Children and Screens

2025

DIGITAL MEDIA AND DEVELOPING MINDS

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONGRESS

Advancing the Agenda

A Report from the Breakout Sessions at

#MediaAndMinds25


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Summary

At the 2025 Digital Media and Developing Minds International Scientific Congress, participants gathered across nineteen breakout sessions for structured discussions around the science and practice of children's digital well-being. Participants included researchers, clinicians, educators, policymakers, and advocates with expertise spanning child development, psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, pediatrics, communications, social work, public health, education, human-computer interaction and more.

Ten sessions focused on surfacing research priorities, methods, and translational opportunities across topics that were also featured at the Congress through invited panels. Nine more sessions explored issues facing the entire field and emphasized strategic thinking across sectors.

This report summarizes the discussions that took place among the participating experts, elevating the key research questions and methodological needs, targeted action and translational opportunities, and strategic priorities identified by each group.

CROSS-CUTTING IMPERATIVES

Across the sessions, several common themes emerged:

- **Consistency in terminology is urgently needed** — terms like "screen time," "addiction," and "problematic use" are inconsistently applied, leading to confusion in research, practice, and policy.
- **Meaningful representation must be central** — research and interventions must properly examine and serve all populations of youth; culturally responsive, inclusive, and strength-based approaches are essential.
- **Accurate, precise, and ecologically valid measurement is critical** — reliance on self-report is inadequate; objective, scalable, and privacy-conscious tools are required to capture real behaviors and outcomes.
- **Norms drive behavior** — peer, family, and societal expectations around availability, sharing, and engagement shape digital practices as much as individual choice or platform design.
- **Messaging shapes perception** — language, framing, and the choice of messengers (researchers, parents, youth) can build trust or reinforce stigma, underscoring the need for strategic communication.
- **Policy, regulation, and design must evolve with evidence** — design codes, school policies, and global protections can mitigate risks, but they require ongoing monitoring to avoid unintended harms.
- I**nterdisciplinary collaboration is the way forward** — addressing the complex interplay of media, health, and development requires bridges across research, clinical practice, education, public health, and technology design.

These nineteen sessions collectively underscore the urgency of multidisciplinary, collaborative, and translational approaches to research, public education, and policy. They call for aligning science with practice, shaping healthier digital environments, and ensuring that policies and innovations reflect the developmental needs and lived experiences of children and families worldwide.

Acknowledgements

Children and Screens extends its sincere thanks to the many interdisciplinary experts who contributed to the 2025 Digital Media and Developing Minds International Scientific Congress, including the breakout sessions, and especially to the breakout session leaders who guided and enriched each discussion. The insights captured in this report reflect the breadth of their collective expertise, and we are grateful for their time, thoughtfulness, and collaboration.

We also want to thank all of the 2025 Congress Sponsors and the generous donors who support the Institute's work for helping to make this event happen.

SECTION 1

Advancing the Research Agenda

In these sessions, participants worked collaboratively to surface the most pressing research gaps and questions within a specific topic area. Each session's topic was connected to an invited panel that was featured during the Congress. Together, participants identified high-priority broader themes, methodological innovations, and translational opportunities that they believe could drive meaningful progress.

Topics

- Artificial Intelligence
- Brain Development
- Child-Centered Designs
- Cyber Risk and Violence
- Early Childhood
- Teen Mental Health
- Parenting
- Physical Health
- Research Designs
- School Phone Bans

