



Episode #128:

**Devorah Heitner on Helping Kids
Thrive in Their Digital World**

October 2, 2018

Debbie: Hi Devorah, welcome to the podcast.

Devorah: Hello.

Debbie: I'm really happy to be having this conversation about something that is just such a relevant part of our world for all parents, but I know this is something that comes up a lot in Facebook groups that I'm in and just parents really wanting more information and tools and just how to frame our thinking around screen time and you kind of wrote the book on it, so I'm really excited to talk with you about this today.

Devorah: Thank you.

Debbie: So your book, I just want to start with the title of your book which is *Screenwise*, which I just love that title and I just would love to hear from you what screenwise means you know, what is loaded into that term?

Devorah: Well, we want to think about wisdom in a sense of our lived experience and a lot of parents discount their wisdom of lived experience when they go to try to mentor their digital natives because they think, well I didn't grow up with Fortnite or Instagram or Snapchat, so therefore what do I know? And they're often discounting a lot of lived experience and a lot of good ideas that would be really helpful to their kids. They just need to get creative and think about that wisdom from a different venue. We all know what it's like to be left out of something. We all know what it's like to get distracted and blow a deadline or have to stay up later than we want to. So it's really important that we acknowledge that we have wisdom from our lived experience even though we didn't grow up with a tiny super computer in our hands.

Debbie: And you know, I actually would like to even take a step back. I'm curious to know how you came to be even doing this work and maybe in answering that you could tell us a little bit about your background and your expertise in all things screen.

Devorah: Sure. So I'm a media scholar. I have a PhD in Media Technology and Society, which believe it or not is a real thing you can study. And my early work in graduate school was about *Sesame Street* and the antiracist curriculum of *Sesame Street*. And then I ended up writing my dissertation and first book about a movement in 1970's television that was really about African American liberation struggles and television programs that came out of that. But I continued to be interested in children's television and I taught classes at the university level when in my first five or six years on the tenure track called *Kids' Media Culture* and other classes like that where I would go with my 20 year old college students out to places like American Girl, interview families and talk to them about purchasing decisions. We would interview third graders about their immediate ecology and their homes and who made the decisions and the rules about what they could and couldn't watch.

Devorah: And what I found is my students, who were then, this is sort of the tail end of millennials. So I was teaching college until 2012. So my 20 year old students were very concerned about what they heard third graders talking about. And so I thought that was really interesting. So we're seeing this micro split of kids only maybe 10 to 12 years younger than they were with completely different access. Because they had grown up with dialogue, but these kids were starting to grow up with smartphones in the home. They weren't growing up with social media. They had much more access to a lot more content from things like YouTube and seeing that discrepancy at the same time that I became a parent myself, my son was born in 2009, really opened my eyes to a gaping hole that parents and everyone else was very confused about what this would all mean for young people and especially the proliferation of things like smartphones. What does that actually mean for kids? So I started to research and speak on that topic and I ended up leaving my university job to just do this full time.

Debbie: Wow. And how long ago did you do your Ted Talk? Which by the way, listeners, I recommend checking it out. I thought it was fascinating. When did you do that?

Devorah: Thank you. That was about three or four years ago. It was before the books, definitely. I think it was 2015.

Debbie: Okay. And I can just imagine this is an area where things are constantly changing.

Devorah: Absolutely. I think the core message of that talk which is empathy, is the app and the focus on both how we as parents need to cultivate empathy for our kids' experience of growing up more connected and more public and how we in turn want to cultivate and support their empathy for their peers and for others in their digital interactions. I think that message is still very current, but yeah, even I'm sure some of the examples I would use now would be a little bit different and that's always true. I mean I, I speak every day on this topic practically and it's always a moving target and that's why I think we should focus more on the core experiences our kids have and the skills that they need to be successful rather than specific applications.

Debbie: Right. Yeah. I know. It seems like when something new comes along like a Snapchat or whatever, then that's like the panic and that's what I really like about your approach and I want to get into more in depth in terms of taking a step back and looking at giving our kids tools to interact with media in a way that is safe and that they can, they can kind of own because we can't be the one standing over their shoulders all the time when they're moving on and launching into life.

