

Research shows parents are 'winging it' on their kids' mobile use

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As many parents will attest, children and teens' mobile use is a significant source of family arguments.

But new Edith Cowan University (ECU) [research](#) is shedding light on the issue to help millennial parents who are literally making it up as they go when it comes to [digital media](#) use in the home.

Researchers from ECU's School of Education have set out to better understand how parents felt the use of digital media affected their children's behavior and development, and what information they were accessing for support.

Lead researcher and Ph.D. student Stephanie Milford said the results emphasized the importance of educating parents on the role mobile media was playing in shaping their child's behavior.

A survey of 281 Australian parents found 75 percent of parents reported experiencing conflict, tension, and family disagreements over mobile media use, yet almost 1 in 3 had never looked for official guidelines on digital media use by children for help.

Additionally, lack of exercise, having difficulties completing tasks, excessive gaming, sleep problems and social withdrawal were all [common problems](#) reported by at least 1 in 5 parents.

Mobile media use has previously been shown to be negatively correlated with [child development](#), however, little is known of how parents approach their child's mobile media use.

Where to go for advice?

Ms Milford said parents were recognizing the negative impacts of mobile media on their child's behavior, reporting their kids were finding it harder to focus, follow directions, exercise self-control and handle emotions.

"What is surprising is while parents reported high rates of oppositional behavior, such as arguing back, very few sourced information on [screen time](#) from trusted sources such as GPs, teachers, or counselors," she said.

"Our results show parents are using informal networks, which could indicate the official guidelines around digital media use are either difficult to understand or not fit for purpose."

Ms Milford said there was a huge amount of conflicting advice, both official and unofficial, on how much time children should use digital media.

"We know today's mums and dads struggle with no frame of reference because these devices didn't exist when they were children," she said.

"Parents are trying their best by using a range of strategies they have heard about, to try to curb their children's mobile media use."

Some of the most common mediation strategies parents are currently using:

- Limiting the length of time a child can use their device (69.5% of respondents)
- A conversation with the child about what they use their device for (68.1%)
- Checking websites and apps a child visits (66%)
- Taking mobile media away as punishment (58.5%)

Education needed, for kids AND parents

Ms Milford explains parents still have a limited awareness about the impact mobile media use has on their child's behavior and what is known as their 'executive functioning': the critical skills we all use every day to

learn, work, and manage daily life.

"It's clear a better job needs to be done in educating parents about how their children's digital media use could be affecting their behavior and development," Ms Milford said.

"As children are natural early users of [mobile media](#) because of its portability and interactivity, this area needs more research."

Ms Milford said these research results show the need for digital [media](#) use guidelines to be developed, which are easy for [parents](#) to understand and put into practice.

The research team is now launching [a new survey](#) aiming to further investigate parent knowledge, understanding and mediation practices of digital device use among [children](#).

"An Initial Investigation into Parental Perceptions Surrounding the Impact of Mobile Media Use on Child Behavior and Executive Functioning" was published in *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*.

More information: Stephanie C. Milford et al, An Initial Investigation into Parental Perceptions Surrounding the Impact of Mobile Media Use on Child Behavior and Executive Functioning, *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* (2022). [DOI: 10.1155/2022/1691382](https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/1691382)

Provided by Edith Cowan University

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