BREAKOUT SESSION

Artificial Intelligence

This session explored the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence in children's lives, with participants emphasizing the urgent need to understand both developmental impacts and equity concerns. The group aimed to define priority research areas and consider how evidence can directly inform safer, more effective AI design, policy, and education.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- What are the developmental, social, and neurobiological effects of children's AI use?
- What technological or theoretical limits (e.g., interpretability) constrain AI research?
- How do AI use cases vary by age, context, and individual traits (e.g., neurodivergence)?
- What skills and literacies are needed for safe and effective AI use by children and families?
- How can we define and measure "safety" in AI use for youth across diverse communities? Consider short-, medium-, and long-term safety concerns.
- How might AI displace critical developmental skills or reshape social relationships?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Develop a shared language and standardized measures for AI literacy across settings.
- Interface with frontier model developers to develop interpretability methods.
- Establish rapid-response "sandbox" environments for iterative, real-time AI research.
- Use longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to capture both short- and long-term outcomes.
- Design context-sensitive studies (e.g., school-based vs. naturalistic) to assess how children adopt and adapt AI tools.
- Address equity by studying impacts across diverse populations and mitigating bias in training data and algorithms.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Guide design of safe and child-centered AI systems that reduce risks and promote prosocial use.
- Partner with educators and parents to build AI literacy and resilience in children.
- Create evidence-based policy frameworks on AI's effects on development, learning, and equity.
- Translate findings into public education campaigns that clarify AI's limitations and risks (e.g., misinformation, false relationships).
- Support innovation in tools that can both empower and protect children, while engaging industry stakeholders in safety-oriented design.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Brain Development

This session examined how neuroimaging and related tools can illuminate the effects of digital media on brain development. Participants considered both opportunities and challenges in using neuroscience to inform practice.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- What neural mechanisms explain digital media's impact on cognition and regulation?
- Which populations are most vulnerable to neurobiological effects?
- How do online vs. offline relationships manifest in brain activity?
- What are the limits of neuroimaging for predicting outcomes?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Leverage large datasets that include extensive neuroimaging or neurophysiological data like ABCD and HBCD to advance analysis of existing neuroimaging data.
- Increase education around noninvasive neuroimaging methods to broader communities to engage and recruit families that may be skeptical of brain-based data collection.
- Use tools like EEG and fNIRS where neuroimaging is not feasible due to cost, accessibility, or population constraints (like with young children), or to expand naturalistic studies.
- Advance analysis of complex neuroimaging data.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide empirical evidence to address societal myths that digital media is "rewiring" the brain.
- Build trust with educators and parents regarding neuroscience methods and findings by increasing education around noninvasive imaging techniques and their utility.
- Encourage cross-country collaborations to increase representation of communities in neuroscience research and to share neuroimaging resources (data, pipelines, etc.), particularly to communities where expensive neuroimaging machines are not accessible.
- Support digital media interventions that are grounded in neuroscience insights.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Child-Centered Designs

This session examined how design features shape children's digital experiences, emphasizing co-design, prosocial innovation, and collaboration with industry. Participants explored how to define positive design, motivate youth to use safer platforms, and create sustainable partnerships with companies.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- How do design features support or undermine children's well-being, and which youth are most vulnerable?
- What do youth want from the platforms they use, and how can these desires help shape better tech designs?
- What strategies are necessary to ensure co-design efforts are adaptable and sustainable over time? What are the limits of co-design?
- Can companies be incentivized to adopt prosocial, child-centered design principles?
- How can design be utilized to encourage youth toward safer or more prosocial online behaviors?
- What dark patterns are most prevalent across platforms used by children, and what impact do they have to their online experiences and related outcomes?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Develop databases of positive design features and test them across ages.
- Identify the different kinds of dark patterns used across platforms.
- Create child-friendly methods to understand design preferences.
- Explore ways to assess and reward prosocial online behaviors within platforms.
- Translate research into formats accessible to designers and product teams.
- Shift research and design focus from "what is" to "what could be".

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Bring greater public attention to dark patterns in children's technologies.
- Bridge research and industry by incentivizing evidence-based design.
- Promote business models that profit from prosocial engagement, and consider how youth define and react to prosocial behavior online.
- Develop educational tools to help companies apply findings from research and basic developmental science.
- Equip stakeholders with realistic expectations of co-design.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Cyber Risk and Violence

This session explored the global landscape of online risks, highlighting adolescent vulnerabilities, parent roles in mitigating risks, and youth-led prevention. Participants emphasized the need for global policies, inclusive research design, and adaptable interventions.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- How do adolescents' abilities to detect danger and assess risk vary?
- What global policies are needed to address cyber risks across regions?
- How should "risk" be defined, and by whom (i.e., adolescent versus parent-perceived risk)?
- What ethical challenges exist in measuring harmful content (subjective vs objective)?
- How can AI be leveraged to promote positive online experiences?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Ensure diversity across age, race/ethnicity, and geography.
- Co-design studies with youth, parents, and communities.
- Use neuroscience and developmental education to teach teens about online risk.
- Develop affordable, adaptable tools for underserved communities.
- Utilize prevention and addiction science to inform efforts.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Promote youth-led prevention and peer education.
- Support parent education programs that empower families.
- Encourage safe, child-centered technology design.
- Scale community interventions across cultural contexts.
- Leverage global collaborations to amplify positive civic outcomes.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Early Childhood

