decision, but a tool to highlight which risk areas or support needs should be addressed in the next planning step. If there's interest in exploring Remote Supports, the identified remote support provider (either a local provider or Remote Support Vendor) should conduct the Risk Assessment with the support team.

This tool is most effective when used during a collaborative meeting that includes the person receiving services, their family or guardian (if applicable), direct support professionals (DSPs), and the service coordinator. Involving the full team helps ensure scoring is well-informed, contextually accurate, and grounded in a shared understanding of the person's needs and preferences.

This is also where the Level of Need (LON) assessment can be a valuable resource, it helps the team understand the person's existing support needs and areas of potential risk. LON should be referenced alongside team discussion, not as a replacement for it to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the person.

Ultimately, this section helps the team answer: What are the highlighted support needs unique to this person that must be addressed to successfully transition to Remote Supports?

🔹 Scoring Interpretation:

Scores at this stage are not a final determination. It indicates where interventions (Tech and/or RSP strategies) are needed, which you will attempt to address in the next section.

CATEGORY	LOW RISK (1 POINTS)	MODERATE RISK (3 POINTS)	HIGH RISK (5 POINT)	SCORE
Medical Needs	Manages medication and health needs independently (or with minimal remote reminders).	Needs scheduled remote support (e.g., reminders, check-ins, telehealth support).	Requires frequent in-person medical oversight that cannot be replaced by remote support.	□ 5 □ 3 □ 1
Behavioral Supports	No major behavioral concerns impacting safety or ability to self-regulate.	Occasional behavioral needs that can be supported remotely (e.g., stress management, coping strategies).	Frequent or severe behavioral challenges requiring hands-on interventions.	□ 5 □ 3 □ 1

Targeting Risks & Support Needs with Tech & Remote Support Strategies

📌 Purpose:

This section transforms risk identification into problem-solving by applying the LON assessment to identify tech solutions and/or develop Remote Support strategies.

✓ Instead of using risk as a barrier, it matches technology solutions & Remote Support Professional (RSP) strategies to reduce risk.

✓ Helps answer: What tools & supports can help make Remote Supports safe & effective?

✓Risk Level Scoring Key (After Interventions Are Applied)

🔹 Revised Score

1 (Low Risk, Strong Feasibility) = Risk has been significantly reduced with Tech and/or RSP strategies, RS is safe to proceed.

3 (Moderate Risk, Requires Adjustments) = Risk has been significantly reduced with Tech and/or RSP strategies, RS is safe to proceed.

5 (High Risk, Needs Significant Interventions) = RS may not be feasible yet without additional safeguards.

LON INSIGHT	WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT RISKS	PROPOSED TECH SOLUTIONS	REMOTE SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL (RSP) STRATEGIES	REVISED RISK LEVEL (AFTER INTERVENTIONS)
Medical Needs	Missed medications, unmanaged health conditions	- Smart pill dispensers - Telehealth check-ins - Wearable health monitors	- RSP checks dispenser data & follows up on missed doses - RSP conducts scheduled check-ins - RSP receives alerts if vital signs show concern & calls the person.	□ 5 □ 3 □ 1
Behavioral Supports	Self-harm, aggression, elopement	- Two-way audio/video - Behavior-tracking apps - Sensor-based alerts	- RSP provides virtual coaching & de-scalation - RSP monitors distress signals	□ 5 □ 3 □ 1

Final Determination & Next Steps

📌 Purpose:

The next step is to recalculate total risk score using the "Revised Risk Level" column before making a final determination.

REVISED TOTAL SCORE (AFTER INTERVENTIONS)	FINAL DETERMINATION
4-8 (Low Risk, Strong Feasibility)	✅ **Remote Support Approved, proceed with implementation.**
9-12 (Moderate Risk)	🔍 **Remote Support Possible, minor enhancements or clarifications may be needed..**
13-19 (High Risk, Needs Significant Interventions)	⚠️ **RS Not Feasible Yet.** Consider a hybrid model or alternative supports. (e.g., RS during sleep hours with in-person staff during awake hours)
20-25 (Severe Risk, Unsafe Without In-Person Support)	❌ **RS Denied at This Time**. RS alone cannot meet the person's needs.