Devorah: Yeah, and especially as parents of kids who are quirky or neurodiverse. We're already thinking about self regulation and I think this is an area where in some ways we have a lot in common with parents of neurotypical kids where sitting on them to get them to do what you want isn't the thing that will keep them from playing Fortnite all night in college, right? They actually need to learn self regulation because there's not going to be someone guiding them forever and so we may have more, a bigger lift sometimes some of our kids teaching them,

teaching them how to self regulate around these issues. But truly all the parents I meet are finding that tech presents some challenges to their family or their kids.

Debbie: So let's talk about the challenges. I just think listeners are going to relate to many of these. So I'm curious to know what are the broad challenges, you know, you just mentioned self regulation as being something that really all parents are concerned about. What kind of challenges do you see generally speaking and then any that are really specific to parents raising differently wired kids?

Devorah: Sure. I mean relationships. It can be a challenge for all of us and for all kids growing up today and for adults who manage a lot of our relationships digitally, just figuring out, you know, what are the differences in disclosure versus discretion and social media versus a face to face conversation. Uh, what uh, what is the expectation of frequency of contact in a digital relationship? You know, if someone texts me, what's my obligation to text them back right away? Is it different with email? Is it different in different genres of social media? You know, is Snapchat different than Facebook? All of these things have a million unspoken rules and I've written a little bit about the kind of rules that kids come up with in their own communities. If you have a kid who has a hard time figuring out the unspoken social rules in verbal communication, they may do better with digital communication because it, it might, there might be a way to be more explicit or it may be just as challenging. So I think we all know kids who are not great at face to face communication, but maybe they're really great at video games. How can we as parents use the video game maybe to help our kids build some face to face social skills, whether it's inviting friends over to play the game, but insisting that they also unplug for some of the time. Or are there other ways that we can use their interests and their skills to bridge into areas of strength.

Debbie: Right. And let's, before we actually hit the record button here, we were talking a little bit about school and you know, not only am I living abroad, so you know, a lot of our listeners are in the US and are immersed in the US school system, but I'm also homeschooling. So talk to me about what is happening today that you're seeing in schools that's presenting challenges as well for parents with atypical kids.

Devorah: Absolutely. So what I'm seeing is that many school districts and independent schools are moving toward one to one. Some are deep pretty far down that road, five to 10 years of tablets in the classroom or kids bringing things like Chromebooks or iPads home with them as well as using them all day at school and there are many ways that that's going to support a kid with executive function challenges or a kid who has really slow and poor handwriting for example, where they're going to be able to maybe keyboard more effectively than they can take handwritten notes or they're going to be able to keep a digital calendar or even take pictures of homework on the board and maybe that's something that was always getting lost when you're dealing predominantly with paper. So that's lovely. On the other hand, you have a distraction that's with kids all day and we're seeing many neurotypical kids completely derailed by that distraction, especially when it's not used effectively.

Devorah: Like if you have teachers who maybe were handed the iPad at the beginning of the year, this is like the worst case scenario. It doesn't always happen this way. It can be much better than this, but worst case scenario handed the iPad at the beginning of the year and told we need to be one to one. Here you go and all your kids have it and you're just supposed to teach with that. And many teachers in that situation are not prepared maybe to use it effectively to teach students to collaborate or use it to have, you know, student driven learning and to sort of be the model that Ed tech people would say is that the teachers, the lead learner, right. And that everyone is exploring together. Well, if you're coming from a completely top down situation where you're used to just running everything from the front of the room and you're going to continue to run everything from the front of the room and say, give a lecture that's not super engaging and expect the students to listen, but you've also handed them iPads.

Well, good luck. You know, because I don't think many students are going to be listening and effectively learning from that and there are bigger questions, is that right? Is lecturing an effective way of teaching, you know, 21st century kids. Is this the best way to go at all? Right. All these questions are good and worth asking, but the fact is what we're doing is just adding a new tool to a culture that is top down learning, teaching from the front of the room, lecture, drill and kill isn't very effective. Giving kids a math app that's a game and they're really excited about it is great, but what about the kid who gets super revved and competitive by the math app and then can't focus on the next task or can't stop playing or you know, can't handle the social interaction when it's driven by competition because that triggers something in them.