This session explored gaps in understanding early childhood digital media use, with attention to diverse families and contexts, measurement, and translating findings into practice. Participants highlighted the need for inclusive research and to broaden the scope of research beyond the household to consider structural and contextual factors influencing early childhood media use.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- How do early digital experiences affect attachment, learning, and social development?
- How do social, contextual, and individual factors influence children's digital media use and outcomes in early childhood?
- What mechanisms explain how young children learn—or fail to learn—from screens?
- How does screen exposure outside the home (e.g., in schools or public spaces) influence development?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Develop granular, objective measures of young children's media use.
- Design inclusive protocols to reduce barriers for diverse families.
- Increase cross-sector and interdisciplinary collaboration, with studies involving child development researchers, software engineers, business professionals, and more.
- Work together as a field to define key concepts (e.g., "educational" media) and metrics for assessing content.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Collaborate with parents, educators, and providers to develop research-backed guidance that is practical.
- Develop certification standards for truly "educational" media.
- Inform childcare policies on screen use and staff practices.
- Act early by providing education to parents in the prenatal period and promoting early interventions to screen-time problems.
- Develop targeted education efforts and interventions that recognize different mechanisms for change in different families.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Teen Mental Health

This session addressed the complex, bidirectional relationship between media use and youth mental health. Participants emphasized moving beyond screen time metrics and identifying universal predictors of well-being.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- How can research capture individualized, bidirectional media impacts?
- What predictors distinguish positive vs. negative outcomes?
- How do we develop and test interventions for problematic social media use?
- How do effects vary by demographics and cultural contexts?
- How does social media contribute to or reduce stigma and self-diagnosis?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Standardize terminology and outcome measures.
- Expand EMA, screenomics, and longitudinal designs.
- Develop quick screening tools for schools and clinicians.
- Involve youth in identifying measures and study design.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Reframe norms around constant online availability.
- Provide clinical tools tailored for schools and primary care.
- Translate findings into balanced, evidence-based guidelines.
- Support policies promoting healthier, intentional technology use.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Parenting

This session focused on parents' roles in shaping digital environments, spanning interactions, stress, rules, and equity. Participants emphasized moving from deficit models to supportive, strength-based strategies.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- What are the bi-directional effects of parent media use on parent-child relationship quality and attachment, both in the moment and over time?
- What resources do parents want and need; how are they best delivered?
- How do stress, social comparison, and information access affect parents' decision-making around their children's digital media use?
- How can parents better scaffold children's social media use based on the child's age and individual characteristics?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Develop ecologically valid measures of real-time family media use.
- Compare strength-based vs. fear-based education interventions.
- Collaborate to better study diverse, undervvrepresented, and hard to reach populations.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Translate findings into accessible parent resources.
- Collaborate with industry to develop standards and best-practices for educational media and incentivize their use.
- Engage healthcare, schools, and communities to help support parents in changing their child's and their own media use.
- Foster shared responsibility across families, policymakers, and industry.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Physical Health

