

# Study: Mobile devices a lifeline for families during lockdowns

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New Curtin research has revealed a positive aspect to the COVID pandemic, with families found to benefit from the extra time together during lockdowns and mobile devices proving useful for helping them

stay in touch with extended family and friends and for activities such as online classes.

However, the research also found lockdowns and other restrictions affected the mental health of some parents who felt overwhelmed, isolated and uncertain about the future, while [mobile devices](#) were also a source of distraction that at times hampered [family](#) interactions.

Lead author, Curtin Ph.D. student Rebecca Hood from Curtin's School of Allied Health, said the study of Perth parents of infants aged nine to 15 months, recruited from [longitudinal study](#) The ORIGINS Project, explored how the first wave of the pandemic in 2020 influenced family routines, relationships and use of technology such as smartphones and tablet computers, among families.

"Families described how spending more time together and doing more shared activities as a result of lockdowns brought them closer together and strengthened relationships," Ms Hood said.

"Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets were found to be helpful for maintaining connections with family and friends who couldn't visit due to restrictions and also for providing ideas for family activities.

"Families celebrated birthdays over video calls and sent photos to grandparents to keep their spirits up. Activities such as exercise classes went online, helping families to bond and spend time together while keeping physically active. Children chatted and played games online to stay connected with their friends.

"However some study participants reported their devices as being a source of distraction within the family unit during the pandemic, interrupting playtime and communication."

Research supervisor Dr. Juliana Zabatiero, also from Curtin's School of Allied Health, said the research provided an opportunity to capitalize on the positive side effects of the pandemic, such as increased family connectedness, while managing the negative impacts.

"Overall, the findings indicate that access to devices has played a positive role in alleviating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on families," Dr. Zabatiero said.

"It was clear from the findings that the ways in which families used their devices was important in whether this was beneficial or detrimental, rather than simply the amount of [time](#) they spent on screens.

"Being aware of the potential downsides of technology use in creating new habits and disrupting family interactions is likely to be of value for families in making wise technology use decisions during pandemic related restrictions.

"Findings of this study will be useful for providing guidance for families, health professionals and government advisors on wise technology use decisions during future [pandemic](#)-related restrictions."

**More information:** Rebecca Hood et al, "Coronavirus Changed the Rules on Everything": Parent Perspectives on How the COVID-19 Pandemic Influenced Family Routines, Relationships and Technology Use in Families with Infants, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph182312865](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182312865)

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