

# How to end the video game struggles with Ash Brandin

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## SUMMARY

*The podcast episode features a discussion with Ash Brandon, known as the Gamer Educator, who explores the complexities of video game use among children and its implications for parenting. The conversation addresses common concerns about video games, the nuances of research on their effects, and strategies for parents to manage screen time in a balanced way.*

- Moderate video game use (up to two hours per day) is generally linked to neutral or positive outcomes for children.*
- Many studies suggesting negative impacts of video games often have limitations, such as not accounting for confounding variables like socioeconomic status or trauma.*
- Parents should focus on understanding their child's individual reactions to gaming rather than relying solely on generalized research findings.*
- Gaming can provide intrinsic motivation and satisfy psychological needs, which can be leveraged to encourage engagement in other activities.*
- Modeling healthy screen time behavior for children is crucial, including discussing the purpose of screen use and setting boundaries.*
- Parents can use gaming as a tool for teaching self-regulation and emotional literacy, helping children draw parallels between gaming experiences and real-life challenges.*
- Open conversations about screen time can help children develop a balanced relationship with technology, recognizing it as one of many ways to fulfill their needs.*

[Music] hello and welcome to the your parenting Mojo podcast do you ever worry about the amount of time that your kids spend on video games do you wish that they would apply themselves to homework and to learning with the same Zeal that they do with video games do you find yourself rewarding them with video games and saying things like if you do your homework or tie to your room or do some

other task that you don't want to do then you can play video games recently I surveyed listeners to ask about what they wanted to hear more about on the show and one of them responded have you ever thought about interviewing the gamer educator and I'd actually been preparing for an episode on the benefits of video games even though the research on this is pretty skimpy and as I saw Ash's Instagram account I knew that we had to have them on the show so Ash

Brandon started researching video games and music education while completing their masters in music education in 2011 but found nearly no research on implementing gaming based strategies in a classroom let

alone in a music classroom they started attending gaming conferences and conventions hoping to find an educator advocating for the creation of gaming inspired classrooms but all they found were sales pitches by gamer companies they researched why we're so motivated to play games and how to harness that power in the classroom

and have developed two talks on This research they've also developed a following of 175,000 people on Instagram on the gamer educator account and the parent who suggested that we talk with Ash is also here today if you're a longtime listener you might recognize Nicole who we chatted with a few years ago about her experience in the parenting membership Nicole is the parent of two children aged eight and six and lives near Philadelphia so welcome Ash thanks so

much for being here it's great to see you thank you so much for having me and welcome Nicole thank you for suggesting this episode I'm excited to you and Ash at the same time awesome um and so Ash I wanted to just kind of start by saying that you completely messed up the plan that I had for this episode when I started thinking about it and researching it because I was planning to start out with an

acknowledgement that there is some evidence that spending time on video games isn't super amazing for kids because it's linked to aggression and then I found your topic uh your conversation with Adam Grant on the Ted podcast um and you kind of just discussed the state of the research and I learned things I didn't know and that this whole kind of Spate of research on the links between video games and aggressive behavior is way way way

muddier than I thought it was so can you start I don't want to spend all of our time there but can we start by just kind of uh giving parents the lay of the land on what that body of research says please the I would say the shortest way to really summarize it would be to say if you look at all of the research and The Meta analyses particularly the ones more in the last 10 years as opposed to

the you know 20 plus years ago um overwhelmingly there is pretty consistent finding that moderate use of video games is generally associated with neutral or positive outcomes and moderate use in most of these studies means on the conservative side up to two hours of play per day but can sometimes be even more than that and of course we

talking averages and all of that um but generally speaking that kind of moderate use is actually where we see the best outcomes um for the majority of players that's probably the simplest simplest way to look at it um and if we see some of the kind of outlying things trying to find some these negative associations uh a lot of those studies in one way or the other have a limitation or multiple

limitations um and there have often been researchers that have come back and and looked at that research and reanalyzed it and have found um an existing bias or other limitation that has impacted the results or the supposed significance of the results um and we however as you intimated already that tends to be what takes hold in our public Consciousness it's more the the negative than the neutral um and I think there's many

reasons for that but partially some of the studies that found these more supposed negative results were also some of the earlier ones so they had a lot of time to kind of take over because they were the they were like the only thing in that area there was a real dir of research so then there there when there's only one or two findings and they tend to be negative that kind of takes over and then it's very hard to

