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Foreword



In a year like no other it is worth noting how some aspects of children's behaviour have been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis whilst others remain largely constant. This report contains a number of interesting findings as to how lockdown has impacted young children and it will be interesting to see how long-lasting that impact is - all testament to the value of comprehensive annual reports such as this.

For me, the most noticeable change this year is the increase in young children's use of and ability with technology. More young children have access to connected devices than ever before and they are learning to do more with them: taking photos, keeping in touch with their families and learning their letters and numbers.

Understandably during lock down children were using technology to learn, communicate and entertain themselves and parents' concerns around screen time have both increased (due to the amount of time children are spending on screens) and reduced as there are few alternatives if they want their children to access learning and maintain communication with friends and family.

I have always maintained that it is less about whether a child is using technology in his or her play and more about what play opportunities the screen affords. Games that promote social interactions can help pre-schoolers develop their friendships and those that encourage movement will help children's physical development and it is encouraging to see some really exciting innovations in preschool technology.

The increase in family time and the change in playmates from peers to siblings and older family members is an interesting one. Children learn a lot from playing with older children but they also need to develop relationships with peers. Whilst for some families, the lock down has been a lovely opportunity to reconnect and re-set priorities, for others it has been stressful and overwhelming and the net effect of this is a widening of the divide between children. With more than three quarters of under fives having access to a connected device, the impact of lockdown on those who do not will be exacerbated and it is going to take a lot of effort and commitment to redress the balance and help these children catch up.



Dr Amanda Gummer
Founder and CEO of the Good Play Guide

Amanda has a PhD in neuropsychology, the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and over 20 years experience working with children and families. Widely considered as the UK's go to expert on play, parenting and child development, she combines her theoretical knowledge with a refreshingly pragmatic approach to family life, that resonates both with parents and professionals.

Her book 'Play' was published in May 2015. Amanda is regularly in the media, continues to take an active role in research, and is often involved in government policy around children's issues.

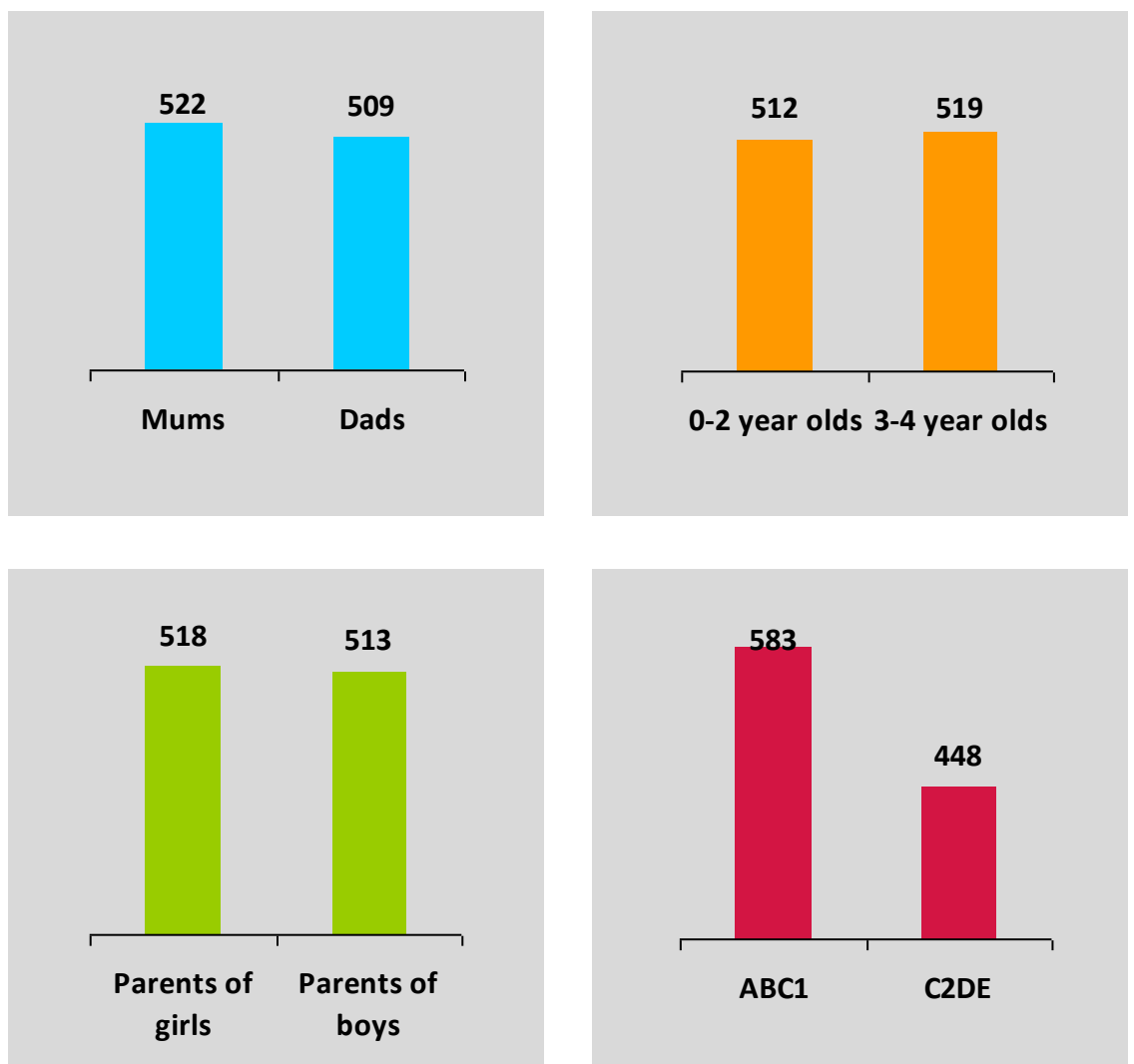
Amanda currently runs Dr Gummer's Good Play Guide, the UK's leading source of expert, independent advice on child development and play.

