

# Assistive Technology for Trauma

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**Ajaune Thomas, AT Specialist**  
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Michigan Disability Rights Coalition  
Michigan Assistive Technology Program





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# Welcome & Presenter Introductions



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# Continuing Education Credits

We are offering one continuing education hour for rehab counselors for this presentation. In order to receive the credit you must participate in and join the live Zoom webinar and answer the survey questions.



## MDRC Mission

MDRC cultivates disability pride and strengthens the disability movement by recognizing disability as a natural and beautiful part of human diversity while collaborating to dismantle all forms of oppression.

Michigan  
**Disability  
Rights  
Coalition**



# What We Will Cover

- 1) Overview of MATP
- 2) Trauma and the various impacts of Trauma on the body
- 3) The intersections of Disability and Trauma
- 4) What is disability pride
- 5) Supporting someone who has experienced trauma
- 6) Assistive Technology for Trauma
  - A. AT for Self Regulation
  - B. AT for Sensory
  - C. AT for Health and Safety
  - D. AT for Daily living
  - E. AT in IEPs
- 1) Resources



# Michigan Assistive Technology Program

- Access to AT information and services in Michigan
- By people with disabilities, for people with disabilities
- We provide demonstrations of AT Devices
- We have a lending library for possible loan of devices

**M A T P**



**Michigan Assistive  
Technology Program**



# Questions & Housekeeping

Please feel free to ask questions during our presentation. We will also have time at the end for questions.

**Please type in the chat or unmute.**





# Please take care of yourself

Survivors of trauma may be triggered by talking about trauma supports

Presenters are trauma survivors

You may be a trauma survivor supporting a trauma survivor —others' experiences impact us and may bring up our own symptoms

Acknowledge your feelings

Take time to process and step away after the presentation





# What is Disability?

MDRC is a cross disability organization. We support people with apparent and non apparent disabilities.

Disability is more than mental and physical effects on the body. Disability is both how society interacts with an individual with a disability and how the individual interacts with society and themselves.