refute that um because if you find that it basically has not much uh impact that doesn't feel like it refutes negative impact right feels like we'd have to find something I don't know that's proving that it's going to make everyone become a neurosurgeon to actually counteract something negative um but overwhelmingly they're increasingly more and more findings particularly also with adolescents that look at things like overall well-being or pro-social

behavior and find that screen time of varying kinds in moderate use is going to have a neutral effect on their life or depending on what you're measuring a a positive outcome on some aspect of wellbeing okay okay great and so I just want to kind of double click into that a little bit and just get you know a little bit more detail on you know some of the things that people may have heard um and uh one of the things that was

most interesting to me was that a large number of the studies don't take into account potentially confounding variables can you tell us what some of those confounding variables might be that interact with children's propensity for aggression well first of all I think it's important that we make a distinction that um many of the studies that attempt to um cast gaming as having a potential negative impact children were not done on children like the kind of seminal study

that gets cited really really ubiquitously was one of the earliest ones which is why I think that happens and it's it from the year 2000 and it uh was done on college students so young adults but adults they were 18 to 22 and the the authors really summarized the findings as as basically saying see this is going to prove that video games are going to make kids aggressive but it Al it was not actually

using children um so I know that was not your question but I do want to just name it because we actually don't see that much research on children because doing this kind of research with children is actually really difficult to do because if it could have a negative impact it would be really really difficult to be doing that in an ethical way um but there are many many things that are just really really impos really difficult to

uh account for in this kind of work and I know you've probably found more than I have but you know things like um sometimes they can account for you know socioeconomic status or family makeup but there's just so many intricacies that we can't necessarily um account for or even know to screen for like um like divorce or trauma because even defining trauma um it would be difficult or witnessing violence like domestic violence or being

the victim of some sort of violence um all of those things are going to have a really big impact something that I've noticed is that you know there there will be often um research that will take into account like socioeconomic status or maybe or maybe the number of caregivers in the home you know things that can be objectively

measured in some way but it's really hard to then think about how you would correct for the impact of those things

okay I can I can correct for the impact of socioeconomic status but then what about the things that implies okay I have one carer over at home and a low socioeconomic status I'm more likely to live in an apartment so I'm less likely to have access to the outdoors I'm more likely to have you know um fewer maybe fewer toys or less adult presence um when we're looking at things like the impact of screen time on you know per

formance or the association of it with you doing you know less well in school or having certain delays um it's important to think about well yes I can I can take some of these things into account but the sort of watershed the domino effect of those things is you can't really accommodate that in um in a study so is that kind of what you had in mind yeah yeah it is and um I there are so

many other topics that I want to make sure that we have time for I guess the the thing that I just want to make sure parents understand is um that there kind of been these dueling meta analyses over the years where one set of researchers said yeah there's really bad impacts and another set of researchers said n kind of there isn't um and one thing I saw in that is even the ones who were saying there are really bad impacts the the

really bad impacts is like really tiny effect sizes so you know the actual outcomes the the probability of this outcome happening is not very high um and I think a quote that really stuck with me is violent video games could be arguably synonymous to peanut butter a perfectly harmless Indulgence for the vast majority but potentially harmful for a tiny minority so we're not saying that there's no risk at all here but more it seems to me as though the takeaway is

like know your child right um know know what's going on in your child's life what has gone on in your child's life um and and kind of Judge the risk according to your child rather than according to the risk for all potential children would you would you draw a similar conclusion yeah and I'm not sure if it's the same reer but one of the big researchers in this area who's done a lot of these met meta analyses his name

is Christopher Ferguson and he has a quote that's in the same vein particularly talking about acts of mass violence because anytime we're talking about aggression and video games it's like a pipeline to eventually talking about like Mass violent Behavior right because that's that's kind of what we're parenthetically afraid of um and his one of his many great points is essentially you know video games are essentially a ubiquitous Behavior like over 95% of especially adolescent populations

are in some way playing a video game at s with some amount of relative regular frequency um and that has been true for over 30 years we have statistics showing 97% of Youth playing video games from 1990 something I can't remember the exact here but you know this has been true for a long time this is not just true in the era of mobile gaming so if it were really true that we're going to see this really strong