Person or representative has provided informed consent for Remote Supports:□ Yes □ No

📌 Additional Example: Missouri DMH Remote Support Assessment Tool

To support providers in implementing quality Remote Support assessments, the following example is provided from the Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH). This tool offers a structured approach to identifying support needs, assessing risk areas, and exploring how technology may be used to promote safety and independence.

This example is shared not as a required format for use within the District, but rather as a resource that may inspire or support teams in their own Remote Support assessment efforts. The Missouri tool highlights the importance of dignity of risk and provides detailed prompts across areas like safety, medical needs, behavioral supports, and community navigation.

It emphasizes collaborative planning with the support team and includes space to explore how Remote Support technology may address identified needs.

Providers are encouraged to review this example to understand different approaches to assessment and to determine which elements may be helpful or adaptable to their own planning processes.

Assistive Technology Services

🔄 How AT Services Get Authorized

During the support planning process, a person supported may request AT services if the person and/or their team are interested in exploring technology to help them make progress towards their goals and/or to increase independence. The Service Coordinator adds the service request to the Individual Support Plan (ISP), and the Waiver Unit reviews and authorizes it. Authorization may be for an assessment or direct implementation depending on the person's needs and circumstances.

📋 When Is an AT Assessment Required?

An AT assessment is required when:

✅ The person and their support team are interested in technology but need help choosing the right option.
✅ The person has:

Communication challenges → May require Speech Therapist input.

Physical or motor limitations → May require Occupational or Physical Therapy input.

Vision impairments → AT Specialist or Low Vision Specialist input needed.

Hearing impairments → Audiologist or AT Specialist familiar with auditory tech.

Complex health conditions → Input from health professionals or nursing staff.

Behavioral/emotional factors → May require Behavioral Specialist or Psychologist to ensure safe, appropriate use.

💰 AT Services $10,000 Spending Cap

$10,000 available per person per 5-year period. Funds do not rollover, a new cap is available at the start of each 5-year cycle.

📌**Best Practice:** Introduce technology gradually instead of spending the full amount at once (SHIFT best practice). Plan long-term needs to maximize the benefit.

What If Someone Needs More Than $10,000?

Exceptions can be requested if additional technology is needed. DDS approval is required for expenditures beyond the cap.

📌 **Best Practice:** Work with the person and their team to determine the best approach to spending over time vs. using the full cap upfront.

Are Subscription-Based AT Covered?

Yes! DDS regulations allow for leasing or subscription-based Assistive Technology (AT) as part of the waiver. 1941.2(b)(2) of AT Reg states: *"Services consisting of purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices for persons served through the waiver"*

This means leasing or subscription-based AT (such as rented solutions or ongoing access to tech) can be covered under as long as funding is available in the current 5-year period.

📌 Best Practice: If using subscription-based AT, plan ahead to ensure continuity of service beyond the 5-year period.

Tech Plan Guidance

🧰 Using the Technology Plan Template: Guidance for Tech First Implementation

The DC Department on Disability Services (DDS) has not standardized a required technology plan template. However, DDS is providing a recommended planning format, **Tennessee's Enabling Technology Plan template** (click title to access), developed by the Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging. This tool is grounded in SHIFT's Tech First Best Practices and provides a comprehensive, person-centered framework that works well for both Assistive Technology and Remote Support implementation.

🏛️ DDS Approach to Assistive and Enabling Technology

At DDS, there is no separate service category for Enabling Technology (ET). Instead, we have adopted a approach that uses existing Assistive Technology (AT) services and funding mechanisms to support people in accessing technology solutions that:

- Advance personal goals and outcomes
- Promote independence
- Enhance community integration
- Improve quality of life
- Reduce reliance on paid supports

This approach broadens the use of AT to include enabling technologies such as smart devices, mobile apps, wearables, wellness, and safety supports, even when those tools are used independently of Remote Supports.

The Technology Plan becomes the tool for documenting and aligning those supports with the person's goals and daily routines.

📋 When and How to Use a Tech Plan

This section of the toolkit introduces the Technology Plan, which should be completed whether:

✅ Assistive Technology alone is being implemented,
✅ Remote Supports are being used, or
✅ Both AT and Remote Supports are integrated.

