

And baby makes ... a cellphone call?

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A baby uses an iPad. Tia Henriksen / Flickr

Have you ever seen a 6-year-old use an iPhone? They're pretty good at it. A new study helps explain how this happens.

Most children have been using smartphones and digital tablets practically since birth.

More than one-third of parents who answered a recent survey said their children had “touched or scrolled a screen” before they had celebrated their first birthday. Another 33 percent of parents said their kids had done so when they were 1 year old.

Only 2 percent of the parents said they had waited until their children were 4 to introduce them to the touch-screen.

Born Users (Well, So To Speak)

We're not talking about children of technology experts, either. The families that were interviewed live in an inner-city, low-income part of Philadelphia.

In fact, 13 percent of the parents who took the survey had not finished high school. Still, 77 percent of them said they had a smartphone, 83 percent had a tablet and 59 percent used the Internet.

Many of the infants and toddlers may have been poking randomly at their digital screens. However, according to their parents, at least some of them knew what they were doing.

Fifteen percent of the children had used an app before they turned 1, and 24 percent had called someone, the researchers reported. The most common age to start using apps was 2. Likewise, more than one third of the kids started playing video games when they were 2.

If the children enjoyed playing with the digital devices, the parents seemed to like it too. Nearly two-thirds of the parents said they used the devices to calm their children, and 29 percent said they used them to get their children to sleep.

More Screen Time Than Thought

The devices also entertained kids while their parents did chores around the house or ran errands.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an association of children's doctors. It says that children should avoid screens until they turn 2.

However, most parents said they never discussed screen time with their children's doctors.

The results of the survey appeared to surprise the researchers from Philadelphia's Einstein Medical Center who did the study.

"We didn't expect (to see) children using the devices from the age of 6 months," said Dr. Hilda Kabali, a pediatrics resident who led the study. "Some of the children were using the screen for as long as 30 minutes."