

Episode 5. Screens

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screens, kids, rules, important, home, parenting, social media, video games, kindles, stuck, piece, feel, life, tv, movies, fair, house, watch, social skills, deana

SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Future Focused Parenting, Kira Dorrian

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- K** Kira Dorrian 00:03
What happens when two parent coaches, one a Christian and the other an agnostic Jew, sit down to talk about parenting?
 - D** Deana Thayer 00:09
I'm Deana Thayer
 - K** Kira Dorrian 00:10
and I'm Kira Dorrian.
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Welcome to Raising Adults, a podcast about Future Focused Parenting.
 - K** Kira Dorrian 00:16
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D

Deana Thayer 00:36

Today we're going to talk about screens and media and technology and how we go about handling that and maybe even limiting that with our children. So Kira, do you want to start with your why on this particular topic?

K

Kira Dorrian 00:49

Absolutely. So I had a couple different whys and I think the main one is all the research out there right, that suggests that it's not good for them to have too much screentime. But I had different ways around different things which I'll talk about more as we get to the how. I have a different why for video games for example, than I do for TV. So video games from a mental health perspective, to me are very concerning because of the violence. And just the way that kids check out and can get addicted, like there's all these studies now that show that it's an addictive activity. So I was more concerned about that than I was about TV. Though I did limit TV, and I'll talk more about that later. But the main why was I didn't want them to get addicted to anything, and I didn't want them to be desensitized to violence. And I also kind of felt like I wanted them to have television or movies as a way of being entertained but not their only way of self entertaining. How about you?

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Deana Thayer 01:50

Well, I have older kiddos, as you know, and this is really different in our house now because they also have social media, which I think is almost it's own beast, but where I operated from even when my, my kiddos were little in terms of TV, which was all they had available to them at that time, was I really didn't want them to lose the ability to interact with people. And I've seen that happen unfortunately, with kids who are on their devices all the time. Just simple things like eye contact or a firm handshake and knowing how to make small talk are going really by the wayside. And I really wanted to avoid that. So I was pretty intentional from the start about limiting the screen time. And then as it moved into social media, a few areas that mattered a lot to me, were again, the integrity piece, what are you doing even when nobody's looking? Because you can put rules around that but older kids can, of course, find ways around them. So we brought in the integrity piece, and again, making sure that we're still really reinforcing how do we interact, and where is technology appropriate, where would it be important to leave it behind because you're interacting with people, whether that be the dinner table, or movie theater, or all those kinds of things. So I wanted to make sure they still had those social skills and that technology didn't water those down.

K

Kira Dorrian 03:09

I love that. And I think it's interesting because I almost feel like especially around video games and social media in a way that has become our social skills. So there is this juxtaposition of needing them to have some exposure to it so that they feel like they fit in. They feel like they can converse about whatever the popular movie or TV show is. I know that a friend of mine who has much older kids, they're grown, she said, they had no video games in the house, which is currently what we have... no video games, but she said her son would go over to a friend's house to play them, and that was okay. But he would struggle because he didn't know how to play it. And it actually affected his social life. People would tease him or this, that or the other. So there's this really fine balance, right, between teaching those social skills that are important to you and I that are going by the wayside, and making those stay there, but also kind of giving them what they need in the current world.

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Deana Thayer 04:00

Right. And another piece of that is the timeframe. So there are elements of video games and social media that are kind of important while they have a peer group, but they actually do fade out over time. And what's lasting is that ability to interact with adults, employers, all of those things. So having respect for there is a season where they might need to know this kind of jargon and just the way to interact around social media, but the ability to have that be just one facet of their life, and not this unilateral, all I think about, my only approach to anything. And that's really tricky to find that balance.

K

Kira Dorrian 04:35

Yeah, I love that idea of it being a season that you can kind of wrap your brain around, like, how am I going to handle this season in a way that, being future focused, it doesn't become their entire lifetime? That's awesome. So how did you, how did you deal with it when they were little? And how do you deal with it now? Like, what are some of the tools or tips that you did that we could impart to the listeners that are maybe wondering what to do about that?

