

**NAME:** Allyson Arserio, allyson.p.arserio@vanderbilt.edu

**PI:** Biggs, Elizabeth

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***The Experience of Parents and their Young Children in Accessing and Learning How to Use a Speech-Generating Device***

**Authors:** Allyson P. Arserio, Elizabeth E. Biggs

**Introduction:** Many children with disabilities have complex communication needs (CCN) and are unable to use functional speech to meet their daily communication needs. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) such as speech-generating devices (SGDs) provide critical communication access and can improve outcomes for young children with CCN (Ganz et al., 2021; Light & McNaughton, 2015; Ronski et al., 2015). However, AAC access occurs too infrequently for young children, and even then, access to an SGD alone is not enough to lead to desired outcomes. Young children with CCN benefit from communication support throughout their day, particularly through family-centered involvement (Mandak et al., 2017). Understanding families' lived experiences is a crucial starting point to improving AAC service delivery and policy. With this in mind, we addressed the following research question: How do parents and their young children with CCN experience the process of obtaining and learning how to use an SGD?

**Methods:** We utilized a descriptive qualitative design influenced by phenomenology, which focuses on lived experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). We conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 mothers who, to be eligible to participate, had to be a parent of a child aged 3-6 who had a disability and was learning to use an SGD. The children had a variety of diagnoses including Down syndrome, autism, apraxia, and developmental delay. Interviews ranged from 25 to 118 minutes in length (M = 58 minutes). Qualitative data analysis involved iterative coding cycles using a team-based, inductive approach (Thomas, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). This strengthened understanding of families' lived experiences by allowing findings to emerge from the data (Thomas, 2006). We used several strategies to ensure rigor, including researcher reflexivity, creating an audit trail, conducting member checks, and engaging in collaborative coding and analysis (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

**Results:** Analysis is underway and will be completed to share by Science Day. Findings will focus on main themes related to families' experiences, including both what families experience and how this is experienced (e.g., internal experiences). This will include addressing (1) the initial process of getting the device, (2) the process of learning how to use the device, (3) the supports and services provided to parents and children, and (4) parents' attitudes, values, and perceptions.

**Discussion:** Early intervention, access to AAC, and family involvement drive positive outcomes for young children with CCN. The knowledge from this study provides an in-depth understanding of families' experiences related to obtaining and learning how to use an SGD. This information will serve as a key starting point for service providers, educators, and policymakers to better understand how to support children and their families.

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