This session focused on how digital media and related technologies intersect with children's physical health, highlighting both underexplored risks and new measurement opportunities. Participants discussed issues such as sleep, hearing, physical activity, and exposure to commercial influences, alongside the potential role of AI and machine learning.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- How do devices and digital environments affect children's sleep, sensory systems (especially hearing), physical activity, and broader physical health?
- What are the impacts of earbuds, noise cancellation, and constant auditory exposure on development, health, and safety? How might these tools be used to help people (e.g., emotion regulation, sensory overload)?
- How do social media, gaming, and online marketing (ads, promotions, influencers) shape body image, substance use, and health behaviors?
- What are the physical outcomes associated with technology bans or restrictions, and how do they vary across contexts?
- How do school screen policies affect movement, sedentary behavior, and sleep?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Validate AI and machine learning tools for analyzing sleep and health data, ensuring appropriate benchmarks and child-specific models.
- Develop precise, multidimensional measures of sleep health and physical activity that move beyond screen time.
- Create methods to assess auditory intensity, noise exposure, and physiological stress.
- Apply interdisciplinary approaches to capture physical health outcomes.
- Examine cross-cultural differences in platform business models and health impacts.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Guide regulations on advertising (e.g., energy drinks, athletic supplements like "preworkout", GLP-1 medications) targeting youth online.
- Inform school and community policies on technology use, movement, and health.
- Engage stakeholders such as educators, healthcare providers, and policymakers to translate findings into actionable guidelines.
- Collaborate with industry to ensure devices and platforms are designed and marketed with children's physical health in mind.
- Develop parent- and youth-facing resources that raise awareness of physical health risks and encourage safer practices.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Research Designs

This session focused on methodological innovations and challenges in studying children's digital media use, from sampling biases to the ethics of using online data. Participants discussed the promise of mixed methods, ecological momentary assessment (EMA), and screenomics.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

- What are the ethical boundaries of using public online data (e.g., Reddit)?
- How do we address self-selection biases in school and volunteer samples?
- Can N-of-1 and longitudinal designs meaningfully inform policy?
- How can research better reflect the complexity of media use and development?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Advance EMA and screenomics tools for real-time data.
- Develop safeguards against bots and AI survey responses.
- Create community-based research labs for doing research with families.
- Integrate qualitative reflection methods to contextualize screen data.
- Explore computational models to synthesize small-N insights.
- Consider ways of improving participant retention in longitudinal studies.

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Empower parents with tools that encourage conversation and reflection.
- Communicate clearer standards for healthy vs. harmful media use.
- Inform policymakers with evidence from innovative research designs.
- Build international collaborations to broaden research contexts.

BREAKOUT SESSION

School Phone Bans

This session examined school smartphone restrictions, exploring implementation, enforcement, and unintended consequences. Participants stressed the importance of understanding equity impacts and broader school culture.

KEY QUESTIONS / RESEARCH GAPS

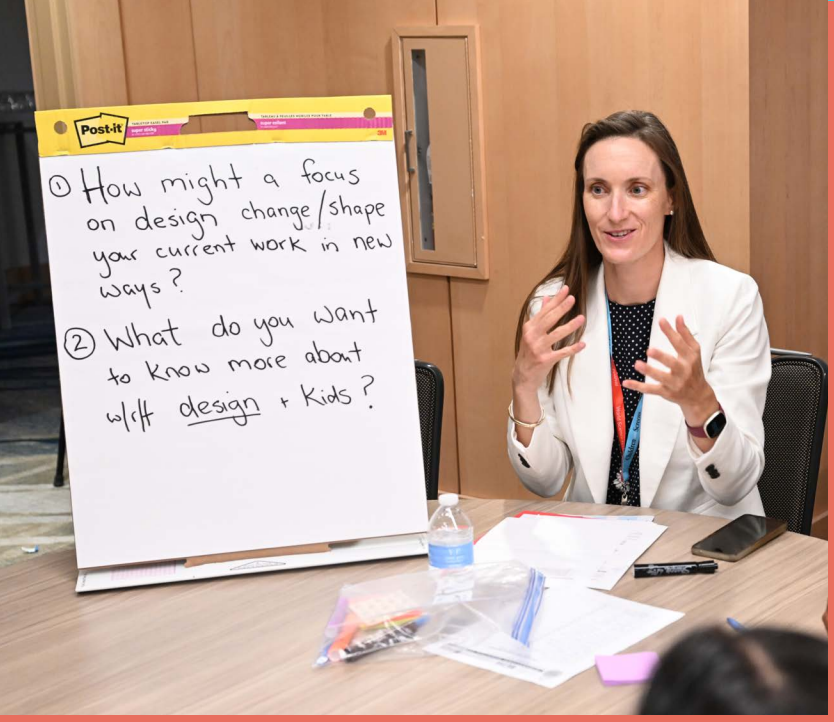
- Do bans improve academic performance, engagement, and behavior, and under what conditions?
- How are bans enforced, are they effective in keeping phones out of classrooms, and how do students adapt or circumvent them?
- What are the perceptions of bans among students, teachers, and parents, before and after implementation?
- Which students benefit most, and who suffers harm (e.g., caregivers)?
- How are other stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators) impacted, and how does this affect the student experience?

