

Canadians offer little sympathy for parents (Candy) Crushed by kids' in-app purchases

Half favour government intervention to ensure app stores put adequate security measures in place

October 24, 2017 – When a child plays in a make-believe world on a parent's smartphone and uses real-world money to make an in-game purchase without understanding or adult consent, who is to blame? And what should be done about it?

Far from idle questions, these debates are at the heart of recent U.S. lawsuits that Apple, Google, and Amazon [settled for a combined \\$120 million](#).

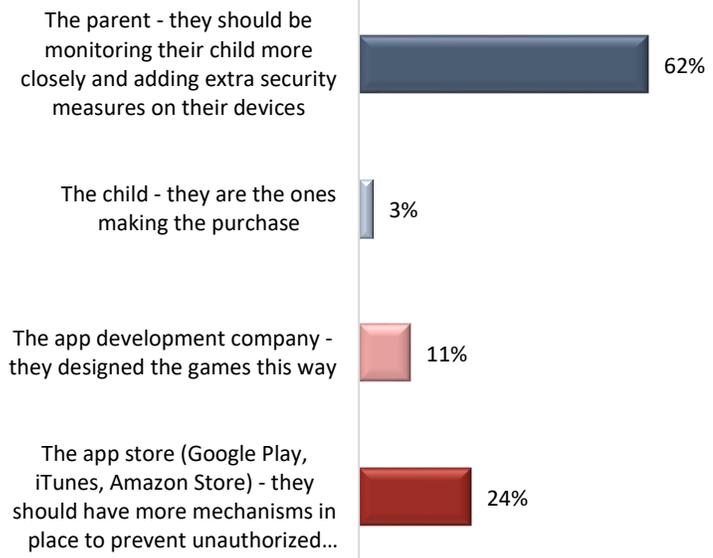
A new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians offering little sympathy for parents affected their children's unauthorized purchases. Fully six-in-ten (62%) say the parents themselves are to blame in such situations. That said, nearly half (48%) would welcome federal government regulations aimed at preventing kids from buying digital goods without parental supervision.

Overall, one-in-seven Canadians have personal experience with children buying something they weren't supposed to on a mobile device – either because they live with the child in question or because it happened to a close friend or family member. Among those under age 35, exposure to situations like these rises to one-in-five.

More Key Findings:

- Though more than seven-in-ten (72%) agree that “those over age 10 should know better than to make purchases on their parents' mobile devices”, just 3 per cent of Canadians say children under that age are most responsible when unauthorized purchases are made

Who would you say is most responsible in when a child between the ages of 4 and 10 - has made an in-app purchase without the consent of their parents?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from September 12 – 18, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,534 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- Three-quarters (75%) agree that “games that are designed for children or ‘all-ages’ should not allow in-app purchases,” but just one-in-ten (11%) blame app developers for unauthorized purchases by minors
- Those who regularly download apps featuring in-app purchases are more likely to say government intervention is not needed in this area (61% do)

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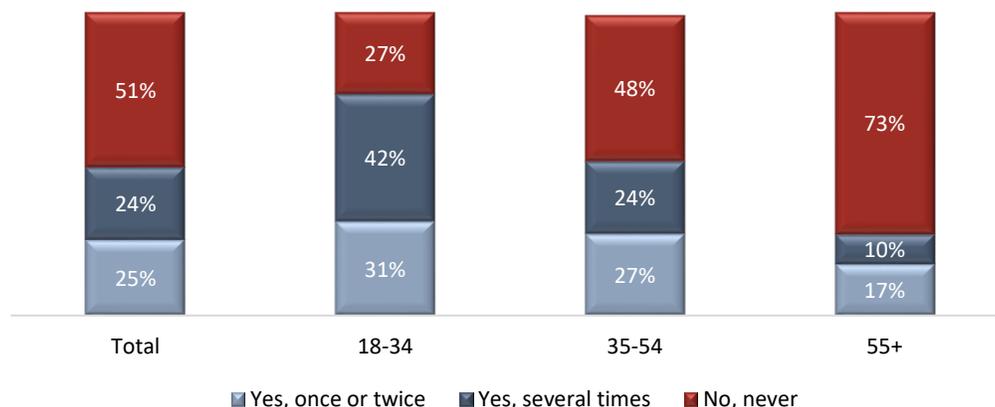
- **Prevalence of unauthorized in-app purchases by children**
- **Who is to blame for unauthorized purchases?**
- **Half say government should step in**

