



Special Bulletin: Distracted Parenting

The Best Start Resource Centre developed this special bulletin in response to the increased interest in distracted parenting such as parents using cell phones while spending time with their children.

We invite you to actively discuss and exchange other relevant information such as work your organization is doing or other links of interest.

[Share your information with the MNCHP network](#)

**Please note that the Best Start Resource Centre does not endorse or recommend any events, training, resources, services, research or publications of other organizations.*

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I. News & Views

The Heartbreak of Digitally-Preoccupied Parenting

Richard Freed (2015), a child psychologist, reflects on the children he meets who confess they feel their parents ignore them for their smartphones. He talks about his personal struggles in dealing with these families. He also explains how parents can help children: “We need to take a hard look at our priorities...Discover how powerful your undistracted, loving presence can be” (Freed, 2015).

[Read the article](#)

Smartphone=Not-So-Smart Parenting?

According to pediatrician Michael Rich from the Boston Children’s Hospital, the pervasiveness of smartphones seems to have brought in a new era of distracted parenting (Novotney, 2016). Child development experts fear that children may feel they are competing for attention when parents are busy with their smartphones (Novotney, 2016). They may also learn that socializing with a screen is just as good as face-to-face interaction. Dr. Rich encourages families he sees in his practice to take 24 hours during which everyone in the family puts away all of their devices. He says most people are skeptical but those who try it are often liberated by the experience (Novotney, 2016).

[Read the article](#)

II. Recent Reports & Research

Patterns of Mobile Device Use by Caregivers and Children During Meals in Fast Food Restaurants

Radesky, J. S., Kistin, C. J., Zuckerman, B., Nitzberg, K., Gross, J., Kaplan-Sanoff, M., Augustyn, M. ... Silverstein, M. (2014). Patterns of mobile device use by caregivers and children during meals in fast food restaurants. Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2014/03/05/peds.2013-3703.full.pdf>

ABSTRACT:

Background and objectives:

Mobile devices are a ubiquitous part of American life, yet how families use this technology has not been studied. We aimed to describe naturalistic patterns of mobile device use by caregivers and children to generate hypotheses about its effects on caregiver–child interaction.

Methods:

Using nonparticipant observational methods, we observed 55 caregivers eating with 1 or more young children in fast food restaurants in a single metropolitan area. Observers wrote detailed field notes, continuously

describing all aspects of mobile device use and child and caregiver behavior during the meal. Field notes were then subjected to qualitative analysis using grounded theory methods to identify common themes of device use.

Results:

Forty caregivers used devices during their meal. The dominant theme salient to mobile device use and caregiver–child interaction was the degree of absorption in devices caregivers exhibited. Absorption was conceptualized as the extent to which primary engagement was with the device, rather than the child, and was determined by frequency, duration, and modality of device use; child response to caregiver use, which ranged from entertaining themselves to escalating bids for attention, and how caregivers managed this behavior; and separate versus shared use of devices. Highly absorbed caregivers often responded harshly to child misbehavior.

Conclusions:

We documented a range of patterns of mobile device use, characterized by varying degrees of absorption. These themes may be used as a foundation for coding schemes in quantitative studies exploring device use and child outcomes.

[Go to the full study](#)

How Adults Use Mobile Phones While Caring for Children at the Playground

Hiniker, A., Sobel, K., Suh, H., Sung, Y. C., Lee, C. P., & Kientz, J. A. (2015). Texting while parenting: How adults use mobile phones while caring for children at the playground. In *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - Proceedings*. (Vol. 2015-April, pp. 727-736). Association for Computing Machinery. DOI: [10.1145/2702123.2702199](https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702199)

ABSTRACT:

Child development research suggests that using phones while caring for children can be problematic, but limited prior work in this space makes defining appropriate use challenging. We conducted the first exploration of whether adults feel pressure to limit phone use in this context and whether they choose to do so. Through mixed methods, we collected data from 466 adult caregivers at playgrounds. We found that phone use was a small part of playground time, yet a notable source of guilt. Adults engaged in systematic and specific phone-use and phone-non-use behaviors in order to prioritize their children above themselves. Our results indicate that caregiver values and self-control together predict behavior and can be used to model phone use in this context. Users' mixed success with engaging in intentional periods of non-use suggests that a design agenda which prioritizes cycles of engagement, disengagement, and re-engagement may be of value to this group.

[Read the full article](#)

Maternal Mobile Device Use During a Structured Parent-Child Interaction Task

Radeskey, J., Miller, A. L., Rosenblum, K. L., Appugliese, D., Kaciroti, N., & Lumeng, J. C. (2015). Maternal mobile device use during a structure parent-child interaction task. *Academic Pediatrics*, 15(2), 238-244. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4355325/>

ABSTRACT

Objective:

Examine associations of maternal mobile device use with the frequency of mother-child interactions during a structured laboratory task.

