Lunch and Learn

Raising Digital Natives, Ensuring Our Kids Use Tech Responsibly

TRANSCRIPT

[Video Link]

Watch Time: 26 minutes (presentation including DOVE 3-minute video)

Read Time: 10 minutes (presentation)

INTRODUCTION

Susan Walsh, CATCH (00:00):

Welcome to everyone as we launch a new year of the CATCH Lunch and Learn series. I'm Susan Walsh, a member of the Lunch and Learn committee educator and mom of two boys. I'm thrilled to introduce you to our topic and speaker. Everywhere I go, parents are talking about technology, social media, and their indecision on how to proceed with their kids. We are so excited about today's presentation, Raising Digital Natives, Ensuring Our Kids Use Tech Responsibly. With this information in hand, we as parents can make the best decisions for our children around tech usage. Allow me to introduce Brittani Sitar. Brittani is an addiction counselor and mental health educator. Before we jump into it, a question that came to us ahead of time, from one of the parents. She shared that she was on vacation in Colorado this summer, and she said, "I have a really serious question for you: "How is it that my kids would rather look at their phones than the majestic Rocky Mountains?" Brittany, I think that you're going to be able to help us today with that - help us understand. We're just really looking forward to getting support with this information because it makes our community stronger when our families are strong. I know there's so much to share. So, Brittani, I will send it over to you. Thank you so much for being here.

PRESENTATION

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (01:35):

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Thank you. My name's Brittani. Today I am here to give you knowledge because knowledge is power. I really want to help parents and families navigate technology in the home and help them create an environment where technology is a tool and not a weapon. A lot of times parents get into a place where they're so far into this that it becomes scary, and it doesn't need to be a scary situation. We want to take a proactive approach and make parents feel empowered and engaged instead of disconnected from this subject. So, we'll hop right in. So, what's the big deal with social media and technology? This is what, as a professional, I've been in the field for 14 years now, and these are some of the things that we've seen, particularly since the pandemic and also particularly in that middle school population.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (02:33):

So, we've seen an increase in suicide rates, along with all the mental health diagnoses, ADHD, depression, anxiety. But the biggest jump has been increased suicide rates. And that's easily connected to bullying. We've seen an increase in eating disorders and body dysmorphia due to body comparison. We've seen an increase of risky behavior. All those TikTok challenges that really put kids in a position to feel like they need to one up each other on these challenges. We know that the brain does not fully develop until we're in our mid-twenties. So, they're not thinking. The last thing to develop in your brain is that prefrontal cortex, and that's the decision making, moral choice and really thinking things through part of the brain. And so risky behavior is part of that growth and development. And when there's challenges on TikTok like that, it's really easy for kids to get caught up in that.

The problem with technology is our relationship with technology

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (03:39):

We're seeing an increase of victims of crime due to online predators and grooming. And we're also seeing dysfunctional ideas of sex and dysfunctional ideas of what relationships are due to access to porn. The average age of a kid/person seeing porn has moved to around eight years old. It's no longer

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the magazines under our parents' beds. It is a simple Google search, because they heard some kid say something at school about it. So, I want to remind you that the problem today is not with technology itself. It's our relationship with technology. So, throughout this presentation, I want to empower you to reflect on what is your relationship with technology and **what do you want your family values and your home to look like in regard to technology?**

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (04:39):

This is a topic that I'm really passionate about. So, I find myself talking to a lot of people about it. And there are a whole set of parents who come at me back with, who cares? I was bullied and who cares? I had access to this stuff. **The goal here is not to remove access and create these perfect childhoods for our kids. The goal is, the problem is the pace at which our kids are exposed to it. So, if you take the pace at which they're exposed to this and the crucial part of brain development and put those things together, it's changing the trajectory of how they view the world, what they think about themselves, their foundation of trust, communication, all of those things during that crucial period of brain development and their access to the things that influence that.**

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (05:42):

So, when I was bullied, funny enough, I was bullied for my voice, and it was on the bus ride home and the bus to school. So, there was a 20-minute period where I had access to that bullying. And when I was at school around teachers, or when I came home and I was in my safe environment, I wasn't exposed to it. If I had a phone in my hand and I had access to social media and I took part in all these chat groups, I can promise you that the trajectory of my mental health would have been very different than that 20-minute exposure to the bullying on the bus.