Prevalence of unauthorized in-app purchases by children

Mobile games are a massive industry. According to Newzoo – an industry analyst – games for smartphones and tablets are expected to generate more than \$46 billion (U.S.) in 2017. Much of that revenue will come from in-app purchases in so-called “freemium” games – apps that are free to play, but offer players the ability to pay real money for in-game benefits. These may include gems or coins the user can buy to speed up play or gain access to new character outfits or game levels.

Canadians are fairly familiar with apps of this type. Half (49%) say they have downloaded such apps at least “once or twice,” and one-quarter (24%) have done so several times. Among Millennials, the number who have downloaded this type of app jumps significantly, to 73 per cent.

Have you ever downloaded an app that features in-app purchases?

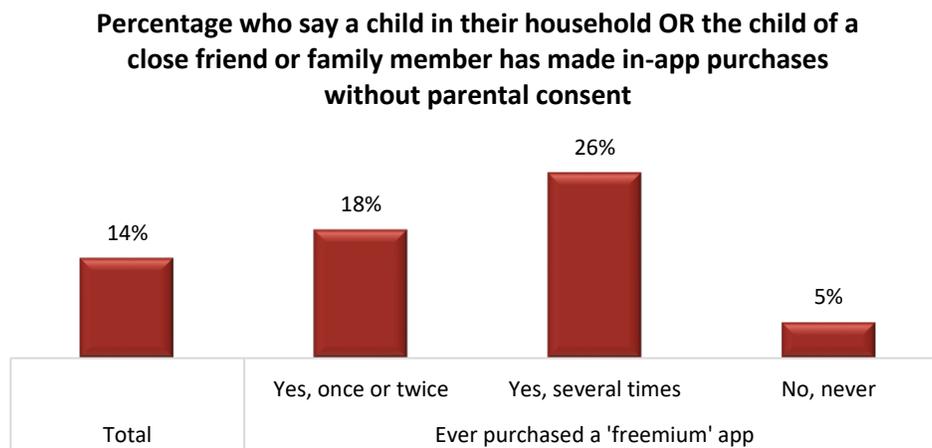


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Having a child make an unauthorized purchase in such an app on your phone is a less common experience. Fewer than one-in-six Canadians (14%) say they have either had a child in their household (4%) or the child of a close friend or family member outside their household (9%) make such a purchase.

Among the heaviest users of freemium apps, however, exposure to this phenomenon in either of these two ways rises to one-in-four:



Given that nearly three-quarters of Canadians under the age of 35 have downloaded an app that features in-app purchases at least once, younger Canadians are also more likely to have some degree of exposure to unauthorized purchases by children.

Some one-in-five Millennials (20%) have had a child in their household or the child of a close friend or family member buy something in an app without parental consent. The rate drops to one-in-six (16%) among those ages 35 – 54, and just one-in-20 (6%) among those in the 55+ age group ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Who is to blame for unauthorized purchases?

Every instance of a child buying something in a smartphone app without parental permission is unique, but there are [some factors](#) that make such a purchase more likely to happen: Parents who haven't turned on safety restrictions for in-app purchases; platform owners like Apple, Google, or Amazon that may offer inadequate options for limiting access or make it hard for parents to find those options; and app developers who put in-app purchases in their software in the first place.