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Deana Thayer 04:59

Sure. So when they were little I stuck with pretty much a straightforward just it was a timeframe, they were allowed a certain amount of screen time per day. And I usually, this is a little self serving, but might be a good tip for our listeners, is I did it when I wasn't available. So for instance, once Marceleno was born, when I was nursing, Cienna could

have a little show, because I wasn't able to go chase her around while I'm stuck in a breastfeeding session. And so it enabled me to know right where she was, and that she was okay. And maybe even purposely learning something. I could pick an educational show, but it meant that if I was stuck, I wasn't going to end up in a toddler crisis that I couldn't address. So that was pretty straightforward. In those early years, it was really about time. Then what was great is when my kids learned to read, I made it a one for one, minute for a minute. The amount of minutes you've read today is the amount of minutes you can have a show. So that was what we did in those earlier years.

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Kira Dorrian 05:55

I love that so much I'm officially stealing that right now. That is just gone into my pocket.

D

Deana Thayer 06:01

It's really helpful. It makes them really devour their books during quiet time really trying to earn it! And the great thing is, especially in those early years when they're emerging readers, even if I had, I had a couple strong readers, but even with a strong reader, it's rare that they're going to read like, hours a day. So it was a very rare time where I had to say, oh, wow, you've outpaced my ability to offer you screentime today, we'll have to put some in the bank for tomorrow. But it really didn't happen too often because just with life, or camps they were doing, or little classes we were taking, or getting outside and playing, it was rare that they would ever read so much that I wasn't comfortable equating the screen time to it. So it was really effective for a long time. Now as we moved into being older, I've had some different rules. My first one is we obey the law. And that might sound funny, but it is appalling how many children have social media that technically if you were to look at the site's website, are not old enough for an account. You really are supposed to be a certain age to have an Instagram, a certain age to be on Facebook, even a certain age to be on Snapchat. So my first rule is you will not have one of these accounts until you are the age it says you can have one. And that helped a ton. It made it not my battle, it was just the site says... blame Facebook sorry, not my fault. And anytime I can remove a power struggle, I love that. So that was our first rule is it just isn't even happening until you're old enough. And then we employed a contract. So I actually wrote up a contract for them with some guidelines. For instance, just to throw out an example if I see an objectionable piece of language or picture, the first time that happens, we're going to talk about that and I'm going to talk about why that's a problem, and work through that with you and then I'll have you take it down, but the second time the whole account goes down. So they were very motivated to be very forward and just real transparent with their accounts because they knew I would have access to them. That was in the the contract as well. So like, did they have to accept your friend request then? Yeah, like the rule was you must be friends

with me on Facebook and Instagram. Yes. I will follow you literally and figuratively, online. And the other nice thing about that, though, is the visibility. And also I got a little window into their world. So I'll admit, in a way, it was actually really nice. It wasn't all just so I could police it all. But that contract really helped. And we evaluate and re-sign the contract every year on their birthday. And so every year the list of restrictions actually shrinks. And I love that as they grow in increasing responsibility, they earn increasing privileges around their social media. So that's how we've handled it in the older years. And then later, I want you to get a turn, but later I'd love to share how the blended piece adds a little challenge to that.

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Kira Dorrian 08:52

I can't even imagine because now you're dealing with completely different roles, right. So just really quickly before I go, what, what about TV now with your teens like, do you limit it now? Do you feel like they have a pretty good handle on it? Because I like, I definitely hear the wonderful kind of boundaries you're putting around social media. What about television, movies, that kind of thing?

D

Deana Thayer 09:12

Yeah, interestingly, TV is not as popular anymore in my house, just because there's other things. Now I've got one biological kid who's just super not interested. So once in a while, we'll have family movie night, and she'll participate in that or she'll watch a couple episodes of The Office with her brother or something. But she's not a huge fan. So yeah, now she just got her own thing. Now Marc, he could easily binge watch stuff if he's not careful. But I would still say more often the thing I'm having to watch is, is he on YouTube and then on his phone and that kind of thing. So I haven't really had to do as much of that. And I've also let life be the best teacher. So if they do stay up late and binge watch something on Netflix, and they have to get up the next morning, I just let that ouchy happen. And so when they're super tired, they make a different choice next time and we definitely talk through that. But it's removed me from being the oh, that we're not going to do that and let LIFE say, oh, I really shouldn't do that.

