

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NextGen Technology:

Insights and Recommendations to
Support the Parents of Children
Ages 0–3





OVERVIEW

New research shows that children experience the most rapid period of brain development, and build the foundation for all future learning, during their first few years of life.¹ It makes sense that technology's role in early childhood parenting and caregiving is quickly growing. Technology holds untapped potential to enable caregivers to support young children's development. This report answers two primary questions:

1. How is technology currently being used to support parents of children 0-3?
2. What improvements can be made to increase technology's effectiveness in supporting this population?

The goal of this report is to provide clarity around how parents of young children are currently using technology, and how the early learning field can harness it to improve development outcomes for their children.²

METHODOLOGY

Our approach to answer these questions was threefold:

1. Create an inventory of technology products and platforms used by parents, available in an [interactive map](#).
2. Conduct long-form interviews with low- and middle-income Bay Area parents to better understand their views on parenting, their aspirations, and how they use technology on a daily basis.
3. Conduct two national surveys disaggregated by income, of 1,000 parents of children 0-3.

Unlike other early childhood technology studies that focus on child-facing technology, we looked at products that are used by parents. We also studied how technology meets the needs of parents using the Protective Factors framework, which outlines five factors that parents of young children need: parental resilience; social connections; knowledge of parenting and child development; ability to access concrete support in times of need; and ability to support the social and emotional competence of children.

INSIGHTS

Following our inquiry, we synthesized these insights, all of which have implications for how technology is developed and shared with parents:

- 1. Google is king:** When parents have a question about child development or parenting, they usually turn to a friend or family member first. If they want information beyond that, they search online.
 - 2. Bias toward peer-to-peer learning:** While parents respect the opinions of parenting and health experts, most find their fellow parents' advice more genuine and applicable.
 - 3. Mobile ubiquity:** Most parents have mobile phones and often use them to access the internet.
 - 4. Parents are forging their own path:** Many parents described conflicts with their families and partners about how to raise their child. They are actively using information sources to find what works best for themselves and their unique child.
 - 5. Parents want their kids to be happy and kind, and live meaningful lives:** Education and academic accomplishments are further down the list of parental aspirations for their children.
 - 6. Early childhood media campaigns are working:** In the Bay Area, two large early literacy media campaigns that inform parents about the benefits of talking and reading to their young children — Too Small to Fail and First 5 California — are making an impact on parents.
 - 7. Parent support services are working:** Most parents approve of local resources, including playgroups, parenting classes, and events like story time at local libraries. However, even those who find value in on-site services can only attend for a limited time due to logistical reasons.
- 2. Think more broadly about parents' needs and how technology might be used to meet them.** Most technology provides parents with information about child development without acknowledging parents' other needs. Parents are already using technology for social connections, stress relief and to access resources, but there are additional opportunities to build and scale new tools to support them.
 - 3. Better integrate technology into the programming of community organizations that serve parents.** Doing so may help these organizations deepen and extend their services to more parents and caregivers who are not able to attend.
 - 4. Conduct further research with parents.** How do the needs of parents change across the years? Different parent sub-populations will have specific needs. With more research, we will have the capacity to design higher quality tools, programs and services.

There are situations in which technology is not the best way to support a particular individual or a particular group of parents, especially those with deep needs such as families experiencing trauma or violence. In those cases, there is no replacement for hands-on support from trusted and caring people. However, even those services can benefit from the integration of technology into their programming to extend their services between site visits or sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these insights, we developed action steps to help guide this work forward:

- 1. Put information online and use search engine optimization (SEO).** Rather than make parents register for programs or download apps to access valuable information, ensure they can find high-quality, evidence-based content online. Online and keyword advertising — Google AdWords, for example — is one strategy the field can use to boost access to such content.

REFERENCES

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