Humans are wired since birth to seek approval

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (06:27):

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So, let's move into social development. Throughout the rest of this presentation, I want you to keep in the back of your head that humans are wired since birth to seek approval. So, we are constantly looking for that feedback loop, from the minute that we enter this world. As an infant, we are looking for that feedback loop from our caregivers. So, we're developing our sense of attachment to humans. We're looking for consistency, stability. We're learning about our body. We're trying to understand language. We're looking at things around us. And so, if we have consistent caregivers, our caregivers consistently respond to our needs, we're going to have a more healthy attachment style. Moving into toddlerhood, we're exploring our identity. We're really establishing moral development. We're establishing the foundation of our relationships, and we're learning how to regulate our emotions. If any of you have or have had to parent an eight year old, you know that emotional regulation is not a natural thing that happens for children.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (07:28):

It's something that we have to teach them. And we do that by healthy communication, by teaching them boundaries and having our own boundaries. We do that by giving them the tools to regulate their emotions. So, we're talking about feelings. I can't tell you how many adult humans that I have worked with who, when they come to me for help, they don't know how to identify their feelings. So, simple, this is what sadness feels like, this is fear, this is anxiety. All of those things are very taboo in homes sometimes. And so being able to have those conversations with our kids and help them understand and put a name to what they're feeling and give them the tool to regulate that feeling or emotion is really going to establish going forward how they handle that.

So, from infant to around nine or 10, we are just an extension of our home environment. So, you'll notice that our toddlers are saying what we say, they're doing what we do. They're complete extensions of us. Once we move past that age, they're starting to explore a little bit more about their identities, who they are, they're taking what they learned about communication, what they learned about boundaries, what they learned about relationships, how to respond to things. They're taking all of those

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things that they learned, and they're applying it in their peer friendships. And then they start taking their feedback loop that they're seeking is more along the lines of peers, cultural, social, educational experiences. They're really seeking privacy at this time and really understanding who and how that privacy is violated. So, this age is a really crucial time for parents and children to establish what that looks like and have respect and trust.

How to build trust with your preteens

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (09:42):

I always encourage parents, the way we start to really establish a foundation of trust with your preteens is to reflect on your reactions to them. So, the first time your kid comes to you and says, mommy, what's sex? Right? The way you react to that will establish how they will feel about approaching uncomfortable subjects going forward. So, their idea of trust is going to be solely based on how we react to them and how you discipline them for things that they have going on. This is a crucial time in development, nine to 13. This is also a more common time for kids to start getting their first phones or getting access to social media. If you're looking at that rapid pace of influence, instead of it just being their peers while they're at school, we're opening up a whole Pandora's box of things for them.

How social media companies leverage our brain's chemicals to solicit responses

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (10:54):

That feedback loop -let's talk a little bit about the dopamine response. **Dopamine's a chemical in the brain that gives pleasure. It's natural. We release dopamine throughout our day for things that are pleasurable.** For me, when I get up before my kids and I'm able to complete a whole cup of coffee, you

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better believe that my brain's excited and happy. And that feedback loop, it's going to say, do that again in the morning. There are several things that will reinforce the dopamine response throughout your day and give you that, "Hey, let's do that again. That was pleasurable. That was enjoyable". **Social media companies and any other email, Google, all of those things, they have designed their systems to target that feedback loop. If you've ever had that ding on your phone, or even just looking at these icons- that is releasing dopamine. Your instinct is to go look at it.**

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (12:02):

It's going to be your kid's instinct too, especially for an underdeveloped brain who can't really regulate that to begin with. But ultimately, if you've ever, I don't know, if you put in Google Coco Melon crazy, you'll see there's this phenomenon where people think that Coco Melon has turned their toddlers into crazy people. Because when you take Coco Melon away, they throw tantrums, they throw fits, and there's a sense of withdrawal from Coco Melon. That's not necessarily Coco Melon doing that. It's that dopamine response in the brain, for kids in that screen when you remove it without parameters. And we'll get a little bit into how you can start setting those parameters. But if you're not proactive about screen time and intentional about screen time, you're going to see those meltdowns. You're going to see the fits. You're going to see; it's going to look different for each age group.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (12:57):