K

Kira Dorrian 10:12

Yeah, there's those natural consequences, right, which I'm sure we're going to spend a whole episode on. I love that. I love that. Well, so it's, you know, here's the thing in our household, you have to remember that Dave and I are former actors. And that really affects how we view movies, especially TV movies. And so for me, we, we've always limited screens when they were born, the first year, we did no screens whatsoever. And then when

they were one, we introduced a 30 minute show, and it was Sophia the First, because Sophia the First had just come out at that time, and they did a brand new musical number in every episode, and I was like, this I can get on board with it. This is an education. And that is kind of how I see film, especially, to me, it's a part of their education. Like they've watched Sound of Music and Singing in the Rain and Wizard of Oz and some classic Disney films. And for us, that's so much a part of who we are, and especially me as a, as a voice actor, you know, that, like animation and doing voices. And that's the world I work in. So it was important for me that that piece of it was really welcomed and encouraged, but in a limited way. So same thing, we definitely put a time restriction on it. And so we introduced Sophia the First, and they would get this little 30 minutes every afternoon. And then as they got older, we started doing a 30 minute chunk in the morning as well, so that I could like make their lunch and get myself ready if I had to go to work. And it was just that perfect amount of time to just breathe and get everything done. They took a little rest before they went off to school or wherever it was that they were going. And so we've kind of stuck with that, but we went completely away from our the video game screens. So my kids hardly ever touch the iPad or our phones. We bought them Kindles when we took our very first trip to the UK to visit Dave's family, so they were four and a half. And we bought them Kindles, and it was hilarious because they literally didn't know what they were because they'd had just so little exposure. And so we were like, they're gonna be so excited. We bought them these like super cool expensive things. And they, it was like, you know, here's some socks, like, they just didn't even know what it was. And so the only time and this is still the rule, the only time they are allowed Kindles is when we travel. And I feel absolutely guilt free, shame free saying, here's your Kindle. Enjoy the nine hour flight. You may now have nine uninterrupted hours of Kindle time and movies. And you know, whatever it is, and that has worked out so well. And it is, that's the long game we talked about, right? It is so hard sometimes to not be like, oh, here's a Kindle, right? Especially if one has an appointment, and we're waiting in the waiting room, it's like, it would just be so much easier to bring the Kindle. But I don't, because then I would feel funny about nine hours of, you know, Kindle entertainment. And so it's worked out really, really well in our favor. They're not video game focused. They like them a lot. And they would probably play it a lot more if we let them. But it's just not front of mind for them. And for me, it was so important to keep the video game stuff at bay for as long as possible.

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Deana Thayer 13:38

And that's really great. And I love that you said they didn't even really know what to make of it and what to do with it. It just reminds me of a funny story. I have to share really quick. I had a set of board books for my kids that happened to have some of the characters from Dora the Explorer, and they had letters and Dora happened to be in the little book about the letter P. And so she was on the page with the word pinata, and my kids had so little

exposure to TV. And this was a "pat mom on the back" moment, I was actually really happy about this. But we were out and about somewhere and Dora the Explorer came on at a friend's house or something. And Cienna looked at the screen and said, pinata! And I just love it when you can actually keep the exposure low enough that they don't even have some of that awareness. And that's actually great. There's nothing bad about that, and how your kids have something to look forward to when they travel. And you can have guilt free flight time where you know that they're entertained, but that isn't how they're spending their life outside of these trips once in a while.

