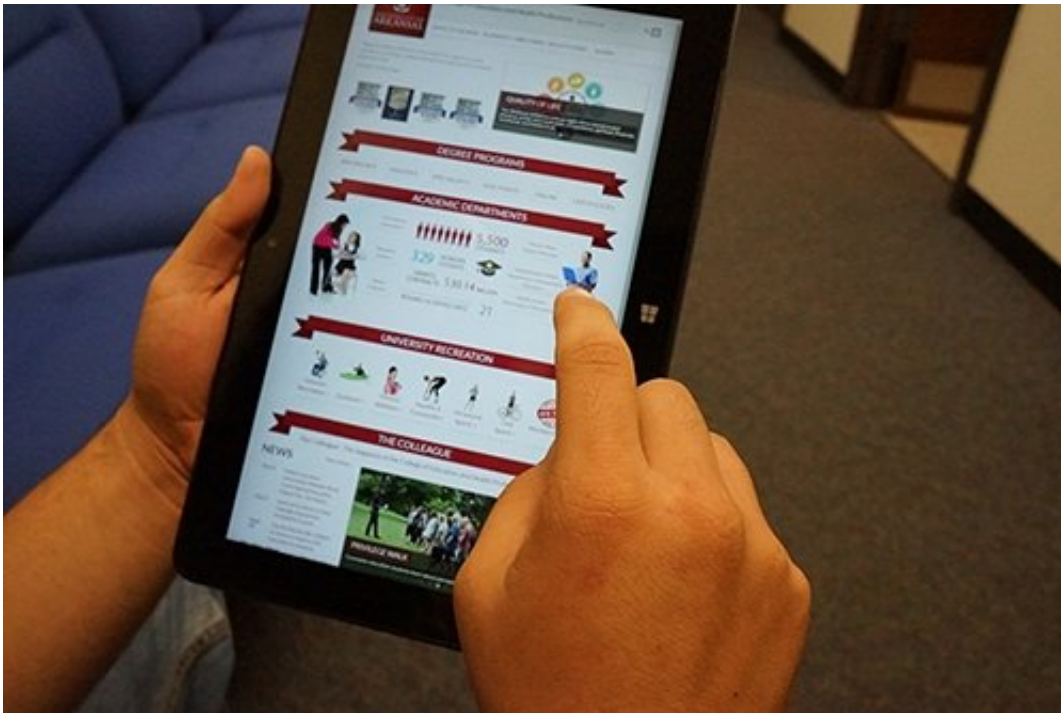


Research finds communication therapy effective but more studies needed

October 5 2017, by Heidi S. Wells



A computer tablet can be used as a communication device. Credit: University of Arkansas

More research on the effectiveness of augmentative and alternative communication is necessary to guide people who work with adolescents and adults with autism, according to a review a new University of Arkansas faculty member conducted with her colleagues at Pennsylvania State University and Elmhurst College.

Christine Holyfield earned a doctorate in communication sciences and disorders from Penn State. She joined the faculty of the communication disorders program in the College of Education and Health Professions this fall.

Research suggests that [early intervention](#) using augmentative and alternative communication devices and methods benefits children with autism, but more [research](#) is needed to shed light on the effectiveness for teens and adults, said an article Holyfield co-authored in the journal *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*.

"Early intervention is often the focus of research and services for individuals with [autism spectrum disorder](#)," she said. "Early intervention is a very powerful tool for promoting communication, language, academic, and vocational success for individuals with ASD. The good news, though, is that for people who may not have received services or received limited services later in life—it is never too late for individuals with ASD to benefit from interventions designed to promote their communication and language."

People's communication needs change as they get older, Holyfield said. Her research focuses on developing and evaluating interventions, including technology and instruction, for people whose speech capabilities don't meet their daily needs.

"Social and legal expectations for adults, and even adolescents, are far different than those expectations placed upon children," the article said. "Interaction among adolescents and adults is more complex and demanding than interaction among young children or between [young children](#) and adults."

Holyfield and her co-researchers found only 18 distinctive intervention studies involving people older than 11 with autism in a review of peer-

reviewed journal articles published from 1995 to early 2017.

Despite the limited number of studies, research indicates augmentative and alternative communication [intervention](#) is effective and should be provided by clinicians, the researchers said. The research indicates that interventions can improve [communication](#) of teens and adults with autism in a variety of contexts, including participating in the classroom and interacting socially with peers.

More information: Christine Holyfield et al. Systematic review of AAC intervention research for adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorder, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/07434618.2017.1370495](https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618.2017.1370495)

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