Right? There's just a lot happening in schools that maybe some schools are less prepared for than others. I've seen schools be much more effective. Take years to do really excellent professional development. Give teachers a lot of power and autonomy about when they use tech and make sure that there's a culture of students knowing to put it away when it's not in use and then it's really put away on off not just sitting on their desks being potentially distracting. That's really ideal where you know, the tech is used to support a specific learning objective or a specific mode of collaboration or engagement and then when it's not in use, it's away. But that's not always what we see. What we see sometimes is, oh here everybody, we got a big grant, here's the Chromebooks, go for it. And you know, even if your kid doesn't have ADHD or isn't on the spectrum or doesn't have any other neurological diagnosis, they may be completely distracted. But for kids, you know, with different kinds of LD's or neurological differences who maybe are already struggling to keep it together during the school day and already looking for a way to tune out the noise or do something else, then that Chromebook or that iPad or that laptop could be very, very distracting. It could be a place to escape from school, not necessarily to enhance your engagement with what's going on around you.

Debbie: Wow. I'm really feeling overwhelmed listening to this because it seems like what do we do? It seems like we're in this situation, schools are in this situation and you know, professional development is such a big piece of this and I feel like there's already so much that teachers need support around just in terms of

recognizing and supporting differently wired kids in the classroom and now we have this added tool which probably makes even that work that much harder in many ways. So -

Devorah: Right. I mean it can support differentiation and that's what people will say. If you go in as a parent to your IEP meeting or in Canada, your SEP, and you know every country has their lingo for how we talk about it. If you, if you have a team at school that's working with your child to individuate their path or to support them with additional services, hopefully you can then talk to them about the role of tech there and what they're going to say is well, the tech is supporting differentiation, you know, which can also be gifted kids, right? So maybe your kid is getting harder math problems and the kid sitting next to them and that can be easier to do when it's an app versus a worksheet. The flip side is your gifted kid may have hacked the whole system and may be busy writing their novel when everyone else is doing math and maybe if you're like me, you're like, well maybe that's okay some of the time. Maybe I'm you know, but if they're going to get in trouble, if there's going to be a consequence, then maybe you don't want your kids spending the day hacking the system. Maybe you just want them to do the math problems. So it just depends.

Debbie: That's so funny. Yeah. Is hacking the system a good thing or a bad thing? And just so I'm clear, because this is new terminology for me, is this one to one that just means each child has their own device?

Devorah: Yes, and in many districts that also means it comes home, which also can present a whole new set of parenting challenges for families where even if you have a device at home, maybe you have a culture around it where kids have to ask permission to use it. When the school device comes home, some parents feel like, oh, it's a school device, so the school should make the rules, but in fact parents still need to step up and mentor their kids around that. Many parents may need to take that device away at night. Just because the school sent home an iPad doesn't mean that your kid needs 24/7 access to it.

Debbie: Oh my gosh, I, I. This conversation could go in so many directions that I feel this big responsibility to ask the right questions for my audience because your expertise is so vast and we could cover so many things. So I would love to just for a minute, go back to social lives and kids who, who may do better with social relationships on screens than they do in real time. What do you know about that in terms of the value of those relationships? This isn't a question I told you I was going to ask but I'm really curious, you know, do you see value in online relationships? Do you think that those kinds of connections can actually help our kids learn social and emotional skills?

Devorah: I think that they can, but I do think they need a lot of mentorship from adults and this is where it gets tricky. So if your child for example, has a strong interest, say they're really into Harry Potter and they joined some online Harry Potter communities and this may be a really good social outlet for them. I would also encourage them to see if there are any kid appropriate face-to-face meetups that come with that community. And that's, I would never send my kid to a face-to-face meet up from someone they met on the internet without me. Right.