Association and we have that many people doing it then wouldn't it make sense that we would be seeing this much much much more um and his quote is you know can a can a near Universal Behavior truly predict a rare one if we were to look at anything else that happened across 97% of the population it would feel ridiculous if we tried to say that that was the reason that a really really unlikely thing was happening and the

other thing of course is if that were really the case and it really were predictive of this really rare Behavior we would see that reflected in other places in the world like in America we get very myopic and think that this is like very insular but you know gaming and its ubiquity is a very worldwide thing but some of these behaviors that we're more worried about are not necessarily seen consistently um to reflect maybe the relationship people think might be there

with gaming makes sense thank you yeah but even if our kids aren't engaging in the kind of violent behavior that would actually show up in one of those research studies we still might see behavior that we don't like so for example I have two kids and they both respond completely differently to gaming um one becomes super disregulated and after playing he just can't function um and while he's playing he also is very

loud and you can tell he's stressed and that doesn't happen when he's watching TV or after TV and I'm just wondering why this happens and if different types of games brains differently um and also if it's possible that a young child isn't ready for certain types of games that gets too much but they might be ready in a few years so that was a few questions in one but um yeah and is there anything I can do to help him or

anyone else that experiencing this yeah um I think it this is I think one of the things that's very hard about trying to come from a place of feeling like informed with data and research and then eventually the rubber has to hit the road and then you're trying to see it in your own life and so you might hear even this conversation and think like okay so it's not doing some sort of like really detrimental harm but there's

like pretty quickly a but right because we see something in our own life that doesn't feel good right it you witness something and you're like okay but this isn't this isn't what I want to see so okay it's not super detrimental but then what's going on you know so and then almost feels in some ways like worse to me because it's like oh okay so you're actually telling me that it's fine but then uh oh like if I'm seeing this then

what does that mean you know I feel that way totally in certain things um I think it brings up some of those insecurities sometimes as a caregiver so something that you know all screens and all brains are different so how they're going to react to things is obviously going to be different um but you know gaming is a really really um in intense activity in terms of there are a lot of things that are happening when we're playing games that are really

engaging to our brain that are going to be different than watching TV which is a pretty passive activity but gaming and you know anything whether that's a tablet game or a console game anything like that with gaming we're we're doing a lot of other things not just in terms of oh I'm pressing buttons and I can't just zone out necessarily but the the way it's kind of satisfying our needs is also different so it's making us feel a lot of things

that the

TV is not necessarily so I'm not necessarily going to feel like skilled when I'm watching TV um I'm not necessarily going to feel depending on what I'm doing I'm not really going to feel that in control um but with gaming you know I might feel really accomplished or like I'm really working on something and I might feel like I have a ton of power over what I'm doing uh and if depending on the game I might

also feel like I'm you directly collaborating with other people and it's providing a lot of these what we call need satisfying um feelings at the same time and it's hard to then go from that to something that probably is doing that less Right video games are very good at satisfying those needs and they do it in a very dense way this is the work of riby and Ryan who've

done a lot of work in this area and they talk about the density of and an frequency of how games make us feel these things and it's not that other things don't make us feel those things but it's going to be less consistent and it's not going to happen as often so it's hard to go from something that's doing everything you kind of want and making you feel things you want to feel to something that's not going to do that

as often um and you mentioned the state of disregulation so we're doing all of that with our brain but probably our body is not moving as much and so there's this real disconnect between the input our brain is getting and what our body is getting and that can be really difficult particularly for kids um so when that's happening I invite people to just to get really curious to see what you might notice because you know in my household

we also have certain games that are just a much harder ask of my child basically right like they got harder ask of their brain um in terms of staying regulated and it sometimes helps to stay neutral in those moments so then notice okay what like is this every game they've ever that they've played or is it ones where they're competitive or is it this particular game um and when we get curious we can stay open without just

sort of spiraling and we can focus on the things within our control like okay they really like this game but it was like really hard yesterday what would it be like if we like shortened it by five minutes or if we did it at a different time of day we put in an opportunity for some you know regulatory inputs like beforehand or something um just to see if that makes any difference kind of getting curious about it because if our

goal is to have this be part of our kids lives and we want them to be able to balance with other things then we also want them to be aware of this too um not in a punitive way but just in a hey did you notice this like how' this feel today how did it feel yesterday oh it seems like maybe this game is better when you you know have less time or have Play Gone outside

