



The Centre for Family Literacy Centre Page

Who Gets More Attention – Your Smartphone or Your Child?



The Centre for Family Literacy is dedicated to helping families grow and prosper.

Parents often complain about how their kids seem permanently attached to their smartphones but it appears that moms and dads are no less vulnerable to the allure of the little screen.

Recent headlines like: Parents Addicted to Cell Phones Are 'More Negative' Toward Their Kids; Parents on Smartphones Ignore Their Kids; Mobile Addict Parents Guilty of Child 'Neglect', are very concerning.

We know from years of research that face-to-face interaction in the early years is the primary way children learn. These early interactions, like sharing books, talking, singing, or playing with children help lay the foundation for early language and literacy – essential skills for success.

So it is alarming to read that parents are interacting less and less with their children and

more and more with their smartphones. American adults check their phones every 6 ½ minutes while Canadians send over 224 million text messages a day. The consequences for children of this overdoing of screen time can be troubling.

A study conducted by the Boston Medical Center found that parents who are unable to put down their phones are more likely to snap at and scold their children. The Boston Medical Center's work involved observing parents and young children eating at fast food restaurants. They reported that 88% of parents looked at their phone, scrolled on it, and typed for most of the meal. Many of the parents were more absorbed with their device than with their children and often when they did interact it was in a negative or harsh manner.

They observed that children whose parents were most absorbed with their phones were

“We're losing the ability to be thoughtful and responsive to one another, to stay focused on another person over time.”

more likely to act out in an effort to engage their parents in some type of relationship. In her book *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age*, Catherine Steiner-Adair states, “We're losing the ability to be thoughtful and responsive to one another, to stay focused on another person over time.”

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Smartphones

Continued



When parents focus on their digital devices and ignore their children, there can be deep emotional disconnects. Steiner-Adair interviewed 1,000 children for her book and found the children used the words “sad, mad, angry and lonely” when describing their parent’s use of mobile devices. Some described throwing their parent’s phone in the toilet or hiding it in the oven; one child described his parent’s smartphone as a “stupid phone.”

Professionals working in early childhood development are all too aware of how crucial the years from 0-5 are for the intellectual and emotional development of children. Not nearly enough parents seem to be aware of how crucial these years are.

Experts are not advocating that parents completely remove these devices when they are with their children. They do however suggest that parents create boundaries to guide their digital use while they are with their families. When we eat, when we snuggle, when we put a child to bed – these are important times to build strong emotional connections and a perfect time to turn off your phone.

Families Learning and Interacting Together

The Centre has developed a new free resource for parents of preschool children – **flit** (families learning and interacting together) – a family literacy app you can download on your iPhone or iPad. Funding for this resource was received from the Edmonton Community Foundation as part of their 25th anniversary celebration. We hope to secure additional funding to make the app accessible on all digital devices.

The app provides parents with a variety of activities to do with their children in eight categories: books, rhymes, games, crafts, writing, numbers, cooking, and reading. Each activity is rated for age appropriateness, allowing parents to support their children’s language development at different stages.

The app provides suggestions for activities that parents can incorporate into their everyday lives, from sorting laundry to making grocery lists with pictures. Each activity also has a section that explains the why of the activity – how it supports a child’s early language and literacy development.

We hope to launch the app at our annual Leading with Literacy Breakfast, January 22, and showcase it at the Family Literacy Carnival at MacEwan University on January 24.



Employment Skills Project

The Employment Skills Pilot Project was an initiative started in response to the request by Alberta Job Corps (AJC) to offer regularly scheduled sessions on financial literacy, computer literacy, resume writing, and cover letters to their clientele.

“Many of our trainees used cash advance stores. As a result of the financial literacy training, they were able to understand how that could affect their budget and possibly their credit rating”

Alberta Job Corps is an Alberta Human Services program that “provides structured, supportive training and work experience for individuals who have a sporadic employment history. The program gives participants the opportunity to work and earn a wage while learning reliable employment skills.”

Over 200 Alberta Job Corps trainees participated in the pilot project that ran from August 2014 to July 2015. The courses were offered in small groups in order to provide the participants with one-to-one support. “Flexibility of the trainers and their openness and patience were key to meeting the needs of the participants,” said one AJC staff member.

Computers, resume writing and cover letter writing were grouped into one session that was offered as a full day workshop. The participants defined the type of work they were looking for and then developed their own resumes and cover letters to reflect their skills for this work. They also learned how to use the computer to write these documents and how to send an email and attach the documents. These are all important first steps in finding employment.

Financial Literacy was a two-day course that provided participants with practical skills that enabled them to manage their personal finances more effectively. They learned how to budget and set financial goals for themselves. They were taught how to read their paystubs and about taxes and deductions and why it is important to file taxes in order to receive GST and Canadian Child Tax benefits.

“Many of our trainees used cash advance stores. As a result of the financial literacy training, they were able to understand how that could affect their budget and possibly their credit rating,” commented staff from AJC. The participants indicated that they had acquired valuable knowledge and were certain they could make at least one change to improve their financial position.

The project has provided concrete outcomes for the multi-barriered Albertans served by Alberta Job Corps, and as a result, the program will continue to be delivered.

Important Dates

Leading with Literacy Breakfast

Friday, January 22,
7:00–9:00 a.m.
Westin Hotel, Edmonton

Guest Speaker -
Randy Boissonnault, MP
Edmonton Centre

Family Literacy Carnival

Sunday, January 24,
2:00–4:00 p.m.
Robbins Health Centre
MacEwan University

National Family Literacy Day

Wednesday, January 27

Check the Centre’s website for more information.



Online donations to the Centre can be made through CanadaHelps.org



The Centre for Family Literacy gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the following:



Ruth Hayden Family Literacy Award Winner



Donna Arnold

The Ruth Hayden Memorial Family Literacy Practitioner Award was presented to Donna Arnold at the Literacy and Learning Symposium held in Calgary. The award is named in honour of Dr. Ruth Hayden and recognizes the accomplishments of an individual practitioner in the family literacy field.

Donna Arnold is the Executive Director of the Henday Association for Lifelong Learning in Innisfail, Alberta. Until recently, she also was the Central Alberta Family Literacy Regional Network Coordinator for the Centre for Family Literacy (CFL) and the Region 5 Co-Regional Resource Leader for the Community Learning Network (CLN).

Donna's commitment to family literacy is seen in her innovative approach to programming. She and her team developed a number of Storysacks (a large cloth bag with a good children's book and lots of activities to bring reading to life) that are being used in the health centre, doctors' offices and libraries in her community.

Donna's open and caring nature makes her an excellent trainer and facilitator. She loves sharing her passion for family literacy and collaborating with groups and organizations to build capacity in her community. Like Dr. Hayden, Donna Arnold works tirelessly to advance the field of family literacy.

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Your support will help us make a difference in the lives of Alberta families! Together we can make Alberta a healthy, literate society where all are able to contribute and succeed.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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Literacy Develops in Families First

The Centre for Family Literacy is dedicated to helping Alberta grow and prosper. Our innovative programs, training and research help Alberta families achieve what they imagine—improved education, jobs and health.

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