If we go back to that Colorado Rockies incident, this is exactly what's happening. If you go on that road trip and you're like, "Hey, we're going to be doing a road trip to Colorado and we're going to go through the Rockies. You guys can have 30 minutes of screen time on this entire road trip. You do it whenever you want, but it's 30 minutes". That is an example of setting parameters, having intentional screen time, rather than just saying, "here, we have a long road trip. Take your tablet and do whatever you can do". They're not going to know when to stop. Just like with anything -you can take your kid to the park and they're not going to ever say they want to go home. It's because we are in charge of that, not them. We

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are in charge of keeping that schedule, regulating those boundaries and having that communication with them. When you gave me that example, I thought it was kind of appropriate just because that's exactly what's happening. They're really incapable of setting those boundaries themselves. So, with this video, I really want to preface this by all of the things that we recently discussed. This is just a three minute clip of all of those things happening in real time. You'll be able to see that dopamine feedback loop, the social pressure, all of the evolution of all of the issues that we're seeing in today's society, particularly with that middle school population.

DOVE VIDEO "Cost of Beauty: A DOVE Film"

Credit: Dove UK (@Dove UK)

Video (14:48- 16:13)

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (17:50):

I do want to mention that there is a very large population of males being impacted by this as well. That video only really hit on females. The likelihood of an eating disorder is a lot higher in females, also suicide risk and depression. All of that tends to be higher in females. This is not just a female issue. Social media and all of these platforms that we have tend to impact that middle school population of girls a lot more. Gaming tends to be the issue, gaming and porn seem to be the issue for males. Though that is not to say that it is not cross, happening to both genders.

What really matters with technology

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (19:03):

Let's talk a little bit about what really matters with technology. If you're in a position right now where you can be proactive about this, that's the most important thing. Not everybody's in that situation and

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they're trying to undo some of the things that have been done. That's due to lack of knowledge, right? Knowledge is power. This is not something that we were given a handbook on when cell phones were released. It's the same exact concept when cigarettes were released. It was free for all eight-year-olds who were smoking them. At some point, somebody was waving some flags saying, "Hey, this is not good".

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (19:59):

We cannot just throw these into kindergartners. We have to have some regulations on this. And they had to, as a society, start undoing some of those things. And the damage to that group of people was already done. And we're kind of in the midst of that. I don't think we're really going to see the depth of the damage until the teenagers/ pre-teens now, their adult generation, they're going to be the ones really driving the change and really saying, "Hey, this was not okay". I think we're really in the infant stages of making changes to this and creating some societal boundaries around technology and protecting our kids. Though it's gotten a lot better since the pandemic, for sure. Being proactive, establishing trust, this is simply a conversation prior to giving them the device. Teach them how it's earned, teach them how it's lost.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (20:55):

I'm giving you this because I trust you. I'm letting you do this because I trust you. This is how I cannot trust you. These are the things that you could do that would break that trust. And I will have to not let you do that. So, we're having those conversations from a very young age about what trust is and how it's earned and how it's lost. We're creating routines, rules on how screens are used. In my family: no screens at the dinner table, no screens behind closed doors. And we have time limits. My kids are still very young, but that routine and those rules apply to me too. So, my kids will call me out if I have my phone sitting next to my dinner plate. They're a hundred percent going to say, "Hey mom, put your

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phone away". That is something that we're establishing now, because the minute I hand them a device, they're going to know like, no, we're not....

Setting Boundaries

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (21:48):

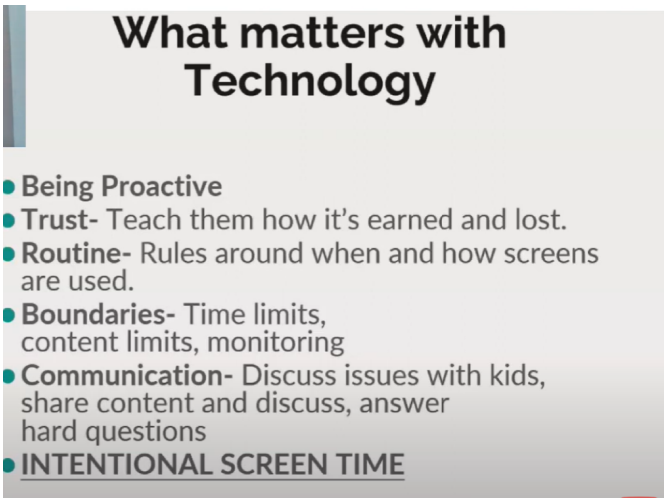
When we have family time, we have family time. We're not going to be zoned out on our phones. Boundaries. We have time limits, and content monitoring. For those who have adolescents or pre-teens, it's when will they know they have their screen time? It's, hey, you get home from school, these are the things that need to get done. Then you can have some screen time before dinner or whatever that looks like for your family. **There is no one right way, but you will know when it's problematic and you will know when you have to revisit these things.** And you have to say, okay, which of these things is missing and how can we improve? Sometimes that's seeking guidance from a counselor or from somebody who would be able to coach you through that. And sometimes it's just saying, what's going to work for my family here?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (22:39):