If the Tech Plan is being completed for Remote Supports approval, a Remote Support Assessment must be completed first. Findings from that assessment along with completed Person-Centered Tools should directly inform the development of the plan, ensuring that it reflects the person's support needs, preferred outcomes, and any identified risks.

Even if a team decides to forgo or waive an Assistive Technology Assessment, a Technology Plan is still required when AT is being acquired. This ensures clear documentation and alignment with the person's individual needs and goals.

Tech Plan Guidance cont.

📄 What the Tech Plan Should Include

The Technology Plan outlines:

✔ Justification for the technology, linked to the person's goals and outcomes
✔ Specific technologies being used, how they function, and where they'll be used
✔ Remote Support Professional strategies (if applicable)
✔ Training needs and response plans
✔ Ongoing evaluation and tech system review procedures
✔ Consent and emergency backup protocols

While providers are not required to use a specific format, any submitted plan must include the core components listed above. The Tennessee Tech Plan provides a solid structure for doing this, whether you're planning for AT alone or also including Remote Supports.

🔁 When Remote Supports Are Not Being Used

If the Technology Plan is being developed **only for Assistive Technology/Enabling** Technology and Remote Supports are not included, several sections of the Tennessee template may be marked "N/A" or omitted altogether. These include:

✔ Direct Support Backup Response Plans
✔ Type of Alert/Notification
✔ Mandatory Provided Supports for Alerts
✔ Response Time for Alerts
✔ Section: Remote Support Schedule
✔ Section: Remote Support Professional Strategies

In these cases, the team should focus on:

✔ How the tech will be used in the home, community, or workplace
✔ How it promotes skill-building, safety, or communication
✔ How the person and their team will be trained to use it
✔ How the tech will be monitored and reviewed for ongoing effectiveness

✅ Why We Recommend the Tennessee Template

The Tennessee Enabling Technology Plan (ETP) is a highly flexible and adaptable planning tool. It allows teams to:

✔ Document residential, community, and workplace tech use
✔ Create technology schedules that are not dependent on paid support hours
✔ Separate tech use from remote supports where applicable
✔ Update plans easily with built-in appendices and duplicable tables

📝 **Tip:** If Remote Supports are not part of the plan, consider adding this note at the top of the form: "This plan reflects the use of enabling/assistive technology only. Remote Supports are not included."

Provider Preparedness: Are You Ready to Deliver AT and/or Remote Supports?

📌 Creating Internal Capacity for Tech First Implementation

Delivering quality Assistive Technology (AT) and/or Remote Supports (RS) requires more than interest, it requires internal readiness and the right team infrastructure.

DDS no longer requires SHIFT Accreditation for providers delivering RS. However, **providers must designate a SHIFT-certified Enabling Technology Integration Specialist (ETIS) as the lead professional overseeing Remote Supports in Supported Living, In-Home Supports, and/or Supported Employment.** This is a mandatory requirement for RS delivery approval.

However, it is still encouraged for providers to invest in completing Accreditation as it guides providers with developing an Organizational Plan that serves as your blueprint to implement the needed infrastructure from staffing, policy, to effectively deliver these services.

Similarly, to deliver Assistive Technology Services, providers must have a one of the following qualified and credentialed professionals:

✓Certified Assistive Technology Professional (ATP)
✓Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)
✓Occupational Therapist (OT)
✓SHIFT-certified ETIS

To be fully prepared, it is strongly recommended that providers establish an Internal Technology Team that potentially includes:

- QIDP
- Clinical professionals (e.g., nursing, OT, SLP)
- DSPs who understand daily routines and tech use
- Designated tech leads and IT support staff (**critical**)
- SHIFT-certified ETIS professionals
- Leadership responsible for compliance, quality, and oversight

Your internal tech team plays a vital role in ensuring your organization is prepared to deliver AT and/or Remote Supports effectively. Their key responsibilities include coordinating tech exploration and planning to ensure solutions are person-centered and aligned with individual goals. They oversee and conduct assessments, ensure proper tech setup and routine maintenance, and troubleshoot when needed. The team should also review outcome data to make adjustments to support plans as needed and provide ongoing training and onboarding to staff. These actions help ensure that technology remains reliable, responsive, and aligned with the person's evolving needs.

