



Dr Wolfgang Muller (Consultant Paediatrician)

Parent Information Guide:



Mobile Phones and Young Babies: Why It's Best to Avoid Using Screens for Distraction

Why it matters

Babies learn and grow through face-to-face interaction — by watching your expressions, hearing your voice, and exploring the world around them. These early experiences shape brain development, language, attention, and emotional connection.

When a baby is regularly distracted or soothed using a mobile phone, video, or other screen, valuable opportunities for learning and bonding can be reduced.

Why avoid mobile phone use for distraction

1. Interferes with brain development

- Babies' brains develop fastest in the first two years.
- They learn best from real human interaction — not from screens.
- Early screen exposure is linked to delayed speech, reduced attention span, and slower social-emotional development.

2. Reduces “serve and return” communication

- Responsive communication (when a parent reacts to a baby's sound or expression) builds secure attachment and language skills.
- Screens interrupt this natural back-and-forth interaction.

3. Overstimulation

- Fast-changing sounds and images can overwhelm a baby's developing visual and auditory systems, leading to fussiness or sleep problems.



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4. Missed opportunities for real-world play

- Babies learn cause and effect, coordination, and curiosity through hands-on exploration — not passive watching.

5. Parental distraction

- Frequent phone use by parents themselves can reduce eye contact and responsiveness, which babies depend on for emotional security.

What the experts say

- **World Health Organization (WHO):** recommends *no screen time at all* for children under 2 years.
- **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):** discourages digital media (except video-calling) before 18–24 months.
- **Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH):** encourages families to create “screen-free” routines for very young children and to focus on sleep, play, and family interaction.

Practical alternatives to using phones for distraction

When you need to keep your baby calm or occupied:

- Offer a familiar object — soft toy, teething ring, comfort cloth.
- Use soothing sounds: gentle singing, talking softly, or white noise.
- Change scenery: go for a walk, show them light through the window, or let them look at your face.
- Encourage tummy time and simple sensory play.
- Let your baby explore textures and shapes safely.

When you need to focus briefly (for example, making a call):

- Place your baby in a safe space such as a cot or play mat within view.
- Try a few minutes of music or gentle talking rather than video.
- Explain what you’re doing (“Mummy’s on the phone; I’ll be right back”) — babies respond to tone and reassurance.



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Building healthy habits early

- Keep phones out of reach and sight during nappy changes, meals, and bedtime.
- Set “phone-free” family times so your baby experiences full attention.
- Role-model healthy phone habits — children imitate adult behaviour from infancy.
- Save video calls for connecting with distant family members, keeping them brief and interactive.

Key takeaway

Your baby doesn’t need screens to learn — they need **you**. Smiles, songs, and playtime are far more powerful than any video. Avoiding mobile phones as a distraction helps your baby build stronger attention, communication skills, and emotional connection — setting a foundation for healthy development.

Further reading

- World Health Organization. *Guidelines on Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep for Children Under 5 Years* (2019).
- American Academy of Pediatrics. *Media and Young Minds. Pediatrics* 2016;138(5):e20162591.
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH). *Screen Time Guidance for Parents and Carers* (2023 update).

Written by: Dr W Muller

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