Disability is natural and beautiful

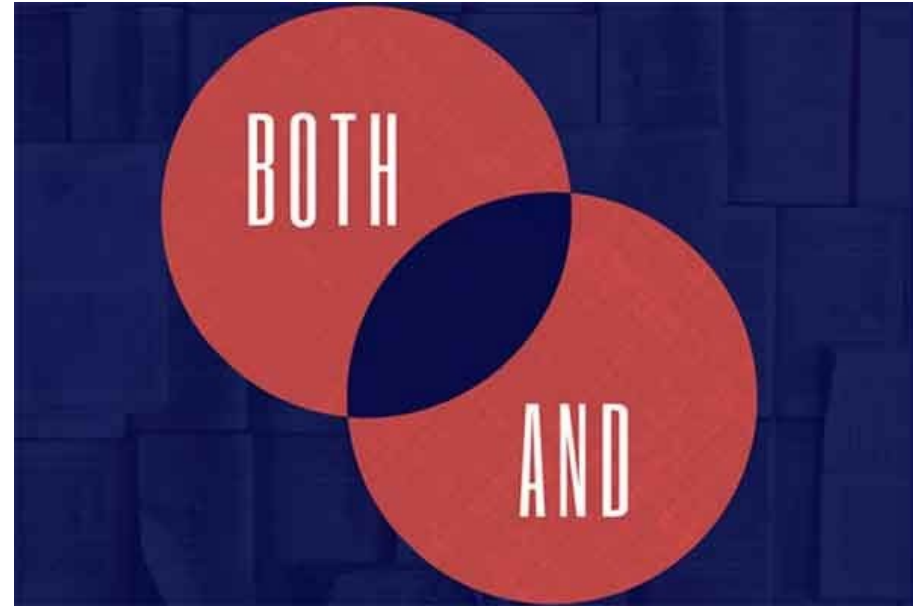


# Both/And

Individuals could have a disability before they experience trauma

Individuals can experience trauma and acquire a disability

Individuals can acquire a disability and already have a disability



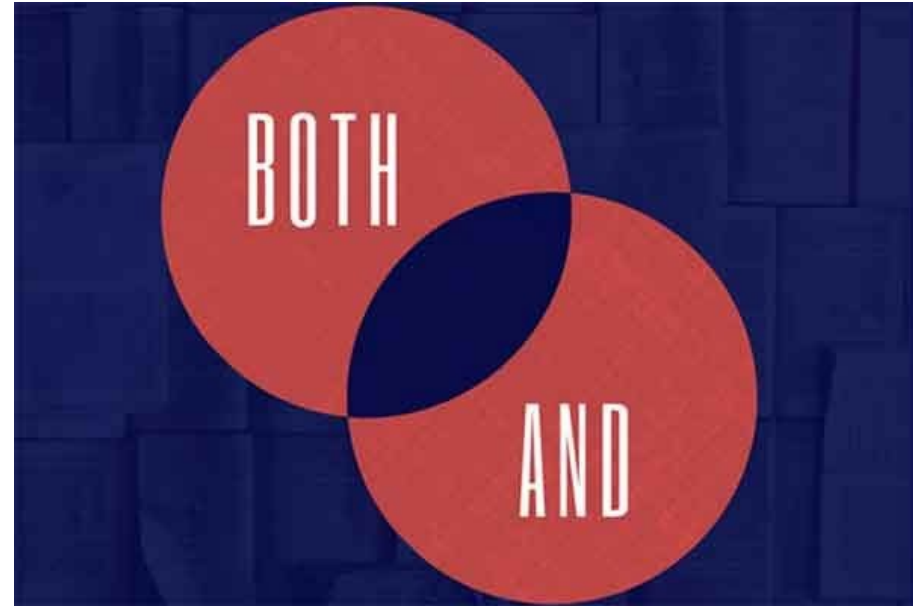
# Both/And

Individuals can acquire a disability from trauma and what happened to them can be wrong AND individuals can live with that disability and not be broken.

A disability caused by trauma is a normal response of the body to a traumatic event.

The disability itself is one that an individual can live with, with pride.

BOTH can be true



# Trauma and Disability

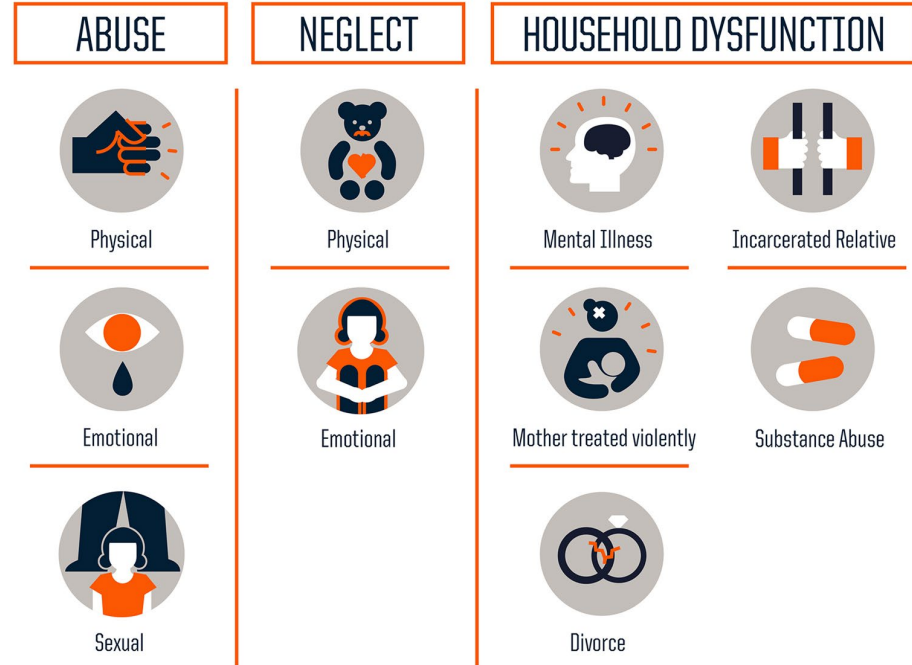
People with disabilities face almost double the rate of childhood trauma as the general population

Trauma is intersectional: People with low -income and educational attainment, people of color and people who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual had significantly higher chance of having experienced adversity in childhood

Supports and tools build resilience and healing.

