



A Majority of Parents Admit Even Youngest Kids Need a “Digital Detox”

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New research reveals children are fluent in technology before they can read

NEWTON, Mass.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Mar. 19, 2025-- In our modern and highly-connected world, technology can be both an asset and a danger—especially for children. Kids today don’t know a world without smartphones, and according to research from the Modern Family Index (MFI), commissioned by Bright Horizons (NYSE:BFAM) and conducted by The Harris Poll, 60% of parents say their children started using technology before they could read. Nearly three-quarters (73%) even admit their children could use a “detox” from technology, including 68% of parents with children under six years of age.

While the long-term impacts of excessive screen time have yet to be fully uncovered, many are worried about the potential effect on kids’ mental health. According to the 2024 U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory, [Parents Under Pressure](#), the rapid adoption and evolution of technology and social media pose new risks to children’s health and safety.

Convenience Conundrum

More than half of parents (55%) use screens as a bargaining chip to get their children to do things like chores or homework. As today’s busy parents struggle to balance their own stress and the overwhelming demands of their families and careers, working parents are even more likely than their unemployed counterparts to use screen time as a reward (57% vs. 42%). An even higher percentage (58%) say they often use screens to keep their children quiet in certain situations such as shopping or dining at a restaurant.

“Screens are essentially unavoidable today, but families should be cautious and deliberate about introducing children to screen-based activities in the early years. This can be hard to hear and feel impractical, but the more guardrails you put in place early, the less you’ll have to do retroactively,” said Rachel Robertson, Chief Academic Officer at Bright Horizons, a leading provider of high-quality early childhood education and care. “Technology of all kinds is designed to make our lives easier, so naturally, parents occasionally find themselves using it as a way to manage behaviors, especially in high-stress environments.”

Parents harbor plenty of concerns when it comes to their children, but at the top of the list, behind their children’s safety (57%), is concern for their mental health (49%). While technology also has its benefits, 42% of parents are worried about the amount of screen time their children engage in and slightly more (44%) acknowledge their children spend too much time in front of screens/using technology.

Making Time for Screen-Free Play

Many parents also recognize that excessive technology use could be taking away from time children spend on more productive activities. Around 3 in 5 (61%) report their children do not do enough healthy activities, such as playing outside with friends, playing in an organized way, playing with toys, coloring, doing homework, or reading. As a result, parents cite negative impacts on their children’s behavior, including spending less quality time with the family (39%), becoming dependent on technology to regulate their emotions (35%), staying confined to their room (30%), and getting anxious about in-person interactions (23%).

When children participate in unstructured, imaginative play offline, they are developing important skills that can’t be achieved through screen time. Play relieves stress and increases happiness, builds feelings of empathy, creativity, and collaboration, and supports the growth of sturdiness and grit. When children are limited in their opportunities for play, their development can be significantly impaired.

Robertson adds, “For that reason, it is critically important to ensure we’re carving out time for kids to engage in unstructured play, explore the world around them, develop friendships offline, and garner a love for reading from a young age. Developing these cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and physical skills is crucial to ensuring kids aren’t just prepared for school, but to be successful throughout their whole lives.”

About the Bright Horizons Modern Family Index

Over the past decade, Bright Horizons has tracked trends impacting working families through its annual Modern Family Index (MFI), highlighting the unique challenges and priorities they’ve faced. In 2025, the report has been refreshed and will encompass several waves of survey data focused on timely topics to be released throughout the year.

To download the 2025 Bright Horizons Modern Family Index, [click here](#).

Research Method

The research was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bright Horizons between February 6-10, 2025, among 2,000 adults ages 18 and older – among whom 622 are a parent or guardian of child(ren) under 18 years of age (“parents”). Data are weighted where

necessary by age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, household income, education, marital status, size of household, and political party affiliation to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents are selected among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. The sample data is accurate to within ± 2.5 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

About Bright Horizons Family Solutions Inc.

Bright Horizons[®] is a leading global provider of high-quality early education and childcare, back-up care, and workforce education services. For more than 35 years, we have partnered with employers to support workforces by providing services that help working families and employees thrive personally and professionally. Bright Horizons operates more than 1,000 early education and childcare centers in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia, and India, and serves more than 1,450 of the world's leading employers. Bright Horizons' early education and childcare centers, back-up child and elder care, and workforce education programs help employees succeed at each life and career stage. For more information, go to www.brighthorizons.com.

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