Introduction & Sample

This report provides a comprehensive understanding of what the UK’s youngest children are currently interested in; their media behaviour, their favourite brands and characters, and their proficiency across a range of social, developmental and technical skills. This year we also take a detailed look at how parents feel the **COVID-19 pandemic** has impacted on their child’s development and wellbeing, and what they feel has been gained or lost as a result.

The report findings are based on **interviews with 1031 parents** of children aged between six months and four years. Interviews were conducted online across the UK, during September 2020. The sample was quotaed by parent gender, age and gender of child, and by socio economic group, to give the final distribution below. Data in the report has been weighted to ensure equal representation of the different subgroups, and to allow comparability with data from previous years.

CHART 1.1
 Sample Structure



1.Introduction & Sample

Back in 2009 when this survey first launched, YouTube was just starting out, the iPad was just a rumour, and, as described in our first report, only **“a minority of pre-schoolers had access to the internet”**. Pre-school viewing was dominated by CBeebies; In the Night Garden was the favourite programme, and only 23% of 0-4 year olds had access to a PC at home. Fast forward eleven years, and 79% of under fives use a tablet, laptop, computer or mobile phone. Today’s pre-schoolers are confidently navigating digital platforms and using touch screen devices with purpose and determination.

More than eight million babies have been born in the UK during the last decade, and more than 3 million of these are currently aged under five. Affectionately known as part of **‘Generation Alpha’**; the first children to be born entirely within the 21st century, these youngsters have never known a life without technology. Almost all pre-school households have regular access to TV programmes and video content via a range of on-demand services. Toddlerhood is different now. Throw in a worldwide pandemic and more time spent at home, and the pressure to balance and safeguard children’s experiences has never been greater.