K

Kira Dorrian 14:39

Right. And it's super special. They can't wait to travel. I mean, obviously because it's super fun, but, but they have this special thing that they know is limited. And it gives us that breath to just, we can relax and enjoy our flight. I mean, our kids fly really well. And I think a lot of it has to do with they can do all of these things that feel special to them and they don't need us as much in those moments as they might if it was just like any other day, so yeah, the video game piece was really the most important to me. And so now my kids watch 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon. And usually the afternoon one is when I'm making dinner again, kind of like when I'm not available, I want to be able to focus on what I'm doing. I don't love to cook and my son has some allergies. So cooking is a stressful time and it's like, just go watch your show. I stuck with mostly educational stuff until they were about five. I loved Little Einsteins that was like my favorite. It's all art and music, again, kind of reflecting our family values. I wanted to expose them to the creative side of this. And my son now is super into moviemaking. He actually just requested a filmmaking camera for his birthday for his seventh birthday. He wants a camera to make films. And so I think some of that has come from the TV and film education but I will be totally honest and say that like when we get home from the UK is a great example. And we're all jet lagged out of our minds. The next day is an unlimited TV day. And we all I mean, Dave and I lie in bed just binge watching something, because we're exhausted and the kids just watch TV all day. It doesn't happen often. I mean, we go to the UK, like once a year. So I would say we do that maybe twice a year. There's usually one other day where Dave and I are like, you know what, let's just watch TV all day. And we let them and, and again, that has always felt really good and really, really healthy to us. The one thing I will say is with video games at the moment, the rule is that they can play them at someone else's house, but only if it's non-violent. I will never say yes to violent video games. I just, it's just, I don't, I don't as a voice actor. I actually won't audition for them either. So that's just a part of our family value system. So right now they are getting, if they go to a friend's house, my son has one friend who they play a lot of video games like Mario Kart and stuff when they're there. And I at the moment, that feels good to me. Like I remember when they were little. I said to my mom, I know they're gonna eat

a cookie one day, but do I have to be the one to give them the cookie? You know, I know they're gonna eat McDonald's one day, do I have to be the one to give them their first McDonald's? And that's sort of how I feel about video games. It's like, I know they're gonna play video games. But I don't know that our home has to be the place where it's introduced, I think that life can introduce them to that. And that in order to support what our value system is it at home, that, that looks a different way at home, but we're not necessarily preventing it out in the world. Does that make sense?

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Deana Thayer 17:26

Absolutely. And I have one other question for you. Because I remember when we chatted about chores, you had talked about if the chores don't get done, then the show might go away. And I'm curious do Rhys and Rhiannon at this point have any way to earn extra screen time? Or is it just those 30 minutes for now, those two times a day?

K

Kira Dorrian 17:45

Yeah, we sort of, it's just those two times a day. I like the idea that we assume you get your your privileges, it's assumed that you are going to behave and act in a certain way that enables you to get your privileges and only if I see that you're making a different choice do I take that away. I wanted, I always wanted to send the message that we assume you're going to do the right thing.

D

Deana Thayer 18:06

Right, you're assuming the best about your own children.

K

Kira Dorrian 18:08

Exactly. So we haven't kind of worked into earning though. I will say, having put the, the more you read, the more screentime you've got, I'm going to put that in my pocket. And I'm actually what, what I'm chewing on out loud here with all of you, our listeners, is maybe taking one of those and making that something that you earn with reading.

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Deana Thayer 18:25

So one is a given...

K

Kira Dorrian 18:26

One's a given, and one becomes something that you earn because I do like the idea. I mean, my kids both love to read anyway. But I love the idea of the one for one thing. That's really cool.

D

Deana Thayer 18:35

All right, well, I have as you know, a two household family actually a total of four households, technically, with my ex-wife in law, my actual ex-spouse, all of those things. So for my biological kids, I have this other added layer of complexity, right? So they aren't always with me, and the rules are different at their dad's house. And so I would love to just take a few minutes for those of you who are either in the same situation or just wondering how you even navigate that to talk about how we do it. And really, it's super easy, not easy to implement, but simple in terms of what I do. And my basic principle that I say to my kids is that our rules are still our rules at our house. I don't get a say, however unfortunate it may be, in what goes on in the other home. But what happens here I am in charge of, and so yes, is that challenging for them? Absolutely. They have to go back and forth between two homes where there are different rules about social media or phone usage, or whether you take your phone to bed at night. Absolutely. And not even about that alone. There's so many other things where we might be different. But what's great is at least it keeps it consistent, and they know what they can expect from our home. And I think that's really important and better than me kind of shifting to match or oh, you can do that at dad's oh, maybe I should change this over here. So it's been really important for them that they at least know, at mom's house, this is how it looks. And I do my absolute best to just honor the other home and say, that's great if dad allows that and not be a stinker about that. But it doesn't mean I have to match that. The other thing is that if we ever have a consequence that's around the phone or social media or just screentime in general, I do communicate it to the other home. And I think that's really important. So that at least my ex-husband and his wife know, hey, here's something I had to do. And you are welcome to implement it as well, or I'll respect it if you don't, but I let them know what's happening. Because I don't want them to ever feel caught off guard or have my kids go over and rush and vent into complaining. Oh, my phone got taken away. And they're feeling really a little confused and maybe like the rug got pulled out from under them. Wow, I didn't know that. And it's really important to remember that really it's not -y ex husband anymore, that's my co-parent. And he deserves to know what's happening. And sometimes he'll even jump on board and say, okay, I'm going to do that at my house too, which is great. But even for people where it might be a little more contentious and less amiable, I still think it's important just to communicate, hey, here's a consequence I laid down around social media for right now, just so you know, every time the kids are at my house for the next two weeks, or whatever it is, just letting that parent in on it, I think is