People can both be recovering and acknowledge and live with trauma history

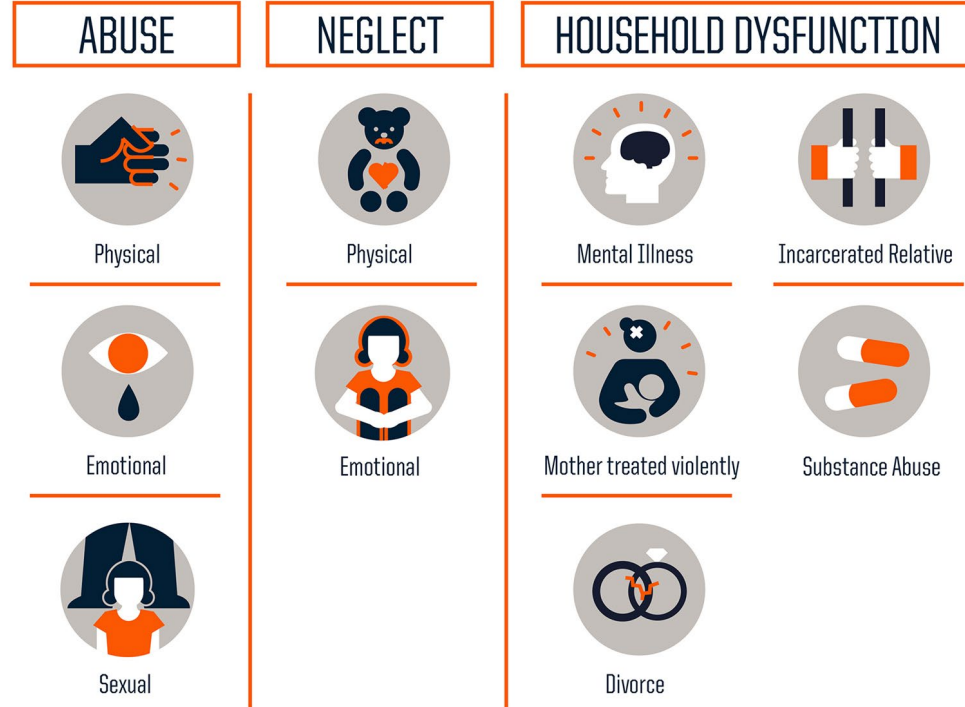
Childhood trauma can also be the cause of disability



# Trauma and Disability

If a child already has a disability before experiencing trauma they are more likely to be maltreated than their nondisabled peers and more likely to be survivors of neglect than their peers.

If we think about statistics of trauma then almost 100% of people who have experienced trauma have a disability, research is hard when a mental health diagnosis or other disability diagnosis don't happen until teens or adulthood.



# Disability Pride



Disability Pride is accepting and honoring our uniqueness and seeing it as a natural and beautiful part of human diversity.

**Pride** comes from celebrating our own heritage, culture, unique experiences, and contributions .

What's to gain from Disability Pride?

- Self esteem, self acceptance
- Support system/community with sense of belonging
- Accommodations
- Value of interdependence
- Life of honesty
- Appreciation for diversity





# Disability Pride

- Disability Pride takes practice
- Disability pride fights internalized ableism
- Using AT and asking for accommodations acknowledges disability
- Requesting and getting accommodations and using AT is practicing pride
- Can reject shame

**Internalized ableism** - when a person with a disability turns ableism inward.

**Ableism** - beliefs that people with disabilities are less value



# Supporting someone who has experienced trauma

- Build resilience by experiencing pleasurable arousal not associated with fear (fast heartbeat can be from playing hard)
- Find trauma trained therapist
- Build safe connections
- Find ways for body to release trauma safely
- Acknowledge triggers that remind our body of trauma
- Find ways of grounding (getting out of fight/flight or shutdown) get the nervous system to rebalance and reorganize after being overwhelmed by trauma
- PTSD Family Coach



# Creating Space

Look away

Breathe

Stretch



# What is AT?

- Assistive Technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, software, or app that is used to help people with disabilities, including older adults, do what they want to do.
- Technology can make things easier for everyone. For people with disabilities, AT opens up possibilities.