Methods:

Participants included 225 low-income mother-child pairs. When children were ~6 years old, dyads were videotaped during a standardized protocol in order to characterize how mothers and children interacted when asked to try familiar and unfamiliar foods. From videotapes, we dichotomized mothers based on whether or not

they spontaneously used a mobile device, and counted maternal verbal and nonverbal prompts toward the child. We used multivariate Poisson regression to study associations of device use with eating prompt frequency for different foods.

Results:

Mothers were an average of 31.3 (SD 7.1) years old and 28.0% were of Hispanic/non-white race/ethnicity. During the protocol, 23.1% of mothers spontaneously used a mobile device. Device use was not associated with any maternal characteristics, including age, race/ethnicity, education, depressive symptoms, or parenting style. Mothers with device use initiated fewer verbal (RR 0.80 [95% CI: 0.63, 1.03]) and nonverbal (0.61 [0.39, 0.96]) interactions with their children than mothers who did not use a device, when averaged across all foods. This association was strongest during introduction of halva, the most unfamiliar food (0.67 [0.48, 0.93] for verbal and 0.42 [0.20, 0.89] for nonverbal interactions).

Conclusions:

Mobile device use was common and associated with fewer interactions with children during a structured interaction task, particularly nonverbal interactions and during introduction of an unfamiliar food. More research is needed to understand how device use affects parent-child engagement in naturalistic contexts.

[Read the full article](#)

III. Current Initiatives

HaltonParents Blog: A New Year’s Challenge to all Parents: Hands-Free Parenting!

The Halton Region Blog featured a New Year’s challenge to all parents “Put down your phones!” (D’Orazio, 2015, January 5). A public health nurse shared her personal story in disconnecting from her phone and reconnecting with her kids.

[Go to the blog](#)

Early Childhood Networking Nights – Education & Support for Parents & Providers: Distracted Parenting

The Wexford-Missaukee Child Protection Council hosted an event on the effects of using technology around children. The speakers noted that the increase of electronic and mobile devices may lead to less attention giving to children during the time where brain development and social emotional bonding is crucial (Wexford-Missaukee Child Protection Council, 2016). The workshop aimed for parents and providers to learn about the effects of this trend and ways to change how technology is used around children.

[See the event poster](#)

[Go to the Wexford-Missaukee Child Protection Council website](#)

IV. Resources

Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a website for parents on “communicating with your child”. The tips include a section on avoiding distracted parenting.

[Go to the CDC website](#)

Globe and Mail Article Features Apps to Help Parents Unplug

This Globe and Mail article (Bielski, 2015, October 8) discussed why it is time for adults to put down their smartphones. The author describes her experience in a restaurant where several patrons were sitting silently on their cellphones rather than using the occasion for talking and family togetherness. She provides an overview of a recent book and studies that bring forward some of the downsides of chronic cell phone use. A list of apps to help “unplug” are provided at the end of the article.

[Go to the article](#)

ParticipACTION Make Room for Play

The ParticipACTION website provides information about sitting less and moving more. It includes an overview of the benefits of physical activity and guidelines by age group as well as several pages about screen time.

[Go to the ParticipACTION website](#)
[Learn more about screen time](#)

IV. Featured Resources by the *Best Start Resource Centre*

The following resources may be useful for helping parents learn more about connecting with their children.

>> READY TO USE WORKSHOP
Connecting with Your Baby

Lesson Outline

General

- The purpose of this workshop is to provide practical tips for parents and simple messages on the topic of parent-child attachment.
- The workshop is designed for parents of children aged 0 to 1.
- The ideal group size is 8-12 parents and their babies.
- The recommended workshop length is 60-75 minutes.
- Facilitators should be familiar with their local children's mental health services and social services, in case some parents feel they need additional supports.
- This workshop is designed for the general population. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt this workshop to meet local needs.

Key Messages

- It is important to consider your baby when he needs it, especially when he is hungry, sick or distressed.
- It is important to talk, read, play and have fun with your baby every day.
- Each baby has a unique personality and has many ways to communicate his needs.
- If your baby feels safe, it will help him develop to his potential.

Suggested Agenda

- Introduction of presenter and topic: (12-2 minutes)
- Introduction of participants and their babies. See suggested ice-breakers, page 2, (10 minutes)
- Overview of attachment. See page 3, (10 minutes)
- Activities. See pages 4-8, (30-45 minutes)
- Additional resources and information. See pages 11-12, (5 minutes)
- Conclusions and evaluation. See page 9, (5 minutes)

NOTES

- Background information for facilitators is provided on page 10.
- A parent handbook is available to complement the workshop. See last page.
- In the document, the baby is sometimes referred to as "he" and sometimes referred to as "she" to simplify the text.

best start multiplier depart
let's see how together we can

Ready to Use Workshop – Connecting With Your Baby

This workshop provides practical tips for parents and simple messages on the topic of parent-child attachment.

Available in PDF in [English](#) and [French](#).

healthy baby healthy brain

Tips for Parents - Brain Development
Did you know?

Age & Stage	Theme	Tip
#6 0-2 months	Your role as a parent	Did you know that your newborn needs your loving care to develop a healthy brain?