🧠 Key Takeaway:

Building internal capacity is the foundation of sustainable, person-centered tech service delivery. Whether using a hybrid model, subcontracting, or fully managing RS or AT in-house, your internal team matters. Invest in the people who will champion, implement, and support technology across your organization.

Are You Prepared to Deliver Remote Supports and/or AT Services?

Delivering Remote Supports or Assistive Technology (AT) services requires more than just purchasing devices. It demands intentional planning, internal readiness, and a person-centered approach.

This checklist is designed to help DDS service providers evaluate their organizational capacity to implement these services safely, effectively, and in alignment with DDS expectations. Use it as a reflection and planning tool as you move toward "Tech First" service delivery.

✅ Leadership & Staffing

- □ We have designated leadership responsible for RS/AT implementation.
- □ We have a SHIFT-certified Enabling Technology Integration Specialist overseeing RS in Supported Living, In-Home Supports, and/or Supported Employment. (Required for RS delivery.)
- □ We have a qualified professional to deliver AT services (e.g., Certified AT Specialist, OT, SLP, or SHIFT-certified Integration Specialist).
- □ We have a multidisciplinary tech team or tech champions supporting implementation and innovation.
- □ Staff understand the goals and benefits of RS and AT.
- □ We are building internal capacity or know how to partner with a vendor.

✅ Technology Infrastructure

- □ We have reliable Wi-Fi or cellular coverage in settings where tech will be used.
- □ We can set up and maintain smart home devices, sensors, and communication tools.
- □ We have systems for alert monitoring, data tracking, and timely response.
- □ We have a routine process and designated staff to conduct technology health checks, troubleshoot issues, and provide ongoing maintenance and documentation.

✅ Assessment & Planning

- □ We are familiar with and can complete the Remote Support Assessment and Tech Plan.
- □ We integrate insights from Person-Centered Thinking (PCT) tools and the Level of Need (LON) in planning.
- □ We monitor outcomes and revise plans based on person progress and preferences.

✅ Training & Support

- □ Staff and RSPs are trained in the tech, support strategies, privacy, and documentation.
- □ Individuals and teams are involved in tech decisions and transition planning.
- □ We know how to access vendor support when needed (if subcontracted.

✅ Compliance & Documentation

- □ We maintain all required documentation (RS Assessment, Tech Plan, consent forms).
- □ We have backup and emergency protocols in place for both RS and AT.
- □ We understand and follow Human Rights Committee approval procedures.

🔍 Reflection

If you're unsure or answered "No" to multiple items, consider starting with the Hybrid Model or partnering with a Remote Support Vendor while you build internal capacity.

Overview of Remote Support Service Provider Delivery Models

Remote Supports are not one-size-fits-all. As more DDS providers explore supporting people from afar/virtually, it's important to understand the three main models for delivering Remote Supports. Each model offers different levels of provider responsibility, staffing, and infrastructure needs. This page outlines the Professional, DIY, and Hybrid models to help you determine which best fits your agency's current readiness, goals, and long-term vision.

Whether you're just starting out or building internal capacity, these models offer flexibility and pathways toward sustainable, person-centered Remote Support delivery.

PROFESSIONAL MODEL 🏢	**DIY MODEL** 🛠️	**HYBRID MODEL** 🤝
DDS Service Provider **Subcontracts** for RS service delivery with a third-party vendor (Remote Support Vendor/ RSV) who manages tech and remote support staffing. DDS Provider provides back-up responder staff and is responsible for providing oversight over RSV to ensure compliance with local regs. **Best for:** Providers who are not ready to manage infrastructure or monitoring themselves.	DDS provider **manages all** RS setup, staffing, and support internally. Develops and implements tech and RS system. **Best for:** Providers with internal tech capacity and a desire to own the entire RS process.	**RSV provides consultation**, setup, and tech to **DDS provider to deliver RS with their own staff**. **Best for:** Providers who want to deliver RS independently but need short-term vendor support to build infrastructure.
PROS ✓ Access to specialized expertise. ✓ RSV handles technology & training. ✓ Scalable & easier to implement.	PROS ✓ Full control of staff, systems, & quality ✓ Can be more personalized to the agency's culture ✓ Greater flexibility to choose & adapt various tech based on person's needs & preferences.	PROS ✓ Best practices support & technical assistance while building capacity ✓ Gradual ownership ✓ Aligned with values
CONS ⚠️ Less direct control over RS delivery. ⚠️ Requires strong coordination & communication. ⚠️ Typically use a proprietary system that works with specific set of devices.	CONS ⚠️ High setup load ⚠️ Full tech responsibility ⚠️ May rely on mainstream tools that aren't optimized for managing supports across multiple service settings.	CONS ⚠️ Still need internal investment ⚠️ May use proprietary systems