beforehand or whatever so they're making those connections and realizing okay like I I can make these adjustments for myself um and the last thing I think can be helpful is if you know your child you probably know that they have some sort of tell that they're like trending toward a state of disregulation like you mentioned loud

my kid is also someone who gets loud like they're not angry they're just loud they it's their their voice volume is just like up and up and

up or they get kind of like Wiggly you know there's just more there's movement happening that doesn't seem helpful um and so when we notice those things you know we figure out like oh that was like a warning sign that I missed right because we deal with the Meltdown and then we're like oh I should have realized and put the pieces together so when you've figured out some of those early signals for your kid that's again a time that we can um maybe

build in some regulatory breaks uh and I have to preface all this and say like kids aren't going to like this like no kids in this state are not going to be like okay you know uh but we again the goal is is sustainability right the goal is is digitally literate kids the goal is kids who can be adults who can manage these things and we want that for food and we want that for leisure and we want

that for um you know managing difficult social moments and all of those things require teaching when it's happening and it's not always fun right so these moments aren't easy to do but I think that it's really helpful if we can and we won't always have that in us every opportunity right but if we can every once in a while great so if I hear my child trending that way we can stop and say like Hey we're we're I'm not we're

not mad there's nothing like we're going to keep playing but we're hitting pause so that we can and then do something that's going to kind of bring the the literal volume down but like the regulatory volume down of whatever works for your child you know some somersaults or some jumping jacks or a quick you know run around the block or whatever to just kind of try bring that down down and then come back to it and try again

and then again we can check in with them how's it feel now better or worse should we try something different next time um in my household we bought like a wobble board like those kind of like half semicircular uh boards that you can like balance on and my my child does not like when we suggest using this but what we've noticed is that if they do it they will continue to play and do it at the

same time so that they are like getting some of that regulation and that physical input but they're still able to do the game and we've noticed that it actually helps them improve their performance because their body has something to do and so then we've been even able to say like hey you're frustrated because you're losing this race and you're getting loud and kicking your legs we're going to pause get on the board you're going to end up doing

better anyway and then we can Circle back to that and find a way to make it into positive and more about like kind of skill building and skill recognition so all of that is a very long answer to your question but any anything we can do to find those things and just work on them little bits at a time um and if something's really not working for your family and you're like we can we absolutely cannot allow certain show or

game because it just 100% ends in total meltdown that's fine not everything is going to work for every family and it doesn't have to be forever this doesn't work for us right now we can try again you know when we think that this might be a better fit or that we're prepared for it whatever way does that give you some ideas Nicole for what you might try yes I really relate to Ash that because I feel like that kiddo you're

describing is very much the kiddo that we have at home um in terms of making those suggestions in the moment versus outside of the moment um yes definitely would like to try that and do you think there can be a positive correlation between distress tolerance and self-regulation by playing video games oh meaning like you're encountering it oh yeah um there there is a game um it's an app that actually

does this on purpose and um and has and they have done some studies with it and found that it has actually has positive results for our kids particularly kids with ADHD um to kind of En encounter and um overcome like frustration tolerance uh so I I mean I certainly think it doesn't hurt uh for kids to find some way of encountering that but with so much of the things that I talk about whether

it's this or you know the feelings of Freedom or creativity or or whatever that gaming provides anything that could be a potential positive I'm just aware of like the kind of refuting of that which is basically some version of but lots of things can do that right you well I could do that with many things they can get frustrated with a board game right it doesn't I don't need video games for that and I would say like no

you don't you absolutely don't but if this already feels like an inevitability in your child's life think about all the ways we can imbue it with skill right with with actual life skills instead of just thinking of it as a completely vacuous activity because if they're wanting to spend more and more of their time in gaming and digital worlds what we don't want is we don't want them to think that

that gaming is the only way they can feel certain things or it's the only way that they can be creative or it's the only way that they can have say over their work their lives like we we don't want that because if that's the only place they think they can get that that's the only place they're going to turn for it so when we get concerned about like preoccupation we want to make sure that we're not

funneling them toward that because we want them to know that there's lots of ways they can feel these things or overcome these things and part of what helps with that in my opinion is being very neutral about it because if I if I just think it's a complete waste of time and I'm writing it off I'm probably not finding these ways of using it to have conversations about skill or skill building and thus it kind of creates

