Mobile phones and Families: Umbilical cords, Babysitters, or Disruptors?

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Building a Culture of health in NJ
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COMMON SENSE REPORTS

MEDIA USE BY KIDS
AGE 0-8
2017

SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL LIFE
2018

FIGURE A. Mobile Devices in the Home, 2011-2017
Among 0- to 8-year-olds, those with:
- 95% Smartphone (in the home)
- 78% Tablet (in the home)
- 42% Their own tablet
- 41% 63%
- 8% 7%
- <1%
2011 2013 2017

FIGURE B. Screen Media Use, by Platform, 2011 vs. 2017
Among 0- to 8-year-olds, share of time spent using:
- TV
- DVD/videtapce
- Computer
- Video game player
- Mobile device

FIGURE A. Social Media and Digital Device Use, 2012 vs. 2018
Percent of 13- to 17-year-olds who:
- 89% Have their own smartphone
- 70% Use social media multiple times a day*
- 19% Don’t use social media
- 15% Say Facebook is their main social media site*

* Differences over time are statistically significant at p < .05.
From the *Atlantic*

Jean Twenge
Sep 2017

*It’s Complicated*
the social lives of networked teens

danah boyd

*Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?*
More comfortable online than out partying, post-Millennials are safer, physically, than adolescents have ever been. But they’re on the brink of a mental-health crisis.

Phones Are Changing the Texture of Family Life

Joe Pinsker
Aug 22, 2018
What do we know from research?

- Both positive and negative (history repeats itself...)
- Caution – correlation is not causation!
Mobile phone and the family

- Umbilical cord - safety, surveillance, management
- Babysitting – boredom, mood management, distraction
- Disruptors – “Tele-Coccooning“ disengagement, reduced interaction
The Three “C”s of Children and Media

- The Child
  - The Content
  - The Context
Case study: “Mommy, look at me!” in NJ playgrounds*

- reduced emotional availability

A mother about 40 years old sat on a bench at the playground with her back to her four-year-old son, who was standing by the swings. The mother talked on her mobile phone and did not pay attention to her child. The son started to pull on one of the swings, then he yelled, “Mommy, I want to swing!” The mother did not respond and continued her phone conversation. The boy yelled, “Mommy, I want to swing!” five more times, and his voice sounded more distressed and his face looked more concerned with each attempt.

*With Nelly Elias and Diana Floegel
- Physical neglect

A mother in her early 30s sat at a picnic table and frequently used her phone while her 6-year-old son played on various equipment ranging from about 20 to 50 feet away from her. Throughout the one-hour observation the son engaged in dangerous behavior that either resulted in mild harm (e.g., falling off stairs and landing face-first, attempting to do a trick on a ladder and falling to the ground) or could have been harmful (e.g., playing with a stick, chasing a squirrel).
Missed opportunities for social learning

Observation of two mothers and two sons (4-year-old and 6-year-old). The boys displayed a number of dysfunctional social behaviors that their mothers missed or ignored while conversing with each other and typing/scrolling on their mobile phones. These activities took place while the mothers faced away from the boys, who threatened to hurt each other, threw sand after being told not to, placed sand at the bottom of slides so people coming down would land in it, and chased after a family to make good on their elaborate (and violent) plans to kill their dog.
Continuum of parents’ mobile use and levels of engagement in the playground setting

- Constant mobile device use
- Potential for other distractions from partners, friends, other park visitors
- Little or no verbal and nonverbal communication
- Inattention to children’s behaviors and emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disengagement</th>
<th>Divided Engagement</th>
<th>High Engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little or no mobile device use, or use as part of interaction (e.g., taking photos)</td>
<td>Involved in children’s play</td>
<td>Frequent verbal and nonverbal encouragement</td>
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<td>Aware of children’s behaviors and emotions</td>
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Mobile phone in NJ restaurants

- **Safety neglect** (e.g., children getting lost, almost falling off the high chair, choking on food...)
- **Emotional neglect** (e.g., parent not emotionally available, doesn’t provide scaffolding)
- **Missed opportunities for social learning and quality family time** (e.g., learning about food, menus, cultures, eating habits, celebrating, conversing...)
- **Cultivating bad eating habits** (e.g., parents eating while scrolling – negative role model; parent scrolling while feeding the child; parent feeding a child busy on the phone)
- **Emotional management of the child** (e.g., giving the child the phone to keep the child distracted, calmed down, “digital pacifier”)
- **Staging “Happy Family”** (e.g., family gathering to stage for a selfie or a waitress to take a photo, smiling happily for a moment, and then smiles disappear and each one returns to their devices and disengage)

* with Nelly Elias, Diana Floegel, and Dan Delmonaco
Strategies

- Parental mediation of children’s use – set rules!
- Controlled self-use – be a role model!
“This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends.

Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box.”

Ed Murrow
RTNDA Convention Chicago
October 15, 1958

1908-1965
Six Myths of Children in the Digital Age
Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics

- Children are ‘digital natives’ and know it all.
- Parents are ‘digital immigrants’ and don’t know anything.
- Time with media is time wasted compared with ‘real’ conversation or playing outside.
- Parents’ role is to monitor, restrict and ban because digital risks greatly outweigh digital opportunities.
- Children’ don’t care about their privacy online.
- Media literacy is THE answer to the problems of the digital age.

Resources for Families

Parenting for a Digital Age, LSE
http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/

- Center on Media and Child Health  CMCH, Harvard University Medical School
  https://cmch.tv/

- Common Sense Media, California
  https://www.commonsensemedia.org/
Thanks for your attention!

Questions? Comments? Sharing?