



Media Release

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NINE IN TEN PARENTS BELIEVE BALANCING CHILDREN'S TECHNOLOGY USE IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS A HEALTHY DIET

Real Insurance study sheds light on how technology is impacting Aussie children's moods, behaviours and development

These days technology is woven into everything children do, from education and learning to forming relationships with parents and peers. According to the *Real Insurance Australian Kids and Technology Survey* released today, the vast majority of parents (87.3%) agree that a balanced digital life for children is just as important as ensuring they have a healthy diet.

The survey is the sixth instalment in a series of national studies, and explores Australian parents' views on the benefits and drawbacks increased use of technology is having on their kids (3-12 year olds) and teenagers (12-16 year olds).

Head of Corporate Affairs and Real Insurance spokesperson Tatiana Day said, "The findings published today provide deep insight into the enormous impact technology is having on kids and teenagers. As technology continues to dominate the lives of Australian children, we are seeing shifts in their moods and behaviours."

Over half of parents in the survey report that technology is encouraging their kids and teenagers to be more inquisitive (54.8% and 50.9% respectively) or more calm and thoughtful (40.0% and 33.7% respectively), whilst conversely seven in ten parents claim to have witnessed their children throwing tantrums after having a device taken away.

Regardless of the trials in controlling screen time, almost all parents in the survey (96.4%) acknowledge that technology is beneficial as an educational tool, and can even help children to overcome learning challenges (91.6%). Nine in ten parents also claim that technology has developed their children's creative flair and complex problem solving abilities (89.1% and 87.7% respectively).

Dr Joanne Orlando, Senior Lecturer of Early Childhood Education (SoE) at Western Sydney University, said, "The new research highlights the ongoing dilemma that parents face – how much technology exposure is 'appropriate' for my children? We cannot shy away from technology in the modern world, it's everywhere. Overexposure is never good. Good quality technology and a balanced use of it however has benefits for educating children and helping them strengthen and form relationships.

"More than 70 per cent of parents believe that technology is building a better world for their children to live in. Being able to use technology is a new fundamental skill for children. Using it

in quality ways provides a child with new ways of understanding the world, problem solving skills, and encourages creativity”.

Interestingly, technology is even changing the way parents interact with their children with eight in ten parents (84.2%) agreeing that technology provides fun activities for them and their children to do together and brings their family much closer to one another. On the other hand, around a third of parents (35.7%) claim their children have texted them whilst in the family home, rather than communicating verbally.

“A unique finding is the impact technology use can have on those children in the eight to ten years age group who are not quite teenagers but are old enough to have their reigns loosened. Remarkably, this age group is the most likely to find their niche interest community through online sources however, half of parents agree that this is also the most likely age for children to become aggressive as a result of using technology”, said Mrs Day.

In many cases, technology use has shown to further impact negatively on children’s mood and behaviour across all age groups, which is no doubt a concern for Aussie parents. For example, four in ten parents claim that technology has made their kids and teenagers more agitated or frustrated (37.7% and 40.5% respectively).

Parents also expressed concerns for technology threatening their children’s emotional development with more than eight in ten holding social media accountable for creating a ‘fear of missing out’ (FOMO) and self-esteem issues (85.3%) among their children. A similar number have noticed their children experiencing attention difficulties (84.9%) and irregular sleep patterns (81.3%).

The new research suggests that technology can have serious implications for children in terms of cyber danger as online predators and bullying were ranked as the two biggest concerns for Aussie parents (9.3 and 8.2 respectively), followed by violence, adult content and hacking. The findings also show that the overwhelming majority of parents (92.4%) say using technology can be addictive for kids and may promote less physical activity and therefore poorer health (89.3%) in their children.

Despite concerns of children using technology, most parents agree that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages (69.5%), and reassuringly so as four in five parents (84.4%) accept that they cannot simply ban their children from using technology. Rather, parents acknowledge that they must focus on how technology can best be used for their young ones and ensure they have a balanced diet of technology.

“Despite the fact that four in five parents are still unsure whether technology is beneficial for their children, they acknowledge that it’s here to stay. That’s why it’s encouraging to see that most parents discuss the dangers of technology with their children and how they can keep safe, and almost all agree that a healthy balance between digital interaction and physical interaction is key,” said Dr Orlando.

Additional findings from the report

- *Tech-proficient kids and teens:* Almost three quarters of parents (73.1%) feel there is too much pressure on children to be tech proficient.
- *Sensible screen time:* Almost half of parents (49.9%) believe children under 2 years old should have less than an hour of screen time per day, and more than a third (35.9%) say children under 2 years old should not have any screen time at all. This increases for older children where the vast majority of respondents agree that between 30 minutes and three hours per day is appropriate for children aged 5-7 years old (81.9%) or 8-10 years old (82.5%).
- *Unapproved online purchases:* More than half of children aged 5-16 (53.6%) have made an unapproved purchase online, and almost all parents have banned in-app game purchases (93.2% and 80.0% respectively).
- *Harmful devices:* Smartphones are the most harmful among all devices according to two in five parents (40.7%), followed by video game consoles (31.1%).
- *Finding solutions to the dangers:* Around one in five parents (19.0%) go to the extreme of placing special software/apps to track and limit their children's usage of devices to counter negative effects, or use GPS trackers to monitor their child's whereabouts (20.7%).

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About Real Insurance

Real Insurance is an award-winning Australian insurer, with a goal to protect the quality of people's lives. Real Insurance has been named as the top Risk and Life Insurer in Roy Morgan's 2015 annual Customer Satisfaction Awards and was also awarded the 2014 Highly Commended Trusted Brand Award in the Life and Funeral Insurance categories, as voted for by Australian consumers. The company has been in the Australian market since 2005 with product offerings in car, home, life, income, pet, funeral, travel and bike insurance. Real Insurance is a trading name of Greenstone Financial Services Pty Ltd and The Hollard Insurance Company Pty Ltd.

About the 'Real Insurance Kids and Technology Survey'

In order to explore the role of technology in the lives of Australian children, CoreData surveyed 1000 Australian parents across the nation in February 2017.

Hard quotas by state were also engaged to ensure all the main states were represented with sufficiently robust samples (NSW = 200, VIC = 200, QLD = 200, WA = 200, Remaining states/territories = 200).