this gap between like oh all these worthwhile things quotes around that obviously um and then like video games are over on the side and it's this thing kids really like we're kind of like ignoring them and that just creates this big this discrepancy so yeah I think absolutely and we can do that in lots of ways we can if they're having difficulties in the game we can draw comparisons to the real world if they're having difficulties in the real world we

can draw comparisons to the game right like the kid who's struggling to learn a new skill in some sport or discipline we can draw comparisons to how they overcome and deal with things they're trying to learn and do in a video game and what they do and how they get over that um because it is so it is so the same skill right it's not done in the same way but it's still the same idea I

have to try something many times I have to overcome disappointment and frustration um I have to take feedback like all of those those are all happening regardless of the medium so I think that can be really helpful and it also shows our kids that we are paying attention and that even if we don't play their games with them or we don't really like them um that we can still see their their value um to our kids and the value

that they can potentially give our kids for other things I think that can be really powerful yeah thank you um I also saw some research on Cooperative games and uh that they can have a real benefit on sort of the self-regulation aspect and uh sort of a lower levels of psychological uh distress like you know depression stress that kind of thing was associated with playing those games as well um so that that was interesting that it can vary based on the type of

game that's played and on who you're playing it with as well you know in our house we try to be value neutral about screens and we want them to have a healthy relationship with technology because it will be part of their lives forever um because as we discussed before it's so disregulated to them I'm just wondering how you help your kids make that distinction and how do you talk about it with them yeah I draw a lot of

comparisons to food because I think there's been a real big um shift and how a lot of caregivers are trying to talk about food uh in the you know compared to maybe how we were raised talking about food this idea of good food and bad food and junk food and all of that and um kind of more division of responsibility and and more intuitive ways of eating even for kids and it can be hard to feel

like you're being neutral about something when there's all when there's still some sort of hierarchy of it at some point right like okay yes I'm not going to put value on Cheetos versus apples but like I I eventually I would not like my child to only eat Cheetos right um and I think that's sometimes the fear of like oh if I treat them as neutral then I am essentially like treating any condition of it as neutral and I don't think those are

necessarily true like I think that being neutral about the value of something is not necessarily the same as like condoning any any boundary or lack of boundary with it like I'm not I'm neutral about um like my child my child's currently in the like I want to read independently phase which is fantastic I'm very glad to be at this part of life happy to be here not complaining and we've been doing a lot of like standing and waiting

in line like we were at amusement parks and last year it was like oh no like how do we fill 30 minutes right and this year my kid is like can I read like like okay great read right so people are seeing my kid on a phone a lot right now I'm like no they're reading a book like I'm not going to complain about this but my my kid has been reading a lot like yesterday but between like travel and

standing in line my kid probably read for like two and a half hours yesterday um and there are times where my kid would just sit in their room and read like undisturbed and not moving for like a long time and be that neutral and validity of different kinds of activities kind of works in reverse because sometimes I'm like if you were sitting and playing video games for an hour I'd be like we need to do something else you know but

if they s and read a book book we're like Oh yay you know but that but sometimes that can still lead to some of those same things of like yeah if I sat and read for an hour and I didn't move and didn't do anything else like yeah eventually I'm gonna need to get up like I am gonna get kind of grumpy and stiff so um sorry I've lost the thread here but the being that neutrality doesn't

have to be a lack of and boundaries around it I can still have neutrality and still have boundaries much like the Cheetos can be a perfectly neutral food compared to the apples but I might you know serve them less or have few fewer on a plate they can still have more but I'm not you know serving them in the same kind of way and you know my kid can probably read for a couple hours a day they're not going to be able to be

on screens for the same amount of time that I would be okay with them reading throughout the day for many reasons um but I don't need to necessarily frame it as like well that's because reading's better for you right that's not necessarily helpful to them all I'm doing then is just inviting us to compare the two things which is not going to help anybody Le least of all me right um but just talking about like hey the we've you know whatever amount

you decide is an amount that works for you like oh we've we've done that already today like we've reached our Max screen time today and now we can do XYZ other things and if you have a kid that is old enough you think to have those conversations I mean you can frame it however you you can approach it however you'd like but I think being coming from a place of we want to make sure that this is one