Especially, I mean my son is nine, so for sure not in elementary school. But even as they get older we need to teach kids that yes, it's okay to connect with people with shared interests online and that can be a good thing, but we also have to have a level of skepticism and an important sense of like how much power does that person have in your life?

Devorah: Like if my child was getting into a romantic relationship with someone they met online, even if it was like maybe they did fall in love on a Harry Potter site and there are people married today who fell in love in situations like this and you know, many of us have partners that we met actually on the internet, so I don't want to demonize that, but I would be very cautious about someone getting really close to my kid. Especially if my kid was very isolated in their day to day life at school. Maybe if they didn't have a lot of friends in their own local community, I would just really want to be sure I knew what was going on. So that's where I always talk about mentoring over monitoring, but I would say with a kid with special needs, especially if you know you use the term differently wired, but especially if they seem like they're more vulnerable than a typical kid or if they're more trusting, maybe if they, if they have a history of maybe like having a lot of trust with people sometimes inappropriately.

Then I would say some monitoring might be appropriate and that's something I would disclose to them. I wouldn't go into covertly monitoring because there are very few cases where I feel like covertly monitoring makes sense, but I think letting your child know, hey, I have access to your communication and I'm not here to mess with, you know, what you're doing and I'm not here to not let you make friends online. But it's important that someone else is able to look at some of this in case there's ever a situation that worries us, and that's how I would frame it. And obviously I would, I would nuance that discussion a little differently depending on the age of the child and how much, how in depth those online relationships are. If your kid's just playing Minecraft or Roblox with other kids, you know, in a public server, I would just go with a very basic safety talk. If they're getting into more complex relationships or they're following someone on Youtube and commenting a lot on their channel and it's getting more personal, that's where I would really want to be clear that they're staying safe in terms of their privacy and their um, and their hearts, you know, you don't want your kid to lose that trust in the world because of someone trying to scam them or abuse them in some way.

Debbie: Yeah. I mean, you talk about this idea of being tech savvy and that's something I think a lot of us are, we believe our kids are, way more tech savvy than we are. Then there's also this wisdom that we as adults bring to the relationship that we don't necessarily need to be tech savvy to be able to share that. Can you talk more about the distinction between those two things?

Devorah: Absolutely. So our lived experience helps us know, wow, if I go down this road in this group text, it's going to lead to conflict and some difficult conversations. Or if I see a picture where I'm left out, I probably don't want to call the person and yell at them because that's, that's not a good way for me to continue the friendship. So it's important for us to bring in that knowledge of previous experiences and our knowledge of, oh, where is this gonna go. Whereas our kids may react much

more impulsively to experiences whether it's seeing a picture where they're left out or getting a text and feeling like they have to respond even if it's in the middle of the night. So we can really counsel them to be patient, to think through their response and also to let them think through how to repair if something goes wrong. If something goes awry in a conversation with someone else.

Debbie: And this is really where then that mentorship comes in and I love that you used that word. You know, I think of us as parents often as, and I refer to this with myself and Asher, you know, that a lot of what I do is coach him, you know, I see that as a big part of my role is to look for opportunities to help him strengthen areas of lagging skills and the executive functioning and all of those things. So can you talk more about how you see our role as parents is mentoring our kids?

Devorah: Absolutely. Some of it is just sharing our own experience. I mean if I run into something in my own Twitter or Facebook world that is uncomfortable or difficult, I might have a solution or maybe I didn't handle it well so I can share that with my kid or hopefully I did handle it really well and I could share that story, but just the ways we curate our experience day to day, the way we might see something that we don't like or makes us uncomfortable. We can share that with our kids so that they know, oh, that's a behavior that might make someone uncomfortable. It's really great for our kids to see us in the world and to know that we make mistakes too. And oh, I responded too hastily to that email and now I have a lot of cleanup to do in that relationship or that work situation and I wish I'd taken the time to think it through or even talk in person instead. So I think letting them know that we've been there and also letting them know that it is genuinely challenging that we recognize that. That's one of the great things about coaching is we're not saying, oh this is so easy, why don't you get it? We're saying yeah, this is really challenging and you know, baby steps.