# Assistive Technology for Trauma

Supporting those affected by trauma to expand their “toolkit”, allows them to be better equipped to identify tools that may work for them in a variety of situations. Assistive Technology provides some of the tools that may benefit those affected by Trauma to be prepared with coping skills.



## Note:

This presentation today will focus primarily on youth and mental health, however we recognize trauma can also cause harm physically and adults experience trauma. A lot of the AT highlighted today can also be used by adults. We also provide trainings on AT devices available for physical disabilities and other learning and developmental disabilities.



# Self Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to manage extreme emotions (positive or negative affect\*), sensations and thoughts

It includes being able to:

- regulate reactions to strong emotions like frustration, excitement, anger, embarrassment, and fear.
- calm down after something exciting or upsetting.
- focus on a task.
- refocus attention on a new task.
- control impulses.



# AT for Self Regulation

- Bubbles
- Sensory Sock





# AT for Self Regulation

- Sensory swings and chairs
- Rocking Horses



# AT for Self Regulation

- Rhythms, repetitive movement - drums
- Vibrations or shaking - maracas
- Stress Balls



# AT for Self Regulation - Technology

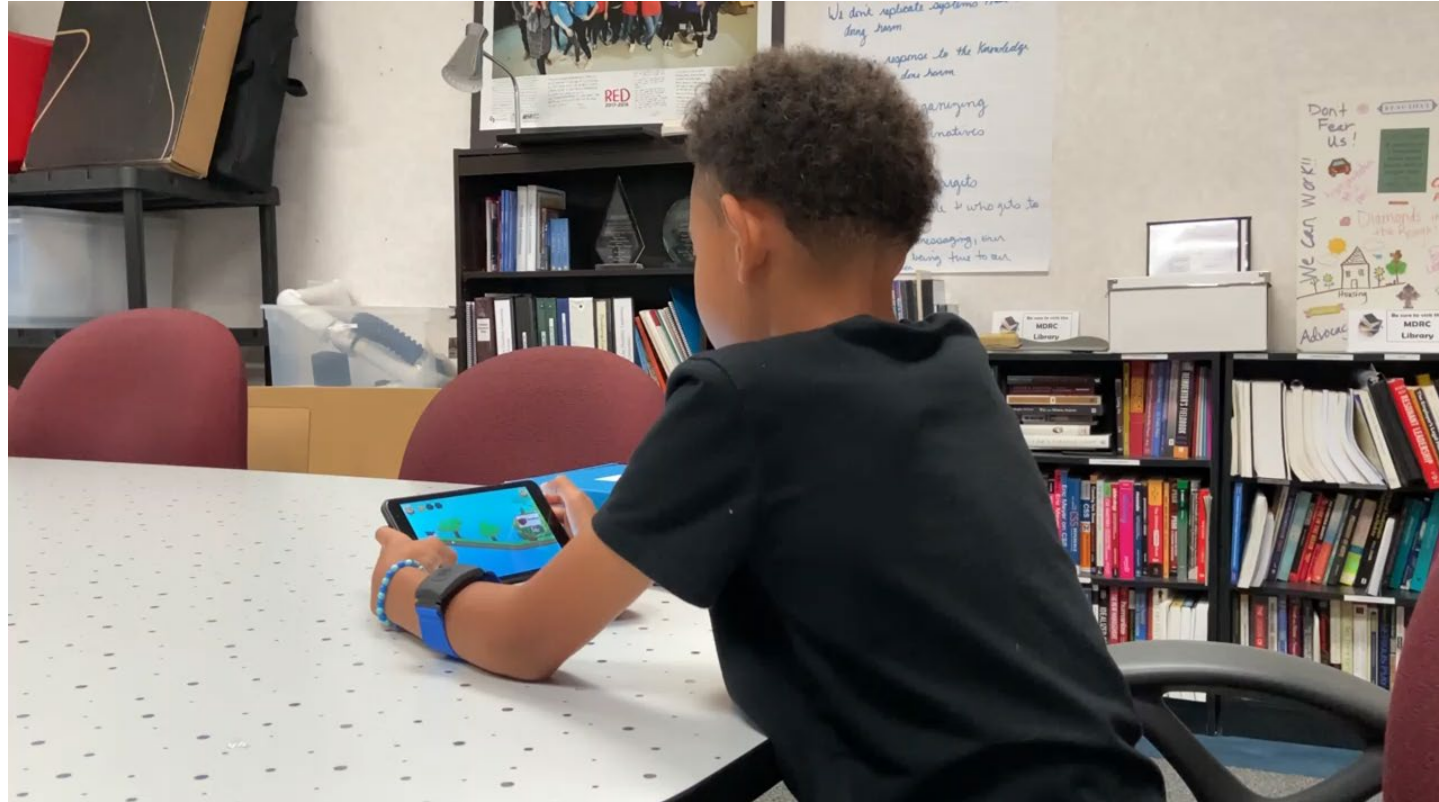
- Heart Rate Monitors
- Apps for calming and thinking
- Games
- Apps for Journaling