METHODOLOGICAL NEEDS

- Conduct ethnographic research on lived experiences of bans.
- Use state and district datasets in conjunction with direct data collection approaches to assess outcomes.
- Develop instruments for comparing types of bans (including no bans) – within schools (before and after), across schools, and across countries.
- Examine substitution effects (e.g., bullying, offline risks).

TRANSLATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide evidence to guide policymakers on what types of bans are effective and how.
- Develop best practices balancing safety, equity, and needs.
- Offer culturally sensitive frameworks for global comparisons.
- Support teachers and administrators with implementation tools.



SECTION 2

Tackling Opportunities and Challenges for the Field

In these sessions, participants engaged in focused, forward-looking discussions with peers across science, medicine, education, and public health to examine some of the most critical challenges and promising opportunities in the field. Participants collaborated to identify strategic actions that can move the field forward, whether through research, policy, practice, or cross-section innovation.

Topics

- Addressing Diversity in Research and Practice
- Applying Developmental Frameworks
- Defining Problematic Use
- Evidence-Based Regulation
- Messaging Strategies
- Objective Measurement
- Public Health Frameworks
- Shaping Healthy Digital Norms

BREAKOUT SESSION

Addressing Diversity in Research and Practice

This session emphasized the need to examine how the online experiences of youth may differ by individual and group-level characteristics, and for research, clinical practice, and tech design to consider these differences. Participants highlighted the risks of a one-size-fits-all approach and the need to ensure systems support representation of all groups at key decision points.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Address underrepresentation of gender, racial, ethnic, neurodiverse, sexual minority, non-clinical/community-based, religious, low-income, and rural populations.
- Recognize cultural variation in parenting, norms, and digital practices.
- Prioritize equity and inclusion in research design, recruitment, and analysis.
- Avoid deficit framing and highlight resilience and strengths.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do digital media experiences differ across cultural and demographic groups? How do they affect their digital well-being?
- How can we promote safe, prosocial digital environments? What inequities exist for marginalized youth?
- What inequities exist for youth accessing safe, prosocial digital environments?
- How does bias in survey measurement, tech design, algorithms, and content affect underrepresented populations?
- What digital practices enhance diverse youth's identity development to form a sense of belonging? What culturally specific protective factors buffer against harm?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Develop targeted recruitment strategies that reach underrepresented groups, which may be more time-consuming and costly.
- Partner with colleagues with culturally-relevant expertise, communities, and youth advisors to co-design research and interventions.
- Train researchers and clinicians to apply equity-focused frameworks rather than deficits-focused framing.
- Advocate for culturally responsive design standards in industry and educational contexts.
- Share findings specific for underrepresented youth and families in accessible ways that benefit participant communities, including non-academic dissemination and translation to other languages and global contexts.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Applying Developmental Frameworks

This session examined how developmental frameworks can better incorporate the contexts and structures shaping children's digital media use. Participants highlighted the importance of bridging silos (home, school, recreation), addressing structural inequities and problematic business models, and understanding how relationships between caregivers, children, and contexts evolve over time according to developmental needs.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Recognize structural factors (e.g., business models, inequities) shaping media use.
- Address autonomy tensions created by persuasive design and the attention economy.
- Integrate developmental perspectives across home, school, and community settings.
- Highlight temporal dimensions — both momentary needs and long-term developmental trajectories.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do persuasive design features and business models interact with children's developmental needs at different ages?
- What mechanisms shape autonomy and self-regulation in digital contexts?
- How do structural inequities (SES, race, access) shape developmental trajectories in media use?
- At what temporal scales (moment-to-moment, daily, long-term) should digital media impacts be studied?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Incorporate contextual and structural factors into developmental frameworks/models.
- Create parent–school training on age-appropriate device use.
- Advocate for child-centered design and developer awareness.
- Strengthen school–family–provider collaboration on healthy media use.
- Convene interdisciplinary researchers to harmonize frameworks and constructs.
- Engage policymakers and designers to promote transparency and positive design standards (e.g., app "attention ratings").