Debbie: So it sounds like just talking out loud about our experience modeling our own kind of navigating tricky online situations or virtual relationships is important. But then I also just to talk about modeling a little more, you know, there are so many articles that I see being shared about, you know, what are our kids thinking when we're on our phones all the time. There was a video that went viral last year, I believe, trying to show the impact of a baby, you know, trying to get their parents attention that their parent was, you know, looking down at their phone the whole time. So this is shifting gears a little bit, but what are your thoughts on that in terms of how we can best model responsible screen behavior to support our kids learning the same things?

Devorah: As the most connected person in my family, I can say that it's really important for me to listen and even put down. I'm much more connected with my laptop than I am with my phone even even 10 years into smartphone ownership or however long it's been, I'm still much more conversant with a laptop and I will close it now when I talk to him and even put it away. Whereas years went by where I would just shut it to half mast and kind of look over it and I recognized finally that that wasn't good enough and that he was just way too smart for that. He knew I was kind of still dividing my attention in half. So for me closing it is really good, good and clear and also making it really an important rule. I mean these are things that many families do but not having devices at the table and we're in

a small space so sometimes the table is a workspace, but once it transforms into a meal space, we all put our devices away and I think that's really important.

Devorah: And then also just recognizing what are the habits of mind that we're cultivating. If every time we have a question about the world, we immediately google the answer, you know, we're not really letting curiosity or other kinds of research methods bubble to the top and we certainly all have search skills in the family to find the answer maybe on Google, but there may be other reasons to be patient and wait to find out the answer. Or we also don't want to undermine our own authority with our kid. Right? If you want your kid to ask you the hard questions about God or sex or death or Santa Claus or whatever it is, you might not want them googling it. Right? And so being really clear with kids about what the, what the big issues in life are and how maybe they should come to you first and not Alexa or Google.

Debbie: Oh, I love that. Well, let's talk about, you know, guidelines now. Again, jumping around, but you were talking about some of the habits you're trying to foster the rules that you have about no screens at the table, which I totally agree with. For so many differently wired kids, there is a strong draw to technology. Many of them are doing really cool work, you know, they're learning how to code or they're, you know, that's where their creativity comes out and it can be tricky. I think a lot of parents find themselves weighing the value of screen time and you know, if they're using it for good or to further their intellectual pursuits, is that different than just mindlessly watching YouTube or someone playing Minecraft or, I don't know. I'm just curious your thoughts on, maybe this is a two pronged question, whether or not you think all screen media is created equal and how we as parents can think about setting guidelines that respect our kids' interests and pursuits while also trying to find a balance there.

Devorah: Absolutely. Screen time is in some ways an obsolete term. I mean I think we all still are using it but I would love to get people beyond it because it doesn't, it's not really descriptive. If I use Google, the Google lady tells me how to get somewhere and then I use the Mark Bittman app to cook my dinner, you know, have I used up all my screen time and now I can't watch a Netflix? I mean is that even a useful way to think about how I use technology to get me through the day? Right. So I really like Howard Gardner's term 'app-enabled' versus 'app-dependent' and I think we all want to raise kids who sometimes are enabled by apps and you know, whether it's my kid making a Lego animation or another kid using speech to text or you know, kids who are coding and creating things and absolutely active and creative use is different than passive use.

They're both good, right? When, when we're passively reading a book, in some sense that's passive use of technology, right? We're just taking it in. We want our kids to read, but we also want them to create and write and, and film and code and, and to take the interest that they're supporting on YouTube like Minecraft and cooking into real life. Whereas you know, where maybe they then actually play the game or mentor other kids about how to play the game. Or maybe if your kid is obsessed with cooking shows, then they're actually going to learn to cook something. I mean, we want our kids also to be able to navigate in the world and ultimately survive on their own. Right. And so all of these things have to be

taken into account. Now what that looks like in a family with, you know, one or more kids is complicated because I think a lot of people, you know I speak at schools all the time and everyone's like "how many minutes" or "what age for this" or..., I mean people really want these concrete guidelines and we have to look at how it supports our kid.