And how can we improve this? Communication. I cannot emphasize this enough. Discuss these issues with your kids. At the pace at which our kids are exposed to content, I would much rather my kids learn sensitive issues from me, rather than them getting on Google, where any idea that you possibly have can be endorsed whether it's right or wrong. So, discuss these issues with your kids. Answer the hard questions when they come to you with something that's uncomfortable or taboo, monitor your facial expressions. Even if you need to take a minute, say, "you know what? I really want to answer that question, but I want to answer it right. Let's research it together. Let's wait till your dad gets home. Let's talk about that as a family". Any of those things. But to make something seem forbidden, that's when kids will often start seeking consultation from the Googles. Last is intentional time. **Make screen time**

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intentional all the way through, until they move out of your house off to college. We're having intentional time. That means we know what content we are and are not allowed to have. We have those content limits. If it's a school night and I know I can only have 30 minutes or an hour of screen time, what is that screen time going to look like? Hey, get your chores done, and you can look up sneakers on the internet, right? Because that's what my kid loves to do, not my kid, but you know. For my youngest, it's Coco Melon. And so, it's like, hey, get all this done and you can have 10 minutes of Coco Melon. There's a boundary, there's a routine, there's accountability there, and I'm communicating when that's going to end. These bullet points are all things that you can revisit when you start feeling a little bit out of control or you start seeing behavior issues that are connected with screen time.



Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (24:48):

Alright, helping our parents. It's highly encouraged to delay phone use until 13 or older. I recognize that this is incredibly difficult. I recognize that kids are getting phones in fifth grade, and if you are delaying phone use past eighth grade, a lot of kids do feel like their social lives are being interfered with without a device. So, again, this is going to be a family decision. There is no right or wrong, but just know when we're really taking to consider brain development, it is our job to put those boundaries in place, those parameters, and really understand the risk that you are giving by putting a device in their hand and really allowing them to have access to all the world around us. **Model healthy tech use.**

Model healthy tech use.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (25:46):

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Practice what you preach, right? We are doing what we say we want our kids to do. Educate the parents, educate the kids about the risks, the content, the consequences. We're always having these conversations, even if they're uncomfortable, even if they feel taboo. There's a lot of religious taboos that might feel, making families hesitant to have these conversations. This is going to really be the foundation of if your kid is going to return to you with some of those hard situations that they may end up in. Grooming, porn, bullying, body comparison, all those things. We want our kids to be able to feel comfortable coming to us. If my kid got into a situation where she was groomed and ended up getting in a situation on some sort of chat or anything like that, I really would hope that she would come to me instead of me seeing a decline in her mental health and finding out after the fact. Establishing our ability to have conversations and have trust with our kids mutually is going to be the key to that.

Q&A

Susan Walsh, CATCH (27:06):
Thank you, Brittani. That was so much good information. When should this happen or when should I let, fill in the blank, right? You talked a lot about the research behind it, which I think is so important. One of our audience members asked,

When is the prefrontal cortex developed?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (27:44):

Not till after college. And that's why when we're at college, we do all this stupid stuff, right? Because we don't really, we're young and free. But it's not even about waiting until it's developed. It's laying that foundation prior to doing it. So, it's establishing trust, really. **And in my opinion, because of that crucial brain development period in that middle school fifth, sixth, and seventh grade particularly, giving them access to social media, it just feels so counterproductive to me. There's nothing good that could come of it. A lot of families that have the extreme view that I have on this, are doing a joint social**

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media account. This is our account, it's on my phone, and we check it together and we have conversations.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (29:01):