Healthy care is the baby's most important connection to the world in the first few years of life. Right from birth, babies can learn from and connect to others, from how you can help:

- All babies respond differently to touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. It's hard to change your own way of doing things. But you can learn to be sensitive to your baby's cues and respond in ways that help them learn. The best way to understand your baby's cues is to observe, practice, and discuss with others.
- Parents need to provide lots of warmth and attention to help their baby learn connections with many interactions, you encourage to develop your baby's brain. Connect little things with your baby.
- Respond to your baby.
- Take care of your baby.
- Touch and play with your baby.
- Learn to follow your baby's cues.
- Help your baby see and touch new things.
- Show your baby a variety of people, animals, places and things. Talk about what you're showing your baby.
- Respond to the sounds your baby makes as if you were having a conversation with them.
- Respond to the way you talk to your baby and how you talk to your baby (how often).
- Cuddle your baby, providing the physical connection they need.
- Your baby responds to you in a special way. They need to see you and feel your love. It's hard to do. But you can do it. Start by looking for the best connection in your baby. When you want them to go to sleep, let them know they are loved and safe.
- If a baby cries, it's because they need something, even if it's just for you to hold them for a few minutes.

With every little word and gesture, you will strengthen new connections in your baby's growing brain. We will help your baby learn to think and do more.

Did you know? Parents can get more on baby's brain development.
www.healthycanadianbaby.com/parents/brain-development
 • The National Child Development Study: www.nationalchilddevelopmentstudy.org

To help your baby have a healthy brain, visit the research website: www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca

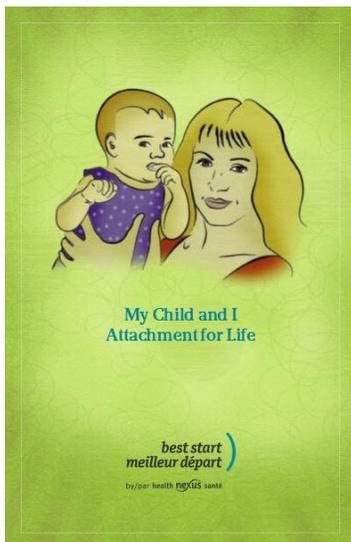
Tips for Parents – Brain Development: Did You Know?

These tips provide parents and future parents some practical suggestions to support their baby's brain development. These messages complement the information provided on

www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca

- [Did you know that your newborn needs your loving care to develop a healthy brain?](#)
- [Did you know that a baby's secure attachment is important for brain development?](#)
- [Did you know that listening to your baby's cues helps your baby's brain to develop?](#)

See all the tip sheets in [English](#) and in [French](#).



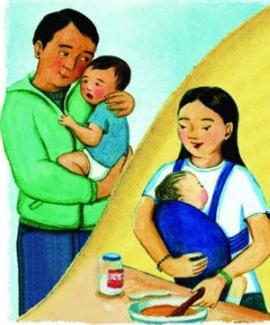
My Child and I: Attachment for Life

This booklet for parents of children aged 0-3 years will help them to understand the principles of attachment and learn ways to promote attachment. Activities are suggested for each age group.

Available in PDF in [English](#), [French](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese \(Simplified\)](#), [Hindi](#), [Punjabi](#), [Spanish](#), [Tagalog](#), [Tamil](#) and [Urdu](#).

[Available to order in print in English and French.](#)

Baby Wants...



best start
meilleur départ
by/par health nexUS santé

Baby Wants

This booklet for parents encourages them to do simple things like playing, reading and singing to help develop their young child.

Available in PDF in [English](#), [French](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese \(Simplified\)](#), [Hindi](#), [Punjabi](#), [Spanish](#), [Tagalog](#), [Tamil](#) and [Urdu](#).

[Available to order in print in English and French.](#)



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- [Click4HP](#) is an international dialogue on health promotion. Participants exchange views on issues and ideas, provide leads to resources, and ask questions about health promotion.
- [The Maternal Newborn and Child Health Promotion \(MNCHP\) Network](#) - A province-wide electronic forum for service providers working to promote preconception, prenatal and child health.
- [Ontario Prenatal Education Network](#) - A space where professionals can share information and resources, ask questions and collaborate with peers on topics related to prenatal education.
- [Health Promotion Today](#) - Our blog keeps you informed of news and topics related to health promotion.
- [The Best Start Aboriginal Sharing Circle \(BSASC\) Network](#) is a distribution list designed for service providers working with Aboriginal Peoples in areas of preconception, prenatal and child health. The network is a forum to share news, ideas, questions and best practices.

En français:

Restez branché!

- Le bulletin francophone [Le Bloc-Notes](#) est un outil indispensable pour les intervenants professionnels qui aiment être à l'affût des nouveautés dans le domaine de la promotion de la santé.
- Le [Bulletin de santé maternelle et infantile](#) est un bulletin électronique mensuel à l'intention des fournisseurs de services œuvrant dans le domaine de la promotion de la santé maternelle et infantile.
- [Promotion de la santé aujourd'hui](#) – Notre blogue sur lequel on partage des nouvelles et réflexions liées à la promotion de la santé.