Devorah: I mean for, for my family, we live in Chicago which has pretty horrendous weather in the winter. And so we absolutely have more screen time as a family in the winter. In the summer if my kid asks for a second show, I'll be like, go outside if it's super freezing cold, I might say, well do something different with a screen or do something different in the house. Like maybe make some videos or maybe want to do an interactive game, but maybe you can't watch another show if you've watched a show or two. Right. So we're trying to change it up. So I think that responding to the individual situation, responding to what's needed, reminding, my kid is very brain aware and very interested in how his brain works and so I'll remind, I can remind him, hey, remember when you don't get exercise, you don't sleep as well or you know, when you watch a couple of shows, it really detracts from your mood, remember?

And so logic doesn't always work and I'm not suggesting that parenting is a kind of democratic situation where my kid then makes the perfect decision because I've reminded him about how his brain works. But if you have a kid who's interested in that and wants to be at their optimal functioning, you can certainly try that strategy. A lot of kids also need a little come-down time from really intense interactions, especially video games. So if you think about it, if you were driving a race car, performing brain surgery and then you immediately had to be at a dinner party without even so much as a commute home, you might have a hard time switching gears. And that's a bit what it's like to ask your child to come to dinner from playing an intense video game. And so talking to kids about building in that transition time, whether it's breath work, a few jumps on a trampoline, a jog around the block, most kids will need some transition time to move from certain kinds of intense tech engagements into dinner and with the family where you're going to expect them to interact and make eye contact and other things.

Debbie: Oh that's good. And of course, you know, I want to ask you, so how much is too much? This is, this comes up all the time. I was just doing a virtual book club group for my book *Differently Wired* and we got down this road to talking about screen times. And that's the question. Like everyone wants to know do we need limits or is it okay? You know, some parents don't have limits. I'm just curious your professional opinion on that question.

Devorah: Some kids for sure. Well all kids probably need some limits. Some kids need a lot more active role in, you know, by us in placing those limits and whether you use some external thing, you know, some people use, you know, apps or products, you know, Circle or other things to like actually shut their kids down at a certain time or shut off the family wifi at a certain time. I would say using tech to control tech has limits as a strategy but it's certainly one way to do it and it can depersonalize it. And also I speak as a parent of one and I always want to be, have some humility. If I had seven I might go for that tech solution. You know, if I

had like a couple of sets of twins in my house or kids with more hacking ability, my kid's like a moderate level hacker, but he's not like a really intense hacker.

Devorah: Like that's not his thing. Like my kid is not spending hours trying to figure out our passwords. There are kids who will. If I had that kid, I might have a more sophisticated system. My system right now is that we have the password for everything and in order to use it he has to ask us to use it. We put in the password and then we're in, we have quite a lot of control that way. That's a very basic way of having control. It's not his device, it's my device, if I don't put the password in, it's a useless device for him. So that's, that's a very simple thing to do, but again, you know, every everybody's situation varies. But I would say if you're using tech to control tech, I would also make sure you're still having the conversations because the thing is even if you're using a filter or using tech to enforce your rules, that it's not giving you the information you want about your child's mood, about their sleep, about the quality of the interactions they're having with, you know a lot of parents will say, oh, should I let my child have this app?

Well, if your child doesn't have friends, then who are they on Snapchat with? I mean that's really the question, right? So I really look at what are the relationships that are going to be growing or enforced or reinforced in this space. If your child is going to play Minecraft, it's very different to set them up to play with their cousins than to let them play on a public server with just anyone. And you know, your seventh grader could be fine playing on a public server. But again, look at your child. Is this a kid who's made good decisions in the past about disclosure versus discretion? Is this a kid who might be kind of vulnerable? Um, is this a kid who's going to pick up language and not know how to not use it? Uh, in that case, you may not want them playing on a public server because they are going to learn some words. If they haven't learned them already, they're going to learn them playing games with kids on, on servers.