Understanding Roles & Agreements: Remote Support Delivery Models

This section helps providers understand the division of responsibilities and what formal agreements are typically involved when partnering with a Remote Support Vendor (RSV). The guidance below aligns with DDS's Tech First approach and supports providers in implementing Professional (Subcontracting) and Hybrid models effectively.

📄 Common Agreements Between Providers and RSVs

Master Service Agreement (MSA):
Outlines the full scope of services, including technology setup and maintenance, remote support staffing (if applicable), training, response times, documentation, data sharing, reporting obligations and liability responsibilities.

Business Associate Agreement (BAA):
Required under HIPAA when RSVs access or store Protected Health Information (PHI) and limits on access/use, such as through audio/video monitoring, sensor data, or digital records. This needs to include data breach notification procedures. This agreement ensures the RSV follows strict data privacy and security standards.

🤝 SCENARIO A: Hybrid Model
Local Provider Delivers Remote Supports Using Vendor Tech & Consultation

LOCAL PROVIDER	REMOTE SUPPORT VENDOR (RSV)
✓ Provides Remote Support Professional (RSPs) ✓ Mantains Oversight ✓ Responds in-person when needed ✓ Delivers support aligned with ISP ✓ May receive consultation from RSV	✓Supplies, installs, and maintains tech * ✓ Trains provider staff on platform ✓ Provides troubleshooting & tech support * ✓ May assist in risk planning, setup, or creating clear step- by-step instructions for how staff should respond to alerts * maintenance and troubleshooting support are typically time-limited (e.g., 30–90 days) or ongoing if covered by a subscription; exact terms should be defined in the MSA.

🏛️ SCENARIO B: Subcontracting Model (Professional Delivery)
Vendor delivers both Remote Support Services and technology

LOCAL PROVIDER	REMOTE SUPPORT VENDOR (RSV)
✓ Maintains oversight of RSV to ensure quality & compliance with policies/regs ✓ Provides in-person backup responder as needed ✓Coordinates with RSV on service planning ✓ Submits documentation and bills Medicaid	✓Installs & maintains tech ✓Provides trained remote support professionals (RSPs) ✓ Monitors alerts and initiates emergency response as needed ✓ Logs support activity and shares updates with provider ✓ Follows HIPAA-compliant data practices and consent requirements.

Remote Support Platforms: Security & Privacy Best Practices for Providers

What Is a Remote Support Platform?

A Remote Support platform is a secure technology system that allows one staff member to oversee and support multiple people living in different homes, all from a single location. These platforms serve as the bridge between provider organizations and the people they support, allowing Remote Support Professionals (RSPs) to monitor sensor activity, interact, and respond virtually while ensuring people's safety and independence. **This is not surveillance. Live video feeds or streaming cameras are prohibited.**

These platforms often include tools such as live video, two-way audio, sensors, alerts, and digital dashboards to provide real-time updates. In addition, other technology solutions used by the person supported such as assistive technologies, smart devices, or health trackers may be integrated into the platform. These tools can feed the system with alerts, behavioral insights, or device usage data that help RSPs offer timely and responsive support.

Because Remote Supports involve real-time access to sensitive personal and health information across multiple home locations, ensuring the security and privacy of this data is essential.

🛡️**Remote Support Platform Security & Privacy: What Providers Must Know**

HIPAA Compliance: Platforms must follow HIPAA standards to protect Protected Health Information (PHI), including data storage, sharing practices, and restricted access for authorized users only.