# AT for Self Regulation - Technology

Video of MATP  
Participant using  
the Mightier Game  
App to self  
regulate emotions

Link to video: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p7MEqpUVTvpZ-ylafM6fNSP3\\_21SeeUn/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p7MEqpUVTvpZ-ylafM6fNSP3_21SeeUn/view)



# Sensory

Anyone can experience sensory overload, but it is most common with people who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), autism, or sensory processing and other neurodevelopmental disorders.

## Symptoms of Sensory Overload:

- Anxiety and an inability to relax
- Irritability
- Tantrums
- Restlessness and physical discomfort
- Urge to cover your ears and eyes to block out the source of input
- Stress, fear, or panic
- High levels of excitement or feeling "wound up"
- Desire to escape the situation triggering the sensory overload



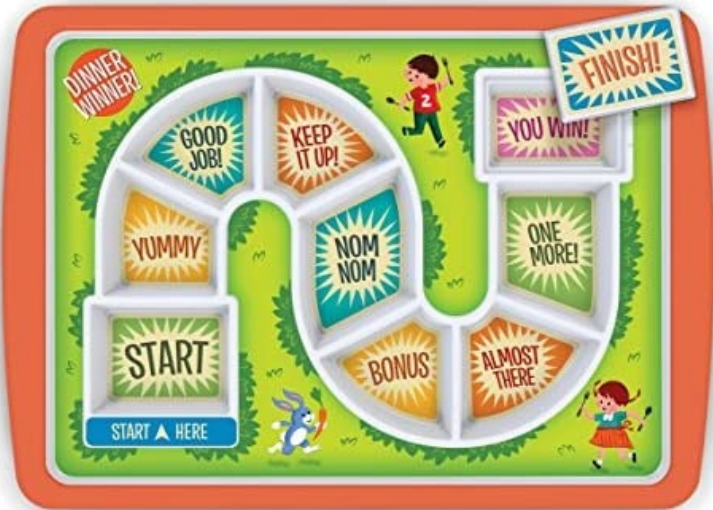
# Sensory Avoiders and Sensory Seekers

**Sensory seekers are undersensitive to sensory input, while sensory avoiders are oversensitive.** Some may show a combination of these reactions. Identifying what may or may not prompt someone to have sensory overload can help find ways to help them cope.



