

Mobile device use can help or hinder bonding with babies in the womb

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Lead author, Curtin Ph.D. student Rebecca Hood from Curtin's School of Allied Health, said interviews with Western Australian parents

revealed that looking at pregnancy information and Apps on their phone or tablet helped many parents-to-be feel connected to their baby, by giving them a better idea of what was going on.

"Among the benefits was that using devices in that way helped parents to picture what their baby looked like while in the womb. For example, descriptions such as 'they are now the size of an avocado and can suck their thumb,' led parents to feeling more excited and caring toward their baby," Ms. Hood said.

"Some parents also reported enjoying playing music through their device to their baby bump, which led to increased feelings of connectedness.

"However, parents who used their devices for unrelated tasks, such as scrolling through [social media](#) or prolonged use without a specific purpose, felt a sense of disconnection to their baby."

"In addition, several parents mentioned reading worst case scenarios and extreme cases such as stories of stillbirth on their devices had led to increased worry."

Research supervisor Dr. Juliana Zabatiero, also from Curtin's School of Allied Health, said the findings helped explain how [device use](#) in pregnancy can affect the early relationship between a parent and their baby.

"The research found how and why parents used their devices was important, rather than simply the amount of screen time," Dr. Zabatiero said.

"Although devices can increase worry or distract parents from thinking about their baby, especially when used without a clear purpose, they can also actually be helpful in forming an early bond.

"It is important to have this early bond, as feeling close to the baby in pregnancy typically leads to a better parent-child relationship after birth, as well as better outcomes in the child's future.

"The findings will be useful for providing information to expectant [parents](#) on how they can make the most of devices while being aware of potential downsides."

This study involves families from The [ORIGINS Project](#), a collaboration between Telethon Kids Institute and Joondalup Health Campus, which is a long-term study of 10,000 families aimed at uncovering the causes of many chronic conditions, and the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child.

The full research paper, "'There's good and bad': parent perspectives on the influence of mobile touch screen device use on prenatal attachment," was published in *Ergonomics*.

More information: Rebecca Hood et al, 'There's good and bad': parent perspectives on the influence of mobile touch screen device use on prenatal attachment, *Ergonomics* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/00140139.2022.2041734](#)

Provided by Curtin University

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