BREAKOUT SESSION

Defining Problematic Use

This session explored debates around defining and addressing problematic digital media use, including whether to frame it as "addiction," "overuse," or another construct. Participants highlighted tensions between clinical utility, social perception, and policy influence, as well as the role of persuasive design and equity in shaping experiences.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Clarify terminology (addiction vs. overuse) and align definitions across disciplines.
- Address stigma, public discomfort, and normalization of high phone/social media use.
- Recognize persuasive design as a driver of compulsive use patterns.
- Consider equity impacts when proposing interventions (e.g., pay-to-limit models).
- Resolve the tension between the need for urgent, convincing language and the concerns about stigma and accuracy.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What criteria best distinguish problematic use from normative high engagement?
- How does terminology ("addiction" vs. "problematic use") shape outcomes in healthcare, law, and policy?
- Which design features most strongly contribute to compulsive or harmful use patterns?
- How do cultural and socioeconomic contexts affect vulnerability to problematic use?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Develop consensus terminology to inform healthcare, advocacy, and policy (while acknowledging that different domains might require different message frames).
- Create diagnostic frameworks that balance sensitivity with avoidance of over-pathologizing.
- Collaborate with clinicians, researchers, and policymakers to evaluate the costs and benefits of labeling digital overuse as an "addiction."
- Engage with industry to explore safer platform models while addressing equity risks.
- Advance public messaging campaigns that promote awareness without stigma.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Evidence-Based Regulation

This session explored regulatory approaches to children's digital media environments, including privacy, safety, design, and enforcement. Participants discussed challenges of implementation, industry influence, and global harmonization.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Strengthen protections around data privacy and commercial exploitation.
- Address safety and design features that put children at risk.
- Balance regulation with innovation and freedom of expression.
- Consider global harmonization of policies and enforcement.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What regulatory models (e.g., age-appropriate design codes) are most effective?
- How do regulations impact child outcomes and industry practices?
- What are the unintended consequences of regulation (e.g., limiting access to positive resources)?
- How do cultural and legal contexts shape regulatory feasibility?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Advocate for evidence-based design codes and child-centered policies.
- Collaborate with lawmakers, NGOs, and international bodies.
- Paint a vision for stakeholders of what digital media, devices, and social media platforms can look like if we enact effective regulations.
- Monitor industry adaptation and unintended consequences of laws.
- Share data that informs ongoing policy debates.
- Build global coalitions to harmonize child digital protection standards.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Messaging Strategies

This session examined how to effectively communicate about children's digital media use to different audiences, including parents, policymakers, and the public. Participants stressed the importance of framing, language, and narrative.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Tailor messages for different audiences (parents vs. policymakers vs. public).
- Balance nuance with clarity to avoid alarmism and complacency.
- Address new or under-messaged audiences, like Dads and Grandparents.
- Use narratives and storytelling to make evidence relatable.
- Address misinformation and build trust.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do different framings ("screen time," "well-being," "addiction") influence different audience perceptions?
- What messengers (researchers, parents, youth) are most credible to different groups?
- Which communication channels (traditional media, social media, community orgs) are most effective?
- How can evidence be simplified without distortion?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Develop message toolkits tailored to key stakeholder groups.
- Train researchers in effective public communication.
- Partner with journalists, educators, and influencers to amplify accurate messages.
- Conduct rapid research on communication effectiveness.
- Build long-term strategies for countering misinformation.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Objective Measurement

This session focused on discussing the benefits and drawbacks of different objective measurements of digital media use. Participants stressed the need for scalable, privacy-conscious, and ecologically valid tools that keep pace with rapidly changing software updates of iOS and Android devices.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Balance precision with scalability and participant burden.
- Address privacy, consent, and data ownership concerns.
- Integrate multimodal data sources for richer insights.
- Develop standards for analyzing and interpreting objective data.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Which objective measurement technologies yield the best data for researchers to work with and keep up with the pace of software updates?
- What technologies best capture real-time digital behaviors?
- How can data be validated across diverse age groups and settings?
- How do objective measures compare with subjective experiences of digital media use?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Develop standardized protocols and shared repositories for digital media use data.
- Partner with industry to improve researcher access to anonymized datasets.
- Test wearable and passive sensing tools in ecologically valid contexts.
- Foster collaborations between engineers, behavioral scientists, and clinicians.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Public Health Frameworks