# Sensory Avoiders

- Timid
- Startled or frightened easily
- “Picky” about clothes and/or food
- Sensitive to smells, touch, and sound
- Avoids crowds and social interactions



# Sensory Seekers

- Has a hard time with “Personal Space”
- Needs to touch people or objects often
- Doesn't realize their own strength
- Unusual tolerance for pain
- Plays rough and loud
- Enjoys jumping, hopping, bumping into things or people
- Seeks oral stimulation - chewing on clothes or other objects





# AT for Sensory - Touch

- Fidget Toys
- Slime, Dough, Putty
- Tactile Activities
- Touch Screen Devices



# AT for Sensory – Smell

- Aromatherapy
- Diffusers
- Humidifiers
- Sprays and mists



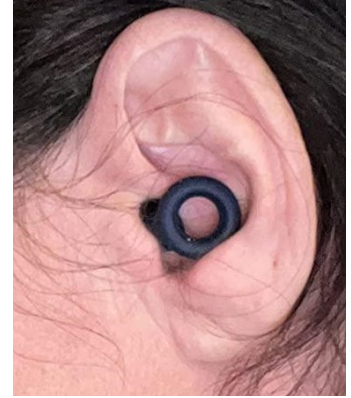
# AT for Sensory – Oral/Taste

- Oral Sensory Chew Toys
- Gum
- Feeding Devices and tools



# AT for Sensory – Hearing

- Noise canceling headphones
- Sensory Apps
- Music, Calming Sounds and Noises
- Meditation - Silence



# AT for Sensory – Sight

- Sunglasses
- Lamps or Light Bulbs with Various Light Settings
- Reading Guides



# AT for Daily Living

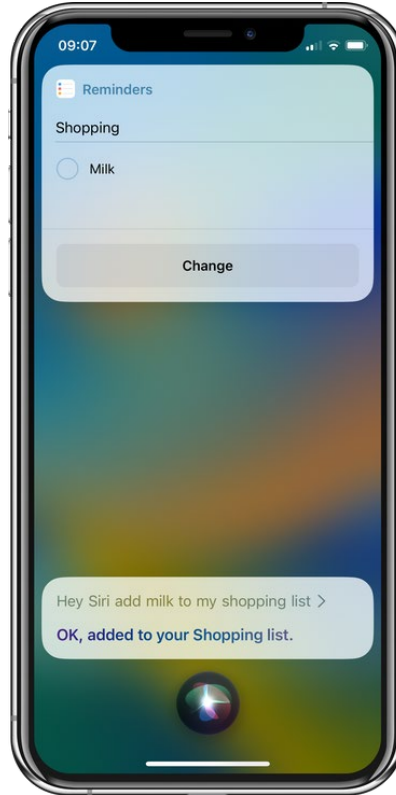
## Daily Activities that can be affected by Trauma:

- Physical Disability
- Health
- Mental Health
- Memory
- Sleep
- Eating Appetite
- Concentration and Focus
- Mood
- Social Isolation or withdrawal
- Performance at school or work





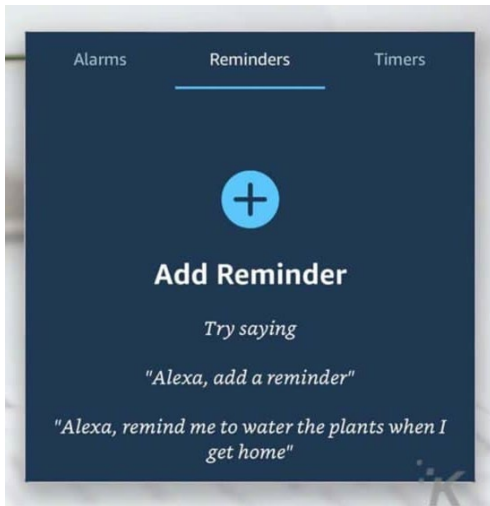
Hi, how can I help?



