

**What are the experiences of children and families during
the habilitation process to bone conduction hearing aids?**

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Abstract

For children with fluctuating conductive hearing losses, bone conduction hearing aids can be an effective treatment option. However, there is much we do not know about the experiences of children and families during the habilitation process to this kind of amplification technology. Since audiologists fit these hearing aids to children, they are in a good position to comment on the benefits and challenges to successful habilitation associated with these devices. Suppliers and manufacturers can comment on potential advances in the technology and provide reasons for their current limitations. Ultimately though, it is the parent who is with their child throughout the habilitation process and who is in the best position to describe their child's experience of it. This qualitative study examines this experience of habilitation to bone conduction hearing aids from the perspectives of all these people in the form of discussions and semi-structured interviews. As action research, this study aimed to identify potential habilitation problems inherent with bone conduction technology and explain why these problems exist. Furthermore, possible solutions were presented within a wider discussion that was already developing at the paediatric audiology clinic.

Themes arising from parent interviews were identified. Parents understood the purpose of the technology and associated it with an expectation that their child would develop speech and the imperative to 'be persistent' featured in some of their responses. However, the common objection that the bone conduction hearing aids were difficult to keep on the children's heads came up again and again, with specific complaints about badly-fitting headbands and oversensitive volume controls, which clinicians were aware of and were in the process of addressing. Several factors which feed into these challenges were identified, not least the vaguely-defined and sometimes contradictory policies at local and national levels on when fitting of a bone conduction hearing aid is indicated, potentially leading to fewer units being ordered and a resultant lack of incentive for suppliers and manufacturers to improve the technology.