



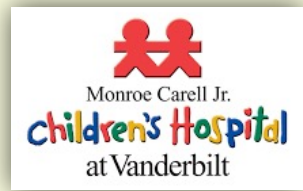
# AAC in the PICU

## Supporting children with complex communication needs in the PICU

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### RESEARCH QUESTION

**What are the experiences of hospital nurses with the use of AAC to support outcomes for children and youth with complex communication needs within the PICU?**

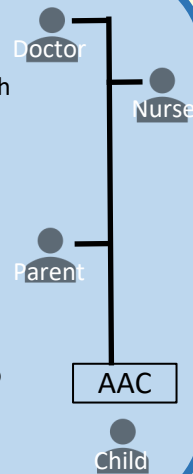
We also aimed to uncover how contextual determinants such as communication and roles of hospital staff and parents or other family members contribute as facilitators and barriers to patient outcomes in the PICU.

### IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

The Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) can be a frightening, and stressful environment for children and their family members. Many children and youth who are admitted to the PICU have severe communication vulnerabilities, compounding stress and uncertainty.

If a child is unable to communicate, it may not only be emotionally frightening for children and their family members but can also increase risk for sentinel events.

All children need a way to be able to communicate effectively with others around them in the hospital setting, and hospital staff need effective ways to support children's sense of control and enable them to participate actively in their care in developmentally appropriate ways.



### METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

We used an exploratory, descriptive qualitative study incorporating aspects of phenomenology to investigate the lived experiences and perspectives nurses who have supported communication for children and youth with AAC needs during PICU stays.

Participants included **5 hospital nurses** who (a) have worked in the PICU setting for at least 6 months and (b) have worked as a primary RN for at least 1 12-hour shift for a child that used AAC (e.g., communication board, picture symbols, speech-generating device).

Age	Years experience in PICU	Years experience as nurse
23-40	2-7, average of 3.8 yrs	2-8, average of 4.6 yrs

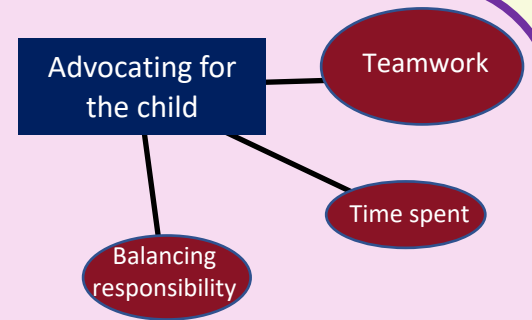
### EMERGING THEMES

#### For Nurses

All participants emphasized the importance of **advocating** for the child, and the importance of helping them "find their voice".

The value of **teamwork** was also a major theme in that establishing a method of communication often requires a "multi-faceted, multi-dimensional approach".

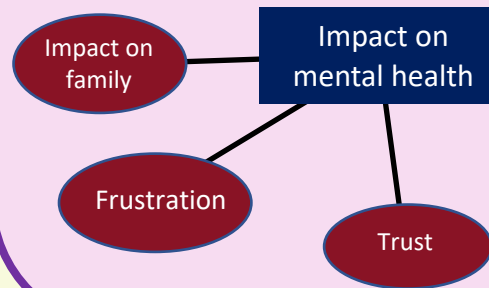
Additionally, the challenge of **balancing responsibilities** emerged as a common barrier, in that ensuring their medical needs are met can lead to successful communication "falling through the cracks".



#### For Children and Family

Being unable to communicate typically is detrimental to the children's **mental health**, and they get a "frustrated feeling like they're trapped and can't like can't get out what they're trying to say".

Furthermore, the **families are impacted**, namely the parents, of these children experience great stress and just "want to talk to the kids so badly about things you would normally talk to your kid about".



### WHAT IS AAC?

**Aided augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)** refers to communication supports such as communication boards, switches or buttons with speech output, eye gaze systems, and speech-generating devices that can provide access to communication. Little research has been conducted on the use of AAC in the PICU.