part of our lives that we're doing other things and um even asking them of like how would you know that this is the right amount or the wrong amount like what would feel like what how would you think what would hap what would happen to make you think like oh this is not good actually like um or what do you think I'm noticing that makes me think that or here are the things I want to make sure you have in your life and we

want to make sure all of those things happen um maybe it's giving them a little bit more of control of like okay it's Saturday and we want to make sure these General categories of thing happen today uh when would you like these things to happen how would you like your day to look um so they're thinking about kind of planning all those things out but keeping it to account the fact that these things always have to coexist with

other things so and we can we can be neutral and about the value we can still be neutral about boundaries and those things can all I think they can coexist I really like how you share the responsibility when it comes to setting limits around screens um we try and do that in our house too but I find that it's really hard because of all the disre potion that is happening and the impact that that has on our family so we

have definitely set up our own parental limits because of the impact um because we have given them the opportunity to try and self-regulate and discussed with them and it hasn't really happened yet and I'm wondering you know in maybe more detail how you handle limits around gaming um I I have said for a long time that I think that you know the the right amount for a family is like an amount that's working for everyone in a family

I think that's really important because sometimes adults will be like well if I let them gain that's all they're going to want to do and I say like yes and we don't have to say yes to that uh and I think we hope that self-regulation is an eventual place they get because you know they're going to be an adults living independently yes we do want that um and I draw my mental comparison is to something like riding a bike which is I

think not something that people would think of as an immediate comparison um but my emphasis in that comparison is that is basically skill uh this is a skill based thing being able to regulate is a skill and it's a complex set of skills uh that we want our kids to have and being able to have that skill independently is something that takes um practice and time but also there's like

there's sort of a shift of the onus of the responsibility so uh you know thinking even something about like riding a bike you teach your child to ride a bike uh you know your child someone on the bike but the majority of the responsibility is still technically on you you know you're holding the seat or you're guiding them and you're the one making sure that they're staying safe and we probably have them with maybe

training wheels and also you know elbow pads and like they're very very protected and then we move slowly right toward this eventual goal of them riding independently you know with a helmet on and going and exploring and all those little steps you can think of of the you know kind of Montage of getting from point A to point B it would take a long time less time than something like this with video games but still it would take a

long time and the the responsibility is Shifting over to them right they're because they're gaining the ability to have to have that responsibility um you know they're they are gaining the skill of balancing so then they don't need us to you know keep them balanced anymore that's a skill so uh if our goal is eventually self-regulation then um my question to

myself would be what ways am I giving them to practice this spec like a specific skill within this in a way I think they can currently handle right so if I'm like okay I'll let them you know just be in control of turning it off but they still need to be turning it off like within my parameters right if they can have an hour and a day I'm like okay it'll be their job to to keep track of

the time well if they like completely blow past that and they like completely unaware and then were arguing because they didn't keep track of time to me that would be a sign of like oh that was too much like we went too far um and let's back up because no if it's way past their ability right no amount of doing that and failing is going to magically just make them be able to do it right it's a skill so okay it would

be like if I let go of the back of the seat and they fall over if I immediately I'm like oh well let's do that again it's it's probably not gonna it's not gonna happen differently right and they're not going to magically be able to balance by me allowing them to fall over 10 times in a row instead we would change what we're doing and I'm not trying to imply that's what you're doing here I'm speaking just generally but if

it instead it were like Okay so I said that you could have it up to an hour and you blew past it today um today uh it's it's an hour and like we'll have a timer to help you monitor how long it's been and you can let me know when the timer goes off right or um maybe you know you can decide when this time Falls throughout the day but you're

going to use your timer I I really appreciate that bike analogy Ash actually and I am seeing in a new light some of the ways that we have been using those tools without even sort of cognitively realizing what we were doing and Nicole I know You' you've been around my work for a long time I'm wondering have you ever done an unlimited screen time experiment I know it's been talked about in our communities a lot um per your suggestion I have okay

because I how did it go I wanted to see as I also did know how yours went but yes that probably and you can speak to that but not it was not how ours went because first and then you can say how yours went so so we did this at the beginning pandemic when my daughter was like five and a half she was wanting always more time on screens more time on screens and we said okay well let's see

if you can do this right let's see if you can regulate this for yourself and find a balance between spending time on screens and doing other things and so um I picked an amount of time I picked a month because to me that felt like for a five and a half yearold it was an amount of time that they were not going to be like okay we're almost at the end and I'm G to get every last moment of screen