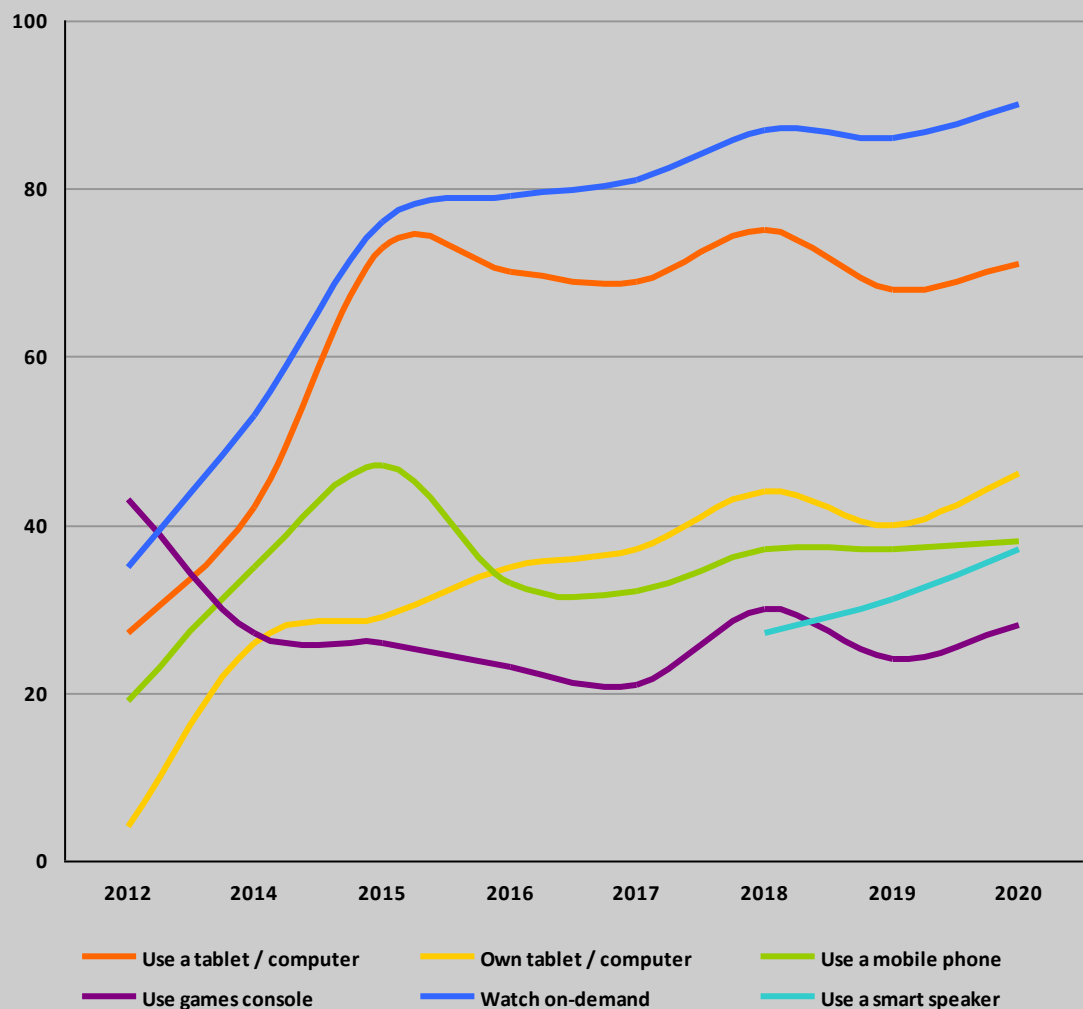


Access to Media

The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated just how important technology can be in times of change and uncertainty. Many of us have embraced technology this year, using it to communicate or work, to learn, or simply to escape the world around us. For many parents, it's meant that rules around screen time have been challenged like never before, with most of us spending more time than ever at home. Habits developed during lockdown might later prove hard to break, but for now we are focusing on children's access to media and the content they are most engaged with.

More than three quarters of under fives have access to a connected device of some kind (78%), including a tablet, laptop, mobile phone, desktop pc, or smart speaker. More than half of children aged between six months to a year have access to at least one of these devices (55%), with numbers increasing rapidly from the age of two. Personal ownership of connected devices has also increased, particularly for tablets, with numbers now at their highest since this survey first began.

CHART 3.1
Access to media
2012-2020



BASE: All age 0-4yrs