



# SMARTPHONE USE IN THE DAILY INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PARENTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Rosanne Roy & Grace Paradis

Psychology & Child Development Department, CSU Stanislaus

Contact: [roy@csustan.edu](mailto:roy@csustan.edu) | [gparadis@csustan.edu](mailto:gparadis@csustan.edu)



## INTRODUCTION

Mobile media technology has rapidly become a part of the day-to-day activities of family life (Plowman, McParke, & Stephen, 2010; Rideout, 2013; Lauricella, Wartella, & Rideout, 2015). According to Rideout (2013), 75% of families own some type of mobile device. In families of young children, for example, 63% own a smartphone and 40% own a tablet (Rideout, 2013). This increased access to mobile devices has also influenced the amount of time the devices are used by parents and their children.

Lauricella, Wartella, and Rideout (2015) reported that parents who own a smartphone spend more than an hour a day on their phone and their young children, 8 years and younger, spend on average 15 minutes a day on a smartphone. What has yet to be examined, however, are what factors may influence how mobile devices, such as a smartphone are used in the daily interactions between parents and their young children.

The current exploratory study was designed to determine the extent to which parents allowed their young children access to their smartphones on a daily basis and for what reasons.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics showed that between one and two times a week parents allowed their young child to play with their smartphones ( $M = 2.67$ ).

Unsurprisingly, young children also requested to use their parent's smartphone between one and two times a week ( $M = 2.75$ ).

Less frequent behaviors reported by parents were that they used their smartphone to distract or calm their child or that their child got upset if they took back the smartphone; these behaviors occurred less than once a week.

The least frequent behavior reported was that parents used their smartphone as a reward.

Spearman rho correlations were conducted to examine the relationship between the frequency in which parents allowed their child to use their smartphone in a given week and:

- Parent using their phone to distract/calm child:  $r_s = .65$  ( $p < .01$ )
- Parent using their phone as a reward for good behavior:  $r_s = .50$  ( $p < .01$ )
- Child requesting the phone:  $r_s = .72$  ( $p < .01$ )
- Child becoming upset when the phone was taken back:  $r_s = .65$  ( $p < .01$ )
- Importance parent felt for their child to become familiar with technology:  $r_s = .48$  ( $p < .01$ )

## METHOD

### Participants

All participants were 18 or older and had to be parents of children aged 1-4 years as well as owners of a smartphone. Participants were compensated with a \$40 gift card.

- **Sample:**  $N = 55$
- **Parent Age:**  $M = 30.62$  ( $SD = 4.85$ )
- **Child Age:**  $M = 31.52$  months ( $SD = 10.59$ )
- **Parent:** mothers (87.3%), fathers (12.7%)
- **Ethnicity:** White (54.5%), Hispanic (32.7%), other (7.3%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3.6%), African American (1.8%)
- **Employment:** stay-at-home caregivers (40%), employed full-time (32.7%), employed part-time (20.0%), self-employed (5.5%), and unemployed (1.8%)
- **Marital Status:** married (72.7%), two-parent households (85.5%)
- **Education:** some college education (45.5%), baccalaureate degree (32.7%), graduate degree (18.2%), some high school (3.6%)

### Measures

**Technology Use Survey.** Parents used a 6-point scale (1 – never; 2 – less than once a month; 3 – 2-3 times a month; 4 – once a week; 5 – 2-3 times a week; 6 – daily) to rate how often they allowed their smartphone to be used by their child and the extent to which they valued having their young child be knowledgeable about mobile technology.

### Procedures

- Counterbalanced conditions lasting 8 minutes.
  - **Condition A:** Parents were told to turn off their phones while they interacted with their child.
  - **Condition B:** Parents were informed they could use their phones if they wanted and a suggestion was made to check out our Facebook page with information on how to receive the gift card.
- After the study, parents completed Technology Use Survey.

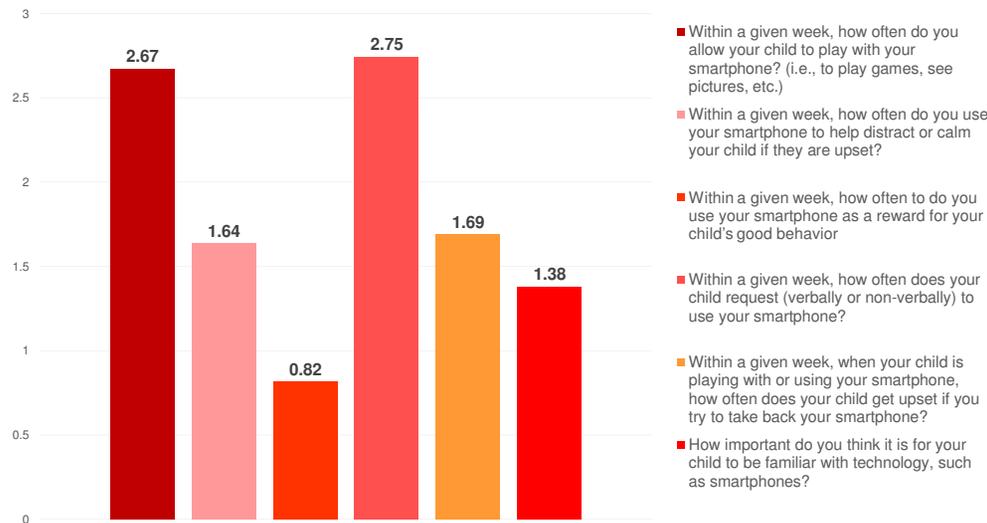


Figure 1. Means for Parent Responses regarding Child's Smartphone Use

## DISCUSSION

Given the rapid increase in mobile technology use in the home and the limited research on the role mobile devices play in parent-child interactions, the current research aimed to gain a better understanding of the frequency in which parents allow their young child to use their smartphone, and the possible reasons parents report for using their smartphones in their interactions with their child. The results indicate that parents of children between the ages of 1-4 permit their child to use their phone on average one to two times a week. This result aligns with findings from Lauricella, Wartella, and Rideout (2015) who found young children use smartphones for approximately 15 minutes a day. However, parents report using the phone as a reward or a distraction much less frequently within a given week.

In addition to how frequently parents allow their young child to use their phone, the results also suggest that parents who feel it is important for their young child to be familiar with technology are more likely to allow their child to use their phone. This suggests that parents' attitudes about technology may influence how much access their young children have to mobile devices. Similarly, parents who frequently allow their child to use their smartphones and feel it important that their child be familiar with technology are more likely to engage in other interactions that involve the smartphone. Specifically, parents who reported higher frequencies of allowing their child to use their phone, also reported they more frequently used their phone as a reward, more frequently used their phone to distract their child and consequently had children who requested their phone more often and became upset more frequently when the phone was taken away.

## REFERENCES

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