time I can out of this because it's going to come to an end I want it to feel really expansive to her um and it was the I got more work done that month than I ever have in my life before and towards the end of the month we're sitting next to each other on the bed and I'm working and she's on screens and I said you know how are you doing do you want to take a break and and she her

eyes stuck to the screen and she's trying to turn her head to me without taking her eyes off the screen she's like I want to stop but I can't and at that point it is Crystal Clear we are at the me holding the seat stage of this journey we are nowhere close to the her riding by the by herself stage so Nicole now I'm curious as to how your experiment went I admire you for taking a full

month to do that um I think ours probably lasted about a week and a half and I printed out a calendar so that we could take some data because I thought from day to day we wouldn't remember how we were feeling at the end of screens when we decided to come off of them um and just so we could have some sort of like happy face sad face Maybe neutral face and because all of those days ended

in a lot of meltdowns we decided to end that a bit earlier than you and decide that we are on the we probably shouldn't even be on a bike right now let's stick with walking or or scooting and then I felt very confident about the limits that I was sitting in that moment yes yes and that that to me is what's really helpful right and and you got to the same place I did coming out of it which is that okay now now I

know that limits are required that she cannot do this by herself and then we repeated the experiment again like annual intervals she would ask to do it again and she's just turned 10 and we last did this like six months ago and she's now pretty much managing it for herself so we last did a two two um two we experiment around Christmas and um and yeah she she did it she she did it for up to about the limit

that we've been doing and then she would stop and and go and do something else and it's not perfect and we do still remind her and you know how much have you done today what's your plan for the rest of kind of thing so we're still kind of like in the same vicinity as the bike she's not completely you know going off on a 20 mile ride by herself yet but but she is riding she's riding um and so Ash I

guess I'm I'm curious have you ever tried anything like that like how does that fit with your the way that you approach uh limits on on gaming with your child well so I haven't Trad it personally especially during the year like during the school year I I'm am like self like there's a there again it's like how do we make this work for everyone in the family and right now I'm like no I I needed at a certain time

like for me you know um and I also need that time to be time that won't be too uh demanding of my attention in case it's you know just too long and all of a sudden I need to really switch on to being very present um currently I'm like no I kind of need like that dedicated chunk of time to make sure dinner's done and things are kind of accounted for at the end of the day um and right now like

that I need that like consistently enough that I don't I don't want to bring in a variable that might mess with that but on weekend days I could see that maybe happening my kid would probably be very happy to try this um but I I I do think it's interesting because essentially you know it's all different ways of trying to accomplish the same thing right and you're you're both talking about how you know kids are going to reach that at different places

and part of how we determine whether or not they've reached It Is by is by letting go right is by seeing if they can balance on their own and that is hard right and I think it's great that both of you I think that taking the data is so important even in just a little you know thumbs up or thumbs down um just so you have something to look back on and I think also giving it time for

both both of you spoke to that I think is so important because I think we would hope that oh if I do the unlimited thing maybe that'll just like take care of everything maybe it'll just be the M the switch p flip and it'll be great um and it might for a couple of days because as you mentioned Jen they just be happy to be able to have it as much as they want and probably exceed way more than we would

like but they'd be thrilled and then we're like okay maybe this is going to work after all um giving it time for things to adjust I think is also really important and sometimes you do that and I think what's interesting is you both kind of came to the same conclusion of like we're not ready for this but you kind of came to it from two different places right because from the outside Jenna it sounds like actually people

would have maybe looked at your daughter and thought this is working fine right because you were getting work done she was quiet but you still knew like okay you could still tell she can't actually stop on her own it's just the way that's manifesting is different than Nicole you coming to the same conclusion but you're just seeing it in two different ways but I think that's really interesting that it it technically didn't work and worked in the same you know kind of outcome but