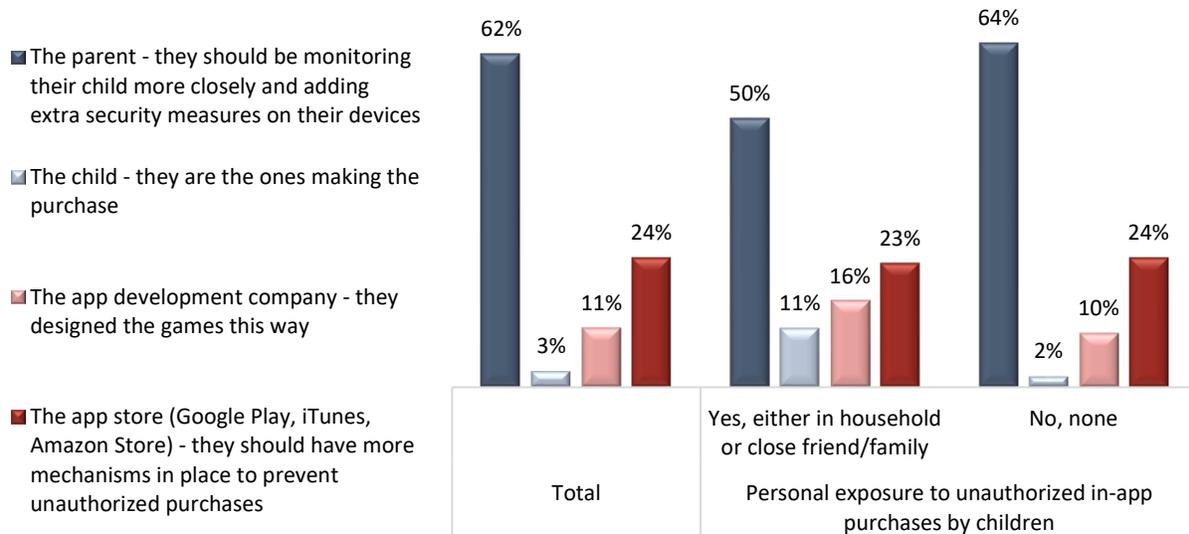
Asked who bears the most responsibility, generally, for these situations, more than six-in-ten Canadians (62%) say "the parents." It's notable, however, that the group most likely to blame parents is those who have never had a child make an unauthorized purchase – and don't know anyone who has.

Respondents who have some degree of personal connection to these types of situations are less likely to hold parents ultimately responsible, as seen in the graph that follows:

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Regardless of if you have personal experience with this or not, who would you say is most responsible in these cases, where a child - say between the ages of 4 and 10 - has made a purchase without the consent of their parents?

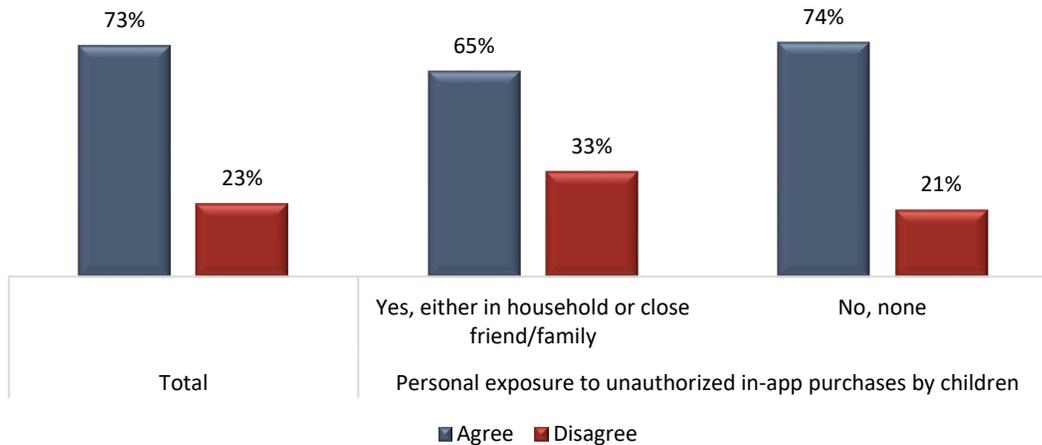


This propensity to say parents are ultimately the most responsible in situations where their children buy things in smartphone apps without permission is also reflected in Canadians responses to the statement, “If parents don’t want their children making in-app purchases, they shouldn’t let their children play with mobile devices.”