Data Encryption: Information must be encrypted both in transit (when sent over the internet) and at rest (when stored), protecting it from interception or unauthorized access.

User Authentication: Secure logins such as strong passwords, two-factor authentication, or biometrics—help ensure that only approved professionals can access the system.

Audit Logging: Platforms must log who accesses data, when they accessed it, and what changes were made. These records support transparency and security investigations if needed.

Role-Based Access: Users should only be able to access data necessary for their roles. For example, DSPs may receive alerts, while clinicians access full health records. This minimizes unnecessary data exposure.

Secure Hosting Infrastructure: If cloud-based, the platform should use highly secure providers like AWS GovCloud or Azure. Hosting must include safeguards like firewalls, backups, and server protections.

Consent & Privacy Notices: Individuals supported, their families, and guardian, when appropriate, must be informed of what data is collected, how it is used, and their rights to consent or opt out of RS services.

Business Associate Agreements (BAA): Providers working with a platform vendor must have a signed BAA. This contract ensures the vendor complies with HIPAA, secures data, reports breaches, and takes responsibility for their subcontractors.

📌 **Why This Matters**

Security and privacy are the foundation of ethical, person-centered Remote Supports. Providers are responsible for ensuring the platform they use meets these standards. Ask the right questions, assign internal oversight, and review agreements carefully before implementation.

Data Collection & Retention: Best Practices for Tech-Enabled Supports

As Remote Supports and Assistive Technologies become more integrated into daily supports, it's essential to understand what data is collected, how it's stored, and who can access it. This supports transparency, protects individual rights, and ensures compliance with HCBS and HIPAA expectations.

Importantly, Remote Supports is not surveillance. It does not involve continuous live monitoring via cameras or audio unless that specific method is requested, consented to, and appropriate for the person's support needs. The goal is to enhance independence, not diminish privacy.

📟Common Types of Data Collected by Remote Support Platforms

Alert & Event Logs
- When alerts are triggered (e.g., door opened, fall detected, panic button pressed)
- Timestamped logs of activity, response time, and resolution steps

Audio/Video (only with consent, not used as continuous surveillance it uses focused support)

- DDS forbids recording audio or video during remote support. For instance, any video chat or video/web cameras used should operate in real-time and not record or have a ongoing feed, and the system must log each activation (who activated it, when, for how long, and why) instead of storing video
- Remote support must not intrude on private spaces like bedrooms or bathrooms.

Medication Access Logs (Smart Dispensers)
- Tracks when meds are dispensed, missed doses, or manual overrides

Sensor Data
- Includes motion, pressure, temperature, humidity, vitals
- Helps recognize patterns like sleep cycles, wellness, bathroom use, or increased wandering

User Interaction Logs
- Documents which support personnel or RSP accessed the system
- Includes interaction notes and frequency of calls, prompts, or system use

System Health & Technical Logs
- Tracks system uptime, outages, connectivity, and battery or power alerts

🗄️ Data Retention & Archiving Practices
There's no single national retention rule, but most vendors follow health record standards aligned with HCBS and HIPAA.

📅 Retention Timeline:
- Typically 3–7 years for data needed for Medicaid billing, audits, or incident reviews

🔐 Secure Storage:
- Encrypted cloud-based systems with strict user access controls

👁️ Controlled Access:
- Only authorized users may view or edit data; audit trails log all access

📤 Archiving & Export:
- Some platforms auto-archive data; many allow data to be exported before deletion