GNA see it in different ways because kids are different because kids in their brains are different um and sometimes you get a kid who might have the introspection to be like I want stop but I can't and sometimes you're going to have a kid who can't who will not have that introspection because they probably don't actually want to stop um and they would like to keep going and it's not serving them well and I think all of

that like that's not to me that's not failure to me it's just in more information and then is another way of talking to our kids about like what have we learned right like okay we put we put a thumbs down or a frowny face but like the why you know did it feel good we've had the conversations like that similarly in my household lately of just like hey days that you say that your mood is like this we're also noticing

this you know is there any relationship here just to again start that skill building of getting them aware of it because then hopefully we can transfer some of that responsibility from us to them um like you said Jen of okay what's your plan for the day how is this going to fit in your day that's definitely a thing I would like to be able to say to my pre-teen or early teenager what's your plan for the

day um and part of how to get there is having these opportunities to kind of figure out what they can and cannot currently manage on their own yeah yeah we definitely didn't look at it as success or failure it was all success it was just what information did it give us for sure Ash you'd that using screen time is important to you as much as it is important to your child and I'm wondering if you ever have to deal with

guilt as a parent for using screens as a break or time for you to get things done I think that guilt and that potential feeling of Shame is a huge reason why we even have these conversations about the value of screens at all um you know we mentioned data at the beginning the research and I think that's absolutely a part of it but I honestly think that the data and research part is frankly

kind of a distraction because even if you show people like all of the data in the world and you can say like look at all of these meta analyses and they refute all of this supposed negative outcome people will still come back to like but it's still not good right and I notice Adam Grant did that in your conversation yeah he was like yeah all the meta analyses but I'm still not going to let my kids play violent video games

yeah right right I heard that too i' I've re listened to that since and thought like yeah that is interesting um but yes uh we still find we all have some discomfort threshold somewhere but I think for many parents they still be like but it's still but they still shouldn't be doing it and I think right underneath that is if we really try to interrogate the why I think it's because we don't always value Leisure that's

just Leisure but I also think that as parents and caregivers we see this extreme responsibility that we take very very seriously which I think is a good thing that we take it seriously but we we do want to do right by our kids we don't want to screw up we don't want to do the wrong thing and if we allow them to do something that is you know quote unquote wasteful that could be filling in for a

quote unquote better use of their time more productive could be giving them a skill for their future self right if if we fill that in with something wasteful like screens or gaming then I'm failing them as a parent right because I'm not providing absolutely everything I could be providing and I think that that is there's you can't win like there's no there's no way you can win when that's how you're framing it um but I like to

flip it and say you know screen should benefit everybody in a family because if an adult is using a screen to help meet the needs of their family themselves right that is going to benefit your child if screens are allowing me to make dinner which is true in my household that's often what I use it for it's not just allowing me to make dinner right it's allowing me to make a meal I probably wouldn't be able to make

otherwise it's allowing me to also you know do all the other things that happen when one makes dinner you know packing lunches or you know going through the fridge or wiping the counter right it's allowing me to do some household labor and household tasks it's sometimes allowing me at time to like decompress from my own day because otherwise I wouldn't have a chance so my kids on screens I'm putting in an airpod and I'm listening to a podcast so I can like

have a moment to myself um so that when I've made dinner and now we're going to have a meal I'm more regulated my kid might be more regulated like they've gotten a break right they've been at school all day long being told what to do all day long they also probably want a break and that break doesn't have to be a screen right it could be something else but if it is a screen you know they're having their need met I'm having

my need met and then we can sit down at the table and have a more pleasant conversation and I can be more present and we can all connect that's benefiting my kid my kid's getting a better parent because they watch TV for half an hour that's a net positive to me and I think when we try to remove the adult from the conversation frankly I think that that actually just compounds the problem because it implies that adults should

not be considering themselves and I I don't think that's true should we Center ourselves no that's not what I'm saying but we can consider ourselves because very often screens are filling in for a gap that we should not have to be filling right we we don't have two present caregivers we don't have affordable child care we don't have outdoor access we don't have all these other things we might need to meet our needs we Face a lot of systemic

inequalities particularly marginalized people and something has to fill in and so if a screen's filling in I don't think it's good that we have a gap I would much rather we not have them but I would much rather that be filled with something that keeps a child safe that an adult can potentially Monitor and also pay attention to and use as a way to connect with their child even if it's at the dinner table conversation I'd

much rather that's happening than a parent getting so disregulated that they can't you know maintain composure for their kid or a child doing something that could be unsafe screens are filling in those gaps that's going to happen so we can allow that to happen in a way that's going to benefit all of us because if it's not benefiting all of us including us like if they're getting so disregulated that I can't make dinner then that's not working for us anymore

and then that's an invitation to get back into the conversation right we're not just going to say well I have to let them have screen time because I have