Nearly three-quarters of Canadians (73%) agree with this statement, and this view is consistent across all major demographic groups ([see comprehensive tables](#)). Even people who currently have children living in their household are not significantly more likely to disagree with this statement, and they blame parents at exactly the same rate as the general population (see summary tables at the end of this report).

Following their pattern of being less likely to blame parents, those with some personal exposure to kids making unauthorized purchases are less likely to agree with this statement, though two-in-three (65%) still do:

"If parents don't want their children making in-app purchases, they shouldn't let their children play with mobile devices."



It should be noted that, while most Canadians don't say either children or app developers are most responsible for unauthorized purchases, there is widespread agreement that each group should bear some responsibility.

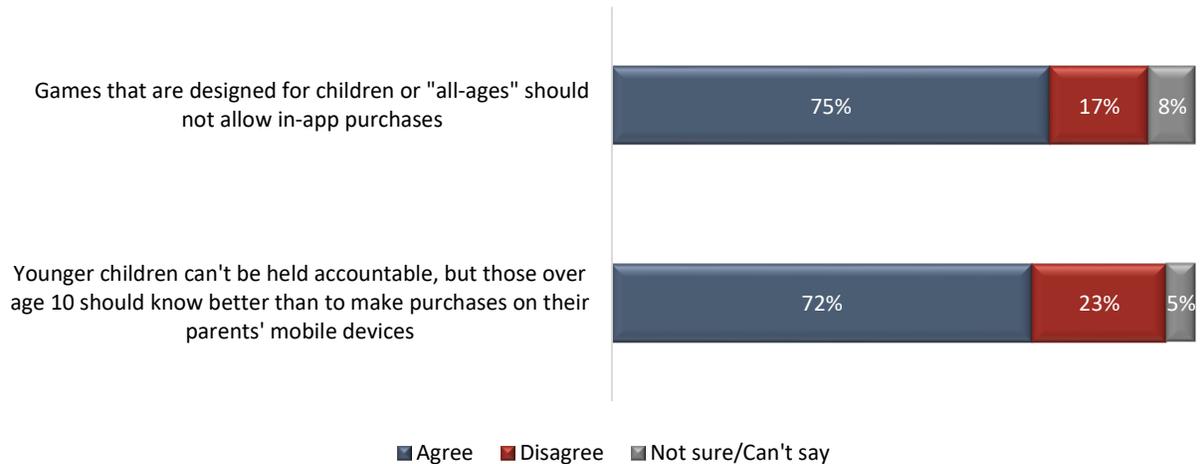
Three-in-four Canadians (75%) agree with the statement, "Games that are designed for children or 'all-ages' should not allow in-app purchases," a finding that suggests a belief that developers who *do* allow such purchases in their games are contributing to the problem.

When it comes to the degree of blame children deserve for making in-app purchases without their parents' permission, the age of the child in question is clearly a key consideration. More than seven-in-ten Canadians (72%) agree that, while younger children can't be held accountable, "those over age 10 should know better than to make purchases on their parents' mobile devices."

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Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?



Half say government should step in

Broadly speaking, does government have a role to play in addressing unauthorized in-app purchases by minors?

While there are currently no laws in Canada dealing specifically with in-app purchases, complaints related to such purchases [would likely fall under the framework](#) of provincial consumer protection laws.

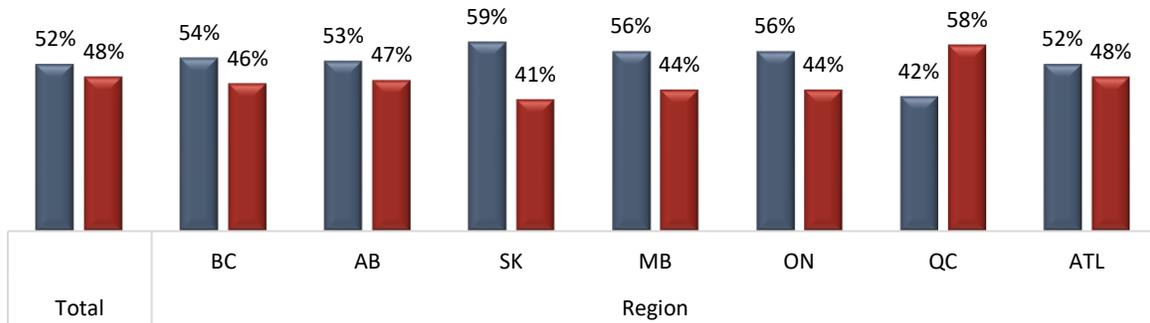
Asked a broad question about whether there should be federal regulations aimed at ensuring there are sufficient security measures in place to prevent unauthorized in-app purchases by children, Canadians are split. Slightly less than half (48%) take the position that government should step in, while the rest (52%) say "this isn't the place for government agencies."