## AT for Memory

- Smart devices - cellphone, iPad, tablet, watch





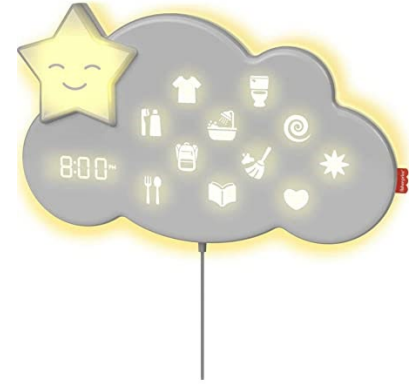
## AT for Memory

- Smart Speakers
- Alexa device
- Google Home
- Organizing devices
- Pen Friend



# AT for Structure and Routine

- Schedules
- Timers/Clocks
- Routine Systems
- Checklists



# AT for Day and Night Time Incontinence

- Clothing
- Bed Pads
- Bathroom Accessibility



# AT for Day and Night Time Incontinence

- Reminder Watches
- Alarms and Sensors



# AT for Sleeping

- Sleep Sacs
- Body Pillows
- Pillow Mist Sprays
- Weighted Blankets
- Weighted Stuffed Animals



# AT for Sleeping

- Sound Machines and Smart Speakers Dusker
- Sleepbar and Eyemask
- Bluetooth sleep band headphones



## SLEEPBAR

turn your pillow into a calming sleep speaker

Calm Spotify Apple Music headspace audible

# AT for Sleeping

- Night Lights
- Night Light Projectors
- Bedtime Routine
- Wake Up Light / Sleep Light



# AT for Safety

Post Trauma Symptoms:

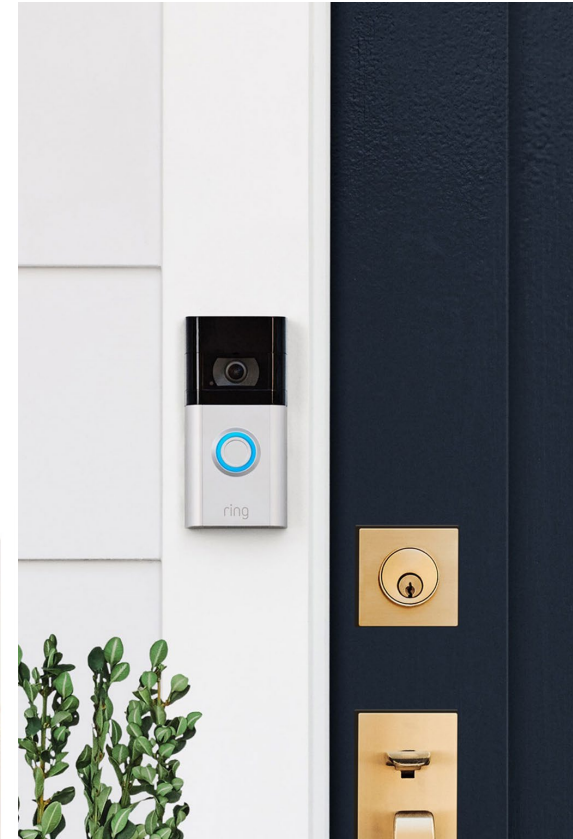
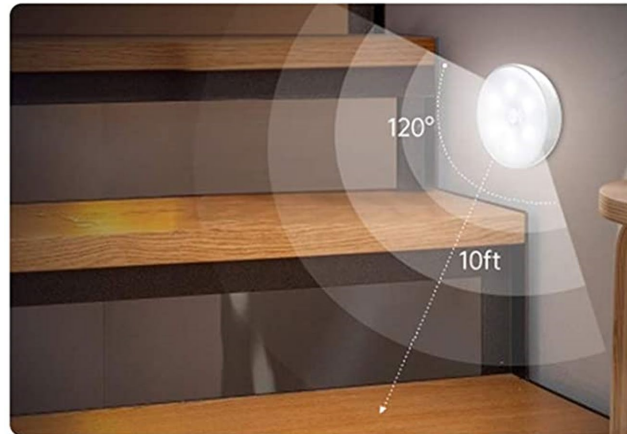
Wanting to “Escape”

Fight or Flight Response - The flight trauma response involves a release of stress hormones that signal us to flee from the danger or threat. Instead of staying in a dangerous situation, this response causes us to literally or metaphorically run.

Complex Trauma can affect a person’s ability to detect or respond to danger cues.

