

Young children and digital technology use

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The rapid proliferation of Australian children accessing mobile touch screen devices (e.g. tablets, smart phones) has led to widespread uptake across home, school, and community settings. Whilst no Australian representative national data exist yet, available evidence suggests that many children under 2 years, and most children aged 3-5 years, are using these devices. As with prior waves of technology (television, computers, electronic games), broad access led to communities embracing these new technologies as well as having concerns about potential negative consequences on young children's development. Although longer-term evidence exists of the impact of older technologies on children's physical and mental development and well-being, such evidence is not yet available for this new generation of mobile technologies; a natural consequence of rapid technological evolution.

Family members and early childhood educators have pivotal roles in helping young children develop appropriate habits for wise technology use. This significant role for families and educators reflects that many caregivers of young children are the first generation to raise children who use mobile digital technologies. Helping children to learn wise and developmentally appropriate ways of using digital technology is likely to help ensure children gain the potential benefits from technology whilst minimising the potential risks.

Given community concerns, a better understanding of families and early childhood educators' attitudes towards digital technology use by young children is essential to inform policy and practice. This presentation describes preliminary data from an industry survey of Australian families and early childhood educators. The survey investigated respondents' attitudes, particularly on what excites and concern them about young children using digital technologies, as well as areas families and educators believe guidance or advice is most needed.

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