So, we're talking about who you're following, and we're talking about reels that you might see and saying, hey, what do you think about this post? Is she half naked? Or What do you think about the comments on her body in this post? And so, we're really having this conversation with them without it being directly them that's the target. You can always go to like the Kardashians' social media page, and there's a whole slew of conversations that can be had based on what they're posting, right. Talk about do you think that's appropriate? How would you feel if somebody said that to you? How would you feel if you saw that on your friend's page? So, you can start having this and doing these baby steps of exposure in those early years so that there's a small chance that they'll start to comprehend the depth of what is happening.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (30:01):

I had a good friend who delayed all the way until the summer after eighth grade. What that did for her was she saw what her friends were going through. She was able to witness it and not be a victim of it. By the time she got it, she was just kind of like, oh, I've seen this, like I know now. Hindsight's 2020, right? She got all this exposure to it, and then she got the phone, and of course she had her own slew of things that happened, but we're setting them up for a little bit more than just blindsiding them with what could possibly go wrong.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (30:41):

That nine to 13 is when kids are often getting started getting their first phones and the parent was saying, but if you waited until 13 or 14, so they can navigate social media and tech more safely.

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I think an argument to that is, if my kid doesn't have a phone, Snapchat, whatever it might be, they're being excluded from social activity.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (31:20):

Yeah. And that's the biggest issue that we're seeing now, is it's not even friend groups that they're feeling excluded from. I come from Vegas and the sports leagues for youth in Vegas, their main form of communication with players is through a social media platform. If you want info on your games or your tournaments or your payments, you were kind of forced to be in this world of social media. Again, this is a society issue that has yet to be resolved, and it's about us really infiltrating all these systems with education. And one by one, we all band together to be like, no this is not an acceptable way for us to communicate. Again, joint social media accounts if you feel like that is really hindering their social ability.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (32:26):

That is the number one thing that I hear from middle school parents is that they're becoming more socially at risk by not giving it to them. I really want to encourage you to lay that foundation, have those conversations, have a strict set of boundaries with this is what me giving you the device looks like, this is what the rules are with it, this is what trust is with it. These are the things that if I see happening, it will not be a part of our household anymore. This is a privilege, not a right. These are the parameters on it. A lot of kids who are getting it in elementary school, it's well I want to be able to communicate with my kid when they're not here. And fine.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (33:23):

If that's your case, then what's the point of them having the phone after school? Right. So, we're going back to our original purpose of the phone. My original purpose of the phone was so that I could access you when you were outside of my house. When you get home, the phone gets put away. We don't need

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to be engaged in all that 24 /7. There is not a cookie cutter way for this to be rolled out. It should be something that everybody in the household, we have a discussion prior to, and we talk about these things. And if I'm going to give this to you in fifth, sixth, seventh grade, we're having the conversation of what it looks like, the parameters around it, and my right to be able to explore what's always happening on that device.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (34:17):

You're talking a lot about the boundaries, and this is how we're going to do it. One of those big pieces that we talked about earlier was communication. I can only speak personally. This summer, I had my children bored a couple of times during the summer. Mom, I'm bored. I'm sure we can all relate to that. And I just did a quick Google search and I said, here's all the research on how good it is for you to feel bored, have fun with it. Aren't you glad I'm trying hard to be a good mom? I feel there is a level of sharing and educating that we can do.

What are the best resources to do that?

Going to the Dove campaign, which is intense. At one point, might that be good to share with the child or is it good to share with the child?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (35:23):

Again, this is going to be personal preference. For me, it will be something that I share with my kid when the time is right. When all those issues start popping up, it will be something that I pull up someone's social media account. Currently I have an almost seven-year-old. As every seven-year-old in today's world wants to be, is a YouTube star, right? We don't even allow YouTube really in our house. So, where she got that is beyond me. We don't have control over what they're really going to be exposed to, but we can educate them. And her biggest question to me every single day, "Mom, why can't I have a

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YouTube account? Mom, why can't I post my videos on YouTube?" She makes videos and does reviews of whatever.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (36:15):

I don't even know; you should see the data on my phone. It's completely full and I won't let her put them on the internet. And so, for me, because that issue is so pushed, I've already started having those conversations and I've already said, "people are mean, and I don't want you to be exposed to that. If I put you on the internet, there's not very nice things". She's currently obsessed with JoJo Siwa. I've pulled up JoJo Siwa's accounts, and I've read some comments. JoJo Siwa is your favorite person in the world, and there's people saying all these things about her. I don't think that is a healthy way for a seven-year-old to live her life. It's really going to be personal preference. When your gut tells you that it's right, and the time is right to have this conversation, you go with it.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (37:06):