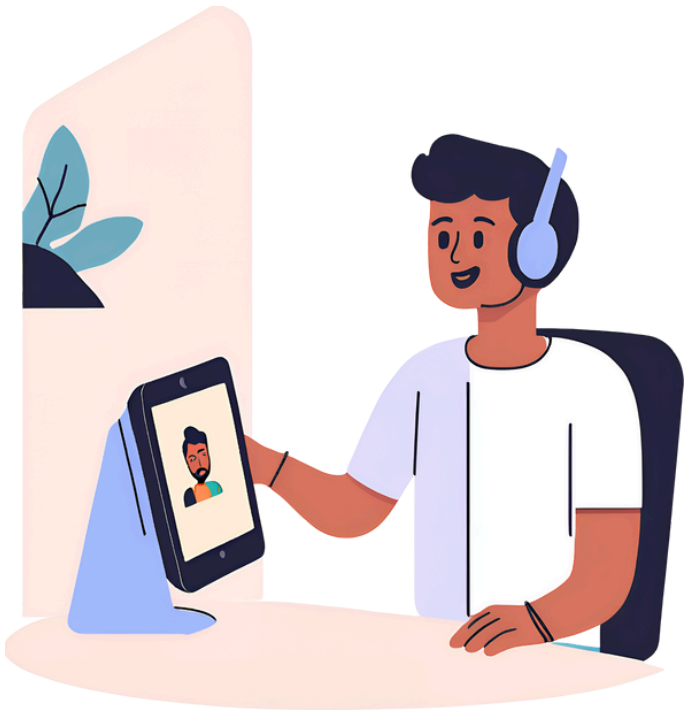
Remote Supports Vendors List

Here's a list of well-known national Remote Support Vendors (RSVs) that specialize in Remote Support tech solutions and staffing for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD):

Subcontracting RSV: The vendor provides both the technology and the Remote Support Professional (RSP) staff, delivering the service on behalf of the local service provider. The local service provider is responsible for back-up responder staff when in-person support or intervention is needed.

Hybrid RSV: The vendor can provide consultation and supplies the technology and remote support platform to the local provider. The local provider uses their own staff to deliver the remote supports and back-up responder staff.

SUBCONTRACTING 🏛️	**HYBRID** 🤝
✓ SafeinHome ✓ Total Home Care Solutions (THS) ✓ Rest Assured ✓ Night Owl Support Systems (NOSS)	✓ Vista Supports **(Subcontracting & Hybrid)** ✓ SimplyHome (**Subcontracting & Hybrid**) ✓ NextGenAT ✓ Sengistix (**Subcontracting & Hybrid**)



SHIFT Tech Education & Certification: Building Capacity for Tech First

🎓 The SHIFT Tech Education program is a nationally recognized training and certification platform designed specifically to support technology integration in services for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). SHIFT is currently the only program in the country focused exclusively on Enabling Technology and Remote Supports in the IDD field, and it is accredited by the National Association of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP).

What Is SHIFT?

SHIFT offers training and certifications that help provider agencies and professionals understand how to plan, implement, and oversee technology supports in person-centered ways. The program covers best practices in exploring, planning, and implementation of Assistive Technology (AT)/ Enabling Technology (ET) Remote Supports (RS).

🎖️ **Types of SHIFT Credentials**

- **Enabling Technology Integration Specialist (ETIS) – Individual Certification**
  Professionals who complete this certification understand how to match technology solutions to persons needs, complete tech planning, support implementation, and ensure person-centered, ethical use of AT and Remote Supports.

- **Enabling Technology Leadership (ETL) – Leadership Certification**
  The ETL certification is for leaders responsible for guiding their organizations through a Tech First transformation. This credential supports strategic thinking, culture change, and long-term planning, making it ideal for executive directors, program leads, or other leadership roles championing innovation at scale.

- **Organizational Accreditation – Agency-Level Commitment**
  Agencies who pursue SHIFT Organizational Accreditation go beyond individual training to build full internal capacity. This includes creating policies, infrastructure, and an internal team structure that supports consistent, high-quality tech integration across services.

Accredited agencies commit to:

✓ Developing a formal Technology Integration Plan

✓ Training multiple staff members across disciplines

✓ Establishing sustainable internal workflows for AT and RS

✓ Embedding Tech First into their organizational culture

Why It Matters for DDS Providers?

To provide Assistive Technology Services, DDS requires at least one qualified professional: Occupational Therapist, Speech and Language Pathologist, Assistive Technology Professional or an ETIS certified staff member.

To provide Remote Supports (not including Telehealth), the QIDP overseeing the service must be ETIS-certified. This ensures the provider has the skills and understanding to safely implement and monitor RS, write effective plans, respond to alerts, and ensure services are aligned with DDS expectations.

🌐 **Click Here** to explore coursework, ask questions, and enroll in SHIFT certifications.