Interestingly, there is a regional split on this question. Nearly six-in-ten Quebec residents (58%) favour federal regulation, while residents of every other region lean at least slightly toward the view that government should stay out:

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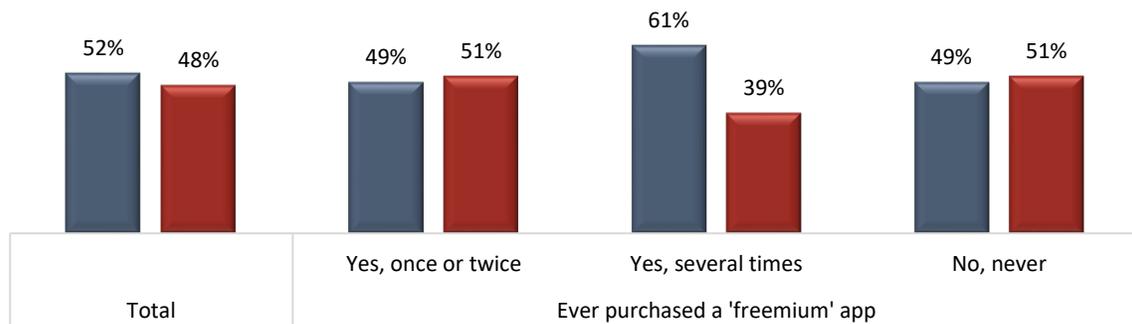
Thinking about this issue in Canada, which of the following would you say is closer to your opinion regarding the role of government in this industry?



- This isn't the place for government agencies. This issue should be handled between companies and consumers, and by parents being more aware of the risks of their children downloading certain games
- The federal government should step in with regulations to ensure there are sufficient security measures to prevent in-app purchases by children without their parent's consent

The belief that government should intervene is also stronger among those who have little or no experience downloading apps that include in-app purchases are split on this question. As seen in the graph that follows, these two groups are divided almost evenly on this question, while those most familiar with these apps – having downloaded them “several” times – say government should stay out:

Thinking about this issue in Canada, which of the following would you say is closer to your opinion regarding the role of government in this industry?



- This isn't the place for government agencies. This issue should be handled between companies and consumers, and by parents being more aware of the risks of their children downloading certain games
- The federal government should step in with regulations to ensure there are sufficient security measures to prevent in-app purchases by children without their parent's consent

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by familiarity with freemium apps and experience with unauthorized purchases by children, [click here](#).

Regardless of if you have personal experience with this or not, who would you say is most responsible in these cases, where a child – say between the ages of 4 and 10 – has made a purchase without the consent of their parents?			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1534)	Children living in household	
		Yes (408)	No (1126)
The parent - they should be monitoring their child more closely and adding the extra security measures on their devices	62%	62%	62%
The child - they are the ones making the purchase	3%	4%	3%
The app development company - they designed the games this way	11%	11%	11%
The app store (Google Play, iTunes, Amazon Store) - they should have more mechanisms in place to prevent unauthorized purchases	24%	23%	24%

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"If parents don't want their children making in-app purchases, they shouldn't let their children play with mobile devices"			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1534)	Children living in household	
		Yes (408)	No (1126)
Agree strongly	44%	40%	46%
Agree moderately	29%	30%	29%
Disagree moderately	17%	18%	16%
Disagree strongly	6%	8%	5%
Not sure/Can't say	4%	4%	4%

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