

Smartphone app makes parents more attuned to their babies' needs, research shows

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University of York researchers have designed an app to help new parents become more 'tuned in' to what their babies are thinking and feeling.

The app, called BabyMind, prompts the parent to think about things from their baby's perspective and to consider what is going on in their baby's mind at a specific point each day. It also provides [parents](#) with [accurate information](#) on babies' [psychological development](#).

Smartphone apps targeted at parents and parents-to-be are increasingly popular with users, but there is a lack of evidence on how effective they are at improving parenting behaviour.

Professor Elizabeth Meins, from the University of York's Department of Psychology, said, "There are thousands of parenting apps available, but we don't know whether any of them actually have a [positive impact](#) on parenting.

"There are many advantages of using apps as a means of intervention—they're low-cost, easy to use and already integrated into people's lives—but we wanted to establish whether an app can have a demonstrable effect on the quality of parent-baby interaction".

The team recruited a group of mothers who started using the app as soon as their babies were born and followed up with them when their babies were six months of age.

The researchers observed the parents playing with their babies and assessed how attuned they were to their babies' thoughts and feelings. The mothers were compared against a control group of mothers with 6-month-olds who had not used the app. Compared with the control group mothers, the app users were significantly more attuned to their babies' thoughts and feelings.

The study included a wide age range of mothers, and the results for teenage mothers were particularly interesting. Professor Meins explained, "Previous research has shown that teenage mothers show less

attunement to their babies' thoughts and feelings compared with mothers in their mid-twenties or older. Our study showed that [young mothers](#) who had used BabyMind were just as attuned as the older mothers who'd used the app.

"Even more impressive was the fact that the young app users were more attuned to their [babies](#) than the older [mothers](#) who had not used the BabyMind app. This suggests that using our app is associated with younger motherhood no longer being a disadvantage".

NICE data show that uptake of antenatal and postnatal services is poor in younger parents, so this research may be useful in designing interventions to support families in hard-to-reach populations.

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Provided by University of York

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