# AT for Health & Safety

- Home accessibility: Motion Sensor Lights
- Sensor Alarms and Alerts : Ring Doorbell
- Smart Plugs
- Bathwater Thermometers
- Medicine Reminders and Pill Organizers





# Mental Health

Trauma can have lasting effects on your mental, physical, and emotional health. Experiencing abuse or other trauma puts people at risk of developing mental health conditions, such as:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Misusing alcohol or drugs – Substance Abuse
- Borderline personality disorder



# AT for Mental Health

- Mental Health Apps
  - Mindfulness - guided meditation
  - Breathing
  - Focus
  - PTSD
  - Coping Skills



# AT for Mental Health

- **Wearable devices** can help with:
  - Stress regulation and panic
  - Focus, attention, and staying on task
  - Self Regulation and coping skills



# Social Isolation and Withdrawal

It's common for those that have experienced Trauma to isolate themselves. They may feel overwhelmed or unsafe in groups, quick to anger, misunderstood, or just uninterested in being around people. Pushing people away becomes a defense mechanism to keep people from being too close - where they can feel hurt



# Building Safe Connections

- Video Calls – FaceTime, Facebook, Zoom, Alexa Device – Echo Show
- Caribu – virtual interactive connection
- Journaling
- Accessible Communication



**CARIBU**  
Playtime Is  
((( Calling )))

# AT in IEP

An Individualized Education Plan (or Program) is also known as an IEP. This is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability who is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services.

- ALL IEP teams are **required** to consider the need for Assistive Technology (AT).
- If AT is necessary, the district must provide the devices and/or services.



# AT in the Classroom

## AT for Sensory and Self - Regulation

- Calming Corners
- Action Corners
- Fidgets
- Weighted Lap Pads

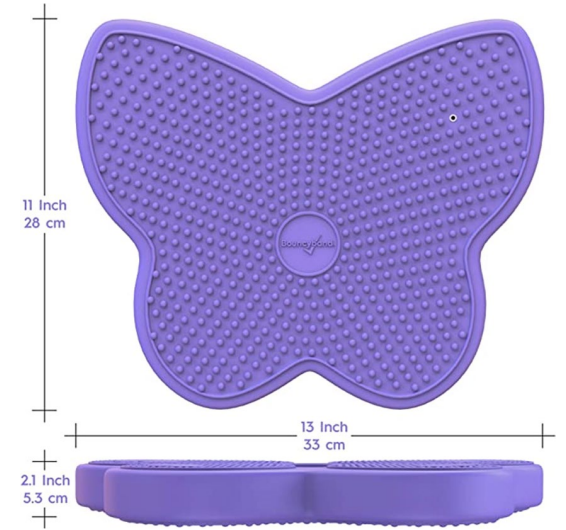
## AT for Learning and Development

- Writing Aides
- Technology Devices –
  - tablets or ipads
- Learning and Thinking Apps



# Sensory Seating

- Wobble Chair Stools
- Tactile Seat Cushions
- Bouncy Chair Bands
- Wiggle Wobble Chair Feet





# Take Away

We are here to help!

You can borrow the devices and try them!

We provide demonstrations.

We are a free, federally funded program, we are here for you to learn and create a space for more access to AT devices.



# Resources

- AT for Trauma Resource Guide by MATP
- ACE quiz (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- Michigan AT Loan Fund
- Therapy Den
- PTSD and Trauma support groups and forums



**Michigan Disability Rights Coalition**  
**Michigan Assistive Technology Program**

## Thank You

Please take our survey - We value your feedback

<https://forms.gle/jB7cTPVbB8R7YRWG7>

To Learn more or test out the items presented request a demonstration:

Email: [info@mymdrc.org](mailto:info@mymdrc.org)

Phone: 800 - 578 - 0280

Web: [MyMDRC.org/assistive - tech - program/](http://MyMDRC.org/assistive-tech-program/)

To contact the Presenters:

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Aimee Sterk: [aimee@mymdrc.org](mailto:aimee@mymdrc.org)



# We're Here To Help!

 @MichiganAllianceForFamilies

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For more information visit:  
<https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org>

Call: 800-552-4821  
En Español 313-217-1060  
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# Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

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