Debbie: Right. So you talked about, you know, that your son is one of the things you're doing is helping him remember, recognize that, oh, you know, I don't sleep as well when I don't get as much exercise or you know, just and that he's interested in that and Asher is similar in that way. I think that speaks to kind of what our bigger goals are for our kids in terms of the relationship we want to help them develop, the healthy relationship we want them to develop, with regards to phones and computers and screens in general. So just taking a big zoom out, what are we working towards here? What should our goals as parents be for our kids to successfully launch and have a healthy relationship with technology?

Devorah: That is a great question. I mean what we want is for kids to be able to pull back and look at, wow, I had a week where I spent a lot of time playing video games and it kind of wrecked my sleep. But wow, it was really fun that one time on the weekend where I did play a lot with my friends and I got really good and so maybe I need to mostly play on the weekends, like maybe school nights aren't so great for video games for me or you know, to make those kinds of conclusions and you know, you see kids who are 10 and they're ready to make those great decisions and then you meet young people who are 17 and they're really not making good decisions. So it's gonna vary over the course of somebody's life. But

I wish that I knew as much, I mean my son's very keyed into the relationship between exercise and his mood in a way that it took me to my late thirties to get to.

Devorah: So I think I'd like to think we helped him, but honestly he's just living in a world where there's more exercise literacy and that's great. And so if we can get there with screens, if I can say wow, my brain feels really fragmented because instead of turning off the wifi during part of my work day so I could just write, I spent the entire day being interrupted by email and I never turned it off. I'm going to see if I feel as fragmented tomorrow, if I take two hours after lunch when I don't have any calls on my calendar and just write with my email and social notifications turned off and see if I get more done, see if I feel more focused. And having those conversations again in front of our kids, letting them know that sometimes we have to take apps off our phone because they're a distraction.

Talking with them about, you know, all the research about distraction. It's really helpful because they can get there now. Again, that doesn't mean that they're never going to stay up all night doing something we wish they wouldn't. And so it's also about are do you have a kid who can then learn from those natural consequences because sometimes kids will do that once or twice and be kind of wrecked and say, okay, that really wasn't great. Other kids, it keeps happening and it really could be hard on their mental health or their grades and we might have to take sterner measures and say, okay, I'm going to just take this device at night, this isn't working.

Debbie: So for parents listening, I feel like, you know, this is a hard question to answer, but even just a couple of strategies like oh, or maybe kind of your top tip for parents, you know, I love what you just said. It seems like it's really just understanding and really getting to know who your child is, how they relate to technology and being very, very individualized. Like there's no one size fits all solution but you have kind of one strategy or word of advice for parents who are maybe feeling overwhelmed, maybe feel like their kids have developed habits that they wish they could put the brakes on and maybe they feel like that's not possible. Like how do they begin to develop this more positive mentorship role to support their child?

Devorah: Well, I would say try to play what they play at least a little. If your kid is really into something, have them teach it to you. Not that you would ever want to get in there to like one up your kid. I mean let them be better at Minecraft or Fortnite than you please, you know. Right. You have other things to do surely, but know enough about it to understand what it is. If you're curious, if you even want to let your kid dive into something like a lot of parents aren't sure about Fortnite and that's a valid question, right? It's a shooter game. It's, you know, it's not for my nine year old, right. Might be for your 15 year old. Just really depends, but you want to look at diving into some information about it, but as much as possible, stay curious about what your kids are into and think about what they're getting out of it.

Why would your kid love Instagram? Maybe it's all about the filters. If your six year old asked for Instagram, it's probably not because that's where her friends

are or because she wants to communicate with her friends. She probably saw pictures with a cool filter. Well, maybe you could let her play with Photoshop or one of the sort of cheap alternatives to Photoshop, right? Maybe she just wants to mess around with images. So the more we know about what our kids are into, the more we can actually find age appropriate ways to support those interests and staying curious is a really good idea. Observing the way our kids do talk to their friends about these things, making sure that our kids aren't getting feeling too much pressure to just have an app or a specific piece of technology, a specific kind of phone just because that's what the peers have. So that, I mean you're homeschooling, but certainly in school like having a visible technology is a big thing.