really important. And so that's helped us that I don't just match the other home. That's not my goal. But I do communicate with the other home about everything screen.

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Kira Dorrian 21:33

So what do you do about the blend in your own home then? So you've got your bio kids, you've got your bonus kids. I'm assuming the bonus kids maybe had different rules around screens coming in. How did you guys handle that?

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Deana Thayer 21:44

Well, it was really similar. I had to tell my two bio kids that these are still mom's rules for you and they might look different than the ones for your brothers, especially now that we have my two stepsons living with us full time and their rules are different. Especially because they're over 18, too. So that looks really different. But they're old enough. And this is a tricky part when you get to the season where the kids are old enough to not just see that it's different and see a disparity, but then have an outcry about it. It's not fair, right? And I've always actually validated that and said, you know what, you're right. That isn't fair. But we're not about trying to do what's equitable. I'm really about trying to do what's best for you. And so these expectations that I already have in place are best for you, and changing them would actually be detrimental. So we're going to go ahead and stick with what we've got. I'm sorry that you get to see it looking different for somebody else, but we're gonna stick with what we have. So that's what we've done and it's at least kept animosity down. I don't think my kids always feel lovely about it. I'm sure that sometimes it's a little frustrating to see different freedoms given to different kids under your same roof. But at the same time, they still have a nice inherent respect for me, and I think it's kept it at least from being a battle for me to just say, this is still how we're doing it.

K

Kira Dorrian 23:00

It's funny because Dave and I just had a talk this past weekend about, like the fairness aspect. Because obviously we have twins. And we're really in this season of, that's not fair. Everything should be equal, everything should be fair. And he and I actually decided just this weekend, we were like, we need to actively seek out unfairness. And let them be in that, because life isn't fair. Like it'd be so cool if it was, but it's not. And especially for our two because they're same age, same season, same everything. They just are going to need to learn that it doesn't always look exactly the same. And I think the way you guys handle that is just right. You know, the, it's what's best for you. And that's what we keep trying to explain to ours too. Like, I know, that doesn't feel fair. But you're different kids with different needs and different brains and different personalities. And so I have to do

what's best for you. Not what's fair for all.



Deana Thayer 23:48

Yeah, and that's probably extra tricky, I would imagine with twins. We're the same age and we're at the same level on so many things, but it's not always going to be fair. And that is such a great life lesson because life is not going to always hand things out nice and equitably of course, that'd be fantastic. But that isn't reality.



Kira Dorrian 24:05

exactly. Okay, well, I hope that you found our discussion on screens and technology useful and that you got a few tips that maybe you can incorporate into your own home, whether you are a blended family or not. And I'm going to hand over to Deana because we're gonna end with a quote.



Deana Thayer 24:20

Yeah, you're gonna hear Kira and I talk a lot about delivery. And it's not just what you're saying, but how. And so I love this quote, it's by Josiah Gilbert Holland and it says calmness is the cradle of power. And while we're always going to discourage power struggles, power and strength are a positive thing. And our kids see that when we can deliver instructions calmly, that is actually strength. So be thinking about that this week. Calmness is the cradle of power. And as you're talking to your kids, especially about screens, which can be a heated issue, that it is important to remain calm with whatever ideas you want to put in place.



Kira Dorrian 24:58

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Future Focused Parenting 25:27

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