There's no cookie cutter. It's really based on your family values, your family unit, how much you want to have these open conversations and expose it and you're going to mess up. We never do things perfectly. You might end up doing something where you're like, oh, that's not something I should have done. But we don't know, right? This is all just trial and error. I try to cling onto people who have kids in this age group right now, right? I ask all the questions like, how are you handling this? What's going on? Because I'm going to need that info in about 10 years. No, less than that, in about six years. I think that being able to share this info with my kids, rather than them getting it firsthand from experience, or from whatever they Google on the internet and find info on, I would much prefer it to be me.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (38:14):

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What advice do you have when your child feels not having a social media platform like TikTok, let's say, is impacting their mental health.

They are being excluded. They are showing signs of depression because of it. What would you say, what are some talking points that you might recommend?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (38:40):

I think that, if this is something that is really concerning, mental health-wise for your kid, that's when you start looking at, okay, this is the time to talk about it. Right? This is the time to say, what do you want? In an ideal world? What would you say that age is? 11, 12? I would assume it's probably like sixth or seventh grade that that's happening.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (39:15):

I even know second, third, especially with TikTok, for instance. When all the dances were a big thing. It could be any age.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (39:33):

Yeah. For me personally, elementary school it's a no-brainer. It's like, sorry, it's not happening. There's really no reason for it to happen. I have seen firsthand what you're speaking of regarding mental health and the disconnect that people feel. I have a nephew; my sister-in-law is very extreme with it. They have a split family. She was very strict about it. Dad was not, in regard to gaming. She had found that when he was at dad's, his mental health had improved because he felt connected in those, they were like chat rooms or whatever. I think that the most important piece here that we're talking about is really if we're going to hand that device over and make the decision, okay, I think as your mom or as your dad, that this is setting you back and we're ready for this.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (40:45):

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Really have a plan on how you're going to roll that out. That's going to be, these are the rules, these are the parameters, this is the time limit. These are the apps or whatever I'm going to put on it to monitor your content and this is how you lose it, right? Kids really operate well on those parameters and it is black and white. If I see these things, this is how it goes away. I need to be able to trust you with it and roll it out in really small doses. Here's the device. First, it's shared and we're talking about this and we're having conversations. I'm monitoring the content you're putting out and the comments that you're saying. Then slowly we cut that umbilical cord and allow them to get more independence on that. But we have training wheels at first, just like with everything.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (41:38):

Along those lines, we've heard the communication, the positive modeling, all of these things. Ultimately families are very busy. You're working, you're going to activities, you have a lot going on. A lot of parents have asked about apps and certain securities that you can have. I know you're not here to promote any specific apps, but I think parents are curious as to what is out there to help safeguard. I know when I was a teacher, I was lucky enough I could look at all 25 of the iPads on my iPad at one time, and if anything was awry, I could tap it and it would go, "Mrs. Walsh has turned off your access". It was the most magical power ever.

Is there a little bit of a magical power that they can add to help them in this?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (42:38):

Yeah, there's several products out there that help with that. There's also, I've done parent coaching on this subject for quite some time now, and I've had a handful of parent coaches or clients who have been like my kids get around those apps. It doesn't matter. It really kind of depends. There is one site that I will throw out there just because that one site will give you kind of a non-biased view of apps, which my mind was blown at the amount of info on this website, it's called Protect Young Eyes. It's a guy out of

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the east coast who does similar work that I do, but he also, his website, you can go to his website, and you can look at like, here's the Instagram app.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (43:37):

This is the risk, and these are the things that are happening, and this is what we want, the petition we want signed to protect our kids for Instagram. He is next level when it comes to knowing the latest apps, knowing the problems with them that our kids are having, and really giving the down low on it. He's going to endorse several products that help put parameters in place. I know Apple has lots of things in place where you can set time limits, you can turn apps off. I don't have an Apple device, but I can tell you that I've considered switching for that very reason, but I'm not there yet, so I don't have to address it. I think that starting at that website and really exploring the resources he has on that page would be helpful.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (44:37):

It's interesting you mentioned that some don't work, or kids find a workaround. I think that's one of the challenges with technology. It's quickly moving. The minute we think we have a secure situation, there's a troubleshoot out there on YouTube. Or a workaround I should say. That's why if we go back to those foundations, we lay with our kids ahead of time, hopefully that helps to lead the way.

