

How Does Parental Technology Use Impact Mental Health in Youth?

(Deneault et al., 2024)

DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.28261

WHAT WE KNEW

- When **parents' attention is frequently interrupted** by phones or devices, **children are more likely** to experience **conflict** with them and feel **less emotional support** and warmth.
- When children's emotional and physical needs are **not responded to** or **consistently ignored**, they are **at risk** of developing **mental health difficulties**.

OUR AIM

To explore whether **children's mental health symptoms** – such as anxiety, depression, inattention, and hyperactivity – was connected to how often they **felt their parents were distracted** by screens or devices.



OUR METHODS

All Our Families children ($n = 1303$) completed surveys about how often they felt their parents were distracted by screens and their mental health symptoms (depression, anxiety, hyperactivity, and inattention) at three time points between 2020 and 2022 when the children were between 9 and 11 years of age.



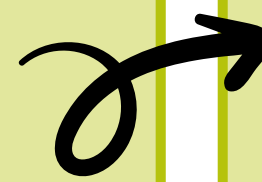
During everyday moments, screens may interrupt connection between parents and children when parents:

- Check screens while a child is talking or playing
- Don't fully return attention after screen use
- Miss eye contact, facial expressions or emotional changes
- Pause play, meals or conversations to look at a screen



How children may experience it:

- Feeling like they are not being fully heard
- Repeating themselves or acting out to get attention
- Withdrawing or giving up when trying to connect



WHAT WE LEARNED

Children who **increasingly felt** their **parents were distracted** by screens showed **higher levels of mental health difficulties**, particularly **anxiety**. These **symptoms increased** as the amount of distraction increased.



Higher anxiety in children was linked to **feeling** that their **parents were more frequently distracted** by screens.

When **parents were increasingly distracted** by screens, **children** showed more **inattention and hyperactivity symptoms**.



HOW TO SUPPORT HEALTHY SCREEN USE IN FAMILIES?

- These findings highlight to the need to **discuss digital technology use and mental health** with parents and children as a part of routine care.
- Results highlight the need for **parents** to consider their technology use around their children.
 - **Create consistent daily screen-free routines** for the whole family, such as during meal times and one hour before bed.
 - It's important for parents to set a good example with screen use by spending quality, focused time with their children and family