DC Assistive Technology Program (DCATP): Informed Decision Making

Click Here to Visit DCATP

🧭 **DC Assistive Technology Program (DCATP)**
A Trusted Local Resource for Exploring and Choosing the Right Tech

The DC Assistive Technology Program, administered by University Legal Services, is Washington, DC's federally funded Assistive Technology Act Program. It exists to help individuals with disabilities, their families, and support teams make informed decisions about AT solutions through hands-on access, professional guidance, and financial support.

💡 **Why Include DCATP in Your Planning Process?**
Whether you're exploring Assistive Technology (AT) or Remote Supports (RS), it's important to begin with informed, person-centered decisions. DCATP provides key supports that align with best practices in technology planning and delivery:

What DCATP Offers?
Device Demonstrations: Get hands-on experience with AT devices to understand how they work and whether they meet the person's needs, before making a purchase.

Lending Library: Borrow AT devices for trial periods. This "try-before-you-buy" approach helps determine what works best for daily routines, communication, mobility, and more.

AT Consultation: Work with knowledgeable AT professionals who can recommend tools based on the person's goals, preferences, and daily challenges.

AT Financial Loan Program: Offers low-interest financial loans to make acquiring necessary AT more accessible, especially for items not covered by Medicaid or other payers.

DC Shares Equipment Reuse: A free durable medical equipment (DME) reuse program that makes gently-used AT available to those in need.

✅ **How It Supports Best Practices**
Encourages Informed Decision-Making: Trying out devices first helps prevent mismatches and increases long-term success.

Supports Person-Centered Planning: Demonstrations and loans allow the person to directly engage in choosing tools that fit their life.

Reduces Financial Risk: Access to loans and used equipment makes tech more accessible and financially sustainable.

Builds Provider Confidence: Providers can better recommend and support technology when they've had a chance to explore options and consult with AT experts.

📌 **Best Practice Tip**: Use DCATP as a first stop when you've identified an area where AT might help but aren't sure what's the right tool. It's a no-cost, low-risk way to explore possibilities and make decisions that are person-centered and evidence-informed.

Exploring Possibilities of Tech & Remote Supports

📌 Purpose:

Below is a curated selection of video resources to offer both support teams and persons with disabilities a better understanding and deeper insight into the practical applications, benefits, and transformative potential of Tech and/or Remote Supports. By providing visual and real-life examples, our goal is to facilitate a more informed decision-making process.

CLICK PICTURE TO PLAY

Tech Revolutionizing IDD supports

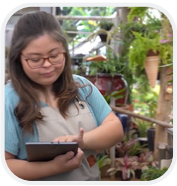
Watch how tech is making a significant impact in delivering proactive supports and empowering independence in Washington, DC.

PossABLE: Enabling Technology

Watch how various forms of tech are helping people with disabilities lead more independent lives in Oklahoma's DDS waiver services

Tennessee Dept. of Disability & Aging

Watch how Larry made the leap to living independently



Remote Job Coaching

Watch how RS & Tech Improve Employment for People with Disabilities

Remote Supports the Gifts of Independence

Parents perspective on adult children benefiting from Remote Supports

Tech Solutions Demo Apartment Tour

watch how technology can support greater independence in the home

DDS Disability Tech Summit Presentations Playlist

Exploring Real-World Tech Solutions to Support Independence and Inclusion

Since 2022, the DC Department on Disability Services (DDS) has hosted the annual Disability Tech Summit (formerly Tech Fest) to showcase emerging technologies that empower people with disabilities and older adults to live more independently, safely, and with greater choice. The Summit directly supports DDS's Tech First Initiative, which aims to increase access to enabling technologies across all settings through person-centered planning, service innovation, and provider capacity-building.

The Disability Tech Summit invites people with disabilities, aging adults, families, service providers, and policy makers to discover real-world technology solutions that promote autonomy, connectivity, health, safety, and quality of life. Past summits have been held at the MLK Library (2022), the Walter E. Washington Convention Center (2023), and fully virtually in 2024.

Click the image to explore the full [YouTube Playlist], a growing library of tech presentations designed to spark ideas, build knowledge, and inspire action in support of Tech First!

Questions about the toolkit or the Tech First Initiative, contact:

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