Devorah: Like walking around with a certain phone in many communities is a big deal. So it's very similar to having a certain kind of sneaker or jeans and in that way, but it's a much more functional piece of equipment, right. So we want to be really cautious about what, you know, getting your kid a phone is very different than getting them a pair of jeans. It opens up a lot more possibilities for them. So I feel like I'm, I'm not. I want to come back to what you initially said is stay curious and also don't be in a rush. If your kid asks you for a piece of tech or an app, you don't have to say yes or no right away. You can say, let me think about it and do your own research. Talk to other parents who have kids who are your kid's age or older and see what their experience is. You know, if, if you're contemplating a certain new step, you can ask parents of kids you know and say, well, I'm thinking of doing this. What, what's come up for you guys? What should I look out for? Do you regret it? So we have to make sure our kids don't expect that automatic green light right away and I think I'll think about it and giving, giving them a little, giving yourself a little time to research it is really helpful.

Debbie: Yeah. I found when I've used that or, my husband is a gamer, and but I always say I need to, your Dad needs to explore this and we need to discuss it and I'd say half the time he ends up losing interest and moving on anyway before we even get back to him. So I like taking the time and not rushing into something.

Devorah: Exactly. I think that's a good strategy for all of those reasons. And then you know, if your kid's still asking week upon week, well then maybe this is something that they're really interested in and that again, doesn't mean you have to say yes, but it's certainly an interesting sign. Just like, you know, if your kid wanted to take up a certain martial art or you know, was really interested in something kind of esoteric and you were about to spend a lot of money to help them pursue that or you know, a lot of time it'd be worth seeing, are they still interested in two weeks? Right. That, that's a fine strategy for many things with parenting

Debbie: For many things in life. Yeah.

Devorah: Yeah. I mean I asked myself that too, you know, am I still, when I, when I thought about writing *Screenwise*, I was like, well let me see if I still want to do this in a month, let me just write a bunch of things. And then months went by and I was writing more and more and I thought, yes, I do want to do this, but it's worth checking that before you commit to a big project as an adult.

- Debbie: That's so true. So true. Well you mentioned *Screenwise*, so can you tell us, um, where people can reach you and learn more about your work and about your book?
- Devorah: Absolutely. So *Screenwise* is available anywhere you can buy books and it's come out in a couple of other languages as well. So in the US, all the online retailers and bookstores should have it and same thing you know, elsewhere and your library too. And my website is raisingdigitalnatives.com and that's where I blog and where you can also sign up for my list and I send about once a month a new post out to people with new information. So I've been writing a lot this summer about YouTube and advising people on what to do if their kid wants to start a channel, how to manage the YouTube things kids watch and those are the kinds of things I like to share with parents or kind of big ideas about friendship and kids in the digital age and it's also a place where people sometimes send me questions that then lead to things that I write, which I really appreciate. So I'm always grateful if someone sends me a question that maybe sends me down the road of writing a new article or adding something to my talks.
- Debbie: Oh, that's great. Well, super interesting. Again, there's so many things we could talk about, but I appreciate all the wisdom that you shared today and I encourage listeners to definitely check out Devorah's website and her book *Screenwise*, which I read and really enjoyed. And thank you again for stopping by today. I really appreciate it.
- Devorah: Thank you. I love what you're doing with *Differently Wired* and with the podcast and I think there's just so much that's exciting and fun. So I guess that's the other thing I want to leave parents with is you could have a lot of fun making a YouTube cooking channel with your kid or you know, coding with your kids. So don't discount the fun factor.
- Debbie: Yes.
- Devorah: Thank you.
- Debbie: Thank you for that.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Raising Digital Natives](#) (Devorah's website)
- [Phonewise Boot Camp](#)
- [Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive \(and Survive\) in Their Digital World](#) by Dr. Devorah Heitner
- [Devorah's TEDx Talk. The Challenges of Raising a Digital Native](#)
- [Howard Gardner / Multiple Intelligences](#)