This session focused on positioning children's digital media use as a public health priority, emphasizing population-level impacts, health equity, and prevention. Participants stressed the need for better surveillance, policy integration, and framing digital media as a modifiable social determinant of health.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Frame digital media as a public health issue with broad societal impacts.
- Integrate digital media into health equity and social determinants frameworks.
- Build systems for surveillance and population-level monitoring.
- Elevate prevention and early intervention strategies.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can we measure population-level exposure and impacts of digital media?
- What are the differential effects of digital media across social, racial, and economic groups?
- How does digital media interact with other health determinants (e.g., sleep, nutrition, physical activity)?
- What are effective public health interventions for digital well-being and flourishing?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Develop national and international surveillance systems for child media use.
- Frame digital media within existing public health campaigns (e.g., obesity, mental health).
- Build collaborations between researchers, public health officials, and policymakers.
- Advocate for prevention science approaches that prioritize early intervention.
- Train healthcare providers to integrate digital well-being into routine care.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Shaping Healthy Digital Norms

This session explored how digital norms are created, reinforced, and shifted across peer groups, families, schools, and society. Participants emphasized the importance of understanding norm formation and strategies for changing harmful practices.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Recognize peer influence and social contagion in digital behaviors.
- Examine generational differences in expectations around availability and sharing.
- Explore how platforms and design features shape social norms.
- Identify strategies for shifting norms toward healthier practices.
- Define digital literacy and discuss integrating it as part of the curriculum in schools.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do digital norms emerge and spread across peer networks?
- What roles do parents, educators, and influencers play in shaping norms?
- Which interventions are most effective in changing entrenched digital practices?
- How do norms vary across cultures and developmental stages?
- How can we make digital literacy part of a scaffolded school curriculum?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Launch public campaigns to shift norms (e.g., around always-on availability).
- Engage youth directly in norm-change initiatives.
- Provide parents and educators with tools to model healthy practices.
- Work with platforms to reduce harmful design-driven norms.
- Evaluate interventions using social network and systems-level analysis.
- Open the discussion on the role schools play in teaching digital literacy.

BREAKOUT SESSION

Supporting Schools and Communities

This session explored how schools and communities can serve as critical environments for supporting children's digital well-being. Participants emphasized the dual role of schools as both sites of digital integration and regulation, and the importance of community partnerships.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES / KEY THEMES

- Position schools as central hubs for digital literacy and well-being.
- Address tensions between educational technology use and restrictions.
- Build partnerships between schools, families, and communities.
- Ensure equity in access to digital literacy and support.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do school-level policies shape student well-being and digital habits?
- What are the impacts of ed-tech use on academic and socioemotional outcomes?
- How do community partnerships enhance or hinder digital well-being initiatives?
- Which interventions are most effective for different developmental stages?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Create partnerships between schools, families, and community members to deliver consistent digital well-being programs.
- Integrate digital literacy into curricula and teacher training.
- Share best practices for implementing balanced school technology policies.
- Engage parents and local organizations to reinforce consistent digital norms.
- Evaluate pilot programs to identify scalable interventions.

About Us

Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development is an international non-profit organization founded in 2013 to understand and address compelling questions regarding media's impact on child development through interdisciplinary dialogue, public information, and rigorous, objective research bridging the medical, neuroscientific, social science, public health, educational, and academic communities.

At Children and Screens, we see an urgent need not only to advance research in the field, but also to more effectively share this research in ways that can positively influence policy and support families, educators, and others in making decisions about media with and for children.

We understand that it is not enough to look at questions of digital media use among children from a single perspective—whether medical, educational, or sociological. Rather, effective progress requires a multidisciplinary, comprehensive, "kaleidoscopic" approach. For this reason, Institute staff, partners, and colleagues represent a wide range of fields including pediatrics, child psychiatry, child psychology, neuroscience, communications, public health, education, and more. By bringing together experts from across both the medical and social sciences, the Institute seeks to broaden how the field is defined, the kind of questions that can be asked, and the diversity of impact that can be investigated.

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