What would you recommend a parent should or shouldn't do if they find out their child is being bullied on social media?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (45:23):

Once you get to middle school, it's really important to first consult your kid, right? This is going to be where that foundation of trust is. I trust your opinion on this. What do you think we should do? Right? See what their baseline is on solving that problem. How can I help you with this? Then you give them your opinion. I can tell you what I want to do are these things. Let's find a middle ground here on what's

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going to work for you and what's going to work for Mama Bear here. Our instinct is to go to the schools. I do know that there are schools, and I'm sure there's plenty of school people in this, but I think that reporting it to schools does something. I'm not quite sure. But I think that one thing that can be done is reporting any bullying or harassment to school administration. Then really having that conversation with your kid. Let's find a middle ground that's an appropriate solution here. One thing you don't want to do is to solve that problem for them without their permission in a way that they don't find acceptable. That's going to really hinder that trust process in whether they're going to come to you with that info next time.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (47:02):

Are there current recommendations for how much intentional screen time that they should have?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (47:17):

Research shows they did a research study out of Salt Lake with a handful of, I think it was like three or 400 people. It showed that kids with social media that were actively doing intentional content had less symptoms of anxiety and depression than kids who were passively on social media. The kids who were just scrolling and looking through social media and comparing themselves and finding what they don't have and what they need and all those things that we just do when we scroll, those kids have higher symptoms of anxiety and depression than the kids who were intentional with it. It's not necessarily about the time limit, there will always be a time limit in my opinion. Because my kids, I think, will always have meltdowns when I take it away.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (48:17):

They always need that end. Right? That's part of the parameter. It's not even about you can't have it for five hours. We're a family unit, we have family time, we have chores, we have dinner. This is your allotted time for that. On the weekends it's a little bit more relaxed, right? It's just like us. So, for Sunday

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morning cartoons, they just look different. It's less about you having this much screen time, but it's Saturday morning, we had our pancakes, and you want some screen time, go ahead, but you better believe I'm going to come sit next to you in about 30 minutes and come be like, what are you watching? What are you looking at? You know, no screens behind closed doors. When I say you're not allowed on YouTube, I better not walk by and see you on YouTube.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (49:12):

And so those are some of the things that as a family, you need to come up with what that looks like. I had a family once, her daughter loved to read, and she was a reader, and they had, they gave her a Kindle and she was like what about my kid who loves to read, and she reads before bed and that's behind closed doors, and she has a Kindle. And I was like, well why can't you turn the internet off? She doesn't need the internet to read her book. She can have the device in her room. I**t's not the screen itself that's causing the problem. It's the pace at which we're getting exposed to some of this stuff, and it's up to us to put those parameters in place for them.**

Susan Walsh, CATCH (50:01):

What advice would you give to a parent who didn't set the rules up or status check-ins and all that ahead of time and now is feeling a little bit stuck in the current situation?

What would you advise for a reset, trying to get some buy-in from the child and not being so resistant.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (50:28):

In those situations, you need to identify if it's problematic. Is this use problematic to a place where you need to seek a professional? Some of the signs of problematic use are isolation, anxiety, and depression. Any kid who is skipping school, it may not be because of technology, but any kid who's skipping school, that's a big sign that you need to seek a professional and figure out what's going on. A lot of times it is tied to something happening on social media or in chat rooms or gaming or substance use, any of those

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things. Identifying first if this is a problem that needs a professional for, and if not, and you just want a healthier home setting, we're starting small with the basics. I always encourage families to go back to the original intention of the device.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (51:32):

Why did we give it to them in the first place? We kind of back up to that reason, and then we modify what that looks like for the kids. Always starting with the dinner table, behind closed doors, and intentional time. That goes for you too. We don't sleep with our phones in our bedroom - phones stay downstairs. They get plugged in before dinner. We don't unless you're my husband. It's something that we really try to establish now. That's something that's super simple and super easy for parents who are way beyond pulling the device and taking things away. That's the last thing you want to do as well, because you're going to experience a lot of pushbacks, a lot of behavioral issues with that and some withdrawal.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (52:26):

There are kids who, the streaks on Snapchat, kids who have literally become suicidal because their parents have taken their device and they've lost their streak. Right. They had a streak, and it's a big deal. I don't have Snapchat, so I wouldn't know. We're intentionally thinking this through, and we're having the discussion first as a family. I want to start having better boundaries as a family with tech, and this is currently what I'm seeing. These are some of the things that I want to start putting in place as a family and where we're starting small. If you suddenly just rip the rug and ruffle up everything, there's going to be some issues. For sure.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (53:13):

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When we talk about modeling, which you just mentioned. I can tell you from my perspective, I use it for carpools, check in when my kids need a ride. I do my grocery shopping on it. I do my clothes shopping on it. I work on it. It's just such a part of our lives.

How do we model when the reality is that's how we're functioning?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (53:48):

We communicate. When my phone is in my face because it's eight o'clock in the morning and I'm at work and my kids are still getting ready for school and they're like, mommy, mommy, mommy. I'm communicating that, hey, I have to check my email. I have to respond to this real quick. I'm communicating that this is intentional use and I'm on the clock and I have to do this. Asking their permission when you're going outside of those parameters. If the phone rings, my husband will sometimes take a work call during dinner and he'll always preface it. Hey, I might get a call during dinner and I might need to get that (or whatever that looks like). When there has to be an exception, we communicate that with our kids because they're going to do that to you. They're going to call you out. If that's a family deal, they're going to call you out, like, mom, get off your phone. Sorry, I'm just putting it in Google Maps. I have to see how far this place is. They will understand. We're over communicating our activity on it and prefacing any rules that we might be breaking with I might need to keep my phone here because of A, B and C.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (55:06):

What about hidden accounts?

A lot of kids will, so if you monitor their accounts and you sit down with them and you're having the kumbaya moment around the app, and then they have a hidden account, obviously you must eventually find it to know that they have one. But any thoughts on that?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (55:32):

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Yeah, so that goes back to being that proactive, establishing this is what it means to lose trust, and if this happens, these will be the consequences, and we're following through with that consequence. If you haven't laid that foundation and you're too far into this and you've found the hidden account, then we're just transparent about that and say, hey, I've noticed this. I want to have a conversation about it, and I'm disappointed that this is what's going on. Why did you hide it? What are some of the things you're doing on it? Laying that foundation right away, immediately going forward, like, this isn't okay, and these are my rules and I need to see this from you, and this will be the consequence. We're establishing it right then and there if we haven't done that prior. If that's happening, there's a few reasons that that could be happening from on a spectrum of like no reason at all. They just want some privacy, there's something going on. I would certainly be digging a little bit more to make sure that there's no grooming or predators or relationships that you're uncertain of. Those are some signs of risky behavior. If you haven't established that trust and their ability to come to you, then they won't, and you'll see a decline quickly.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (57:01):

My son wants to listen to music all the time.

The parent thinks it's really distracting and he's very resistant to a change. Can you speak about that kind of digital use?

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (57:25):

Distracting to what? Right. We're talking about boundaries and parameters here. When it's intentional family time, we're engaged and we're connected, right? We're still putting those parameters. If it's music and you guys are doing chores or doing whatever, and you don't think it's going to do no harm, no foul, then it's a family decision to say go for it. But if you feel like it's intruding in connection with family, then it'll be up to you to set those boundaries on when there's connection with family, there's no earbuds in your ears, right? We're playing a game. Or maybe you start with one, you have one and

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you're engaged, and these are the things that I need to see from you. If there's music in your ears, if you can't do that, then you have to take the earbuds out. There's a fine line between putting these rules in place frivolously and without purpose and doing it intentionally because you're seeing problematic things as a result of it.

CONCLUSION

Susan Walsh, CATCH (58:40):

Well, Brittani, you've given us so much information and thank you for answering all of our questions. Thank you so much. Everything will be shared. We'll be posting the presentation on YouTube where you can also see the slides and see numerous past presentations that are fantastic as well. Brittani, I have enjoyed meeting you, getting to know you and appreciated the dialogue that we've shared both on and off screen.

Brittani Sitar, Mental Health Educator (59:16):

Yeah, likewise.

Susan Walsh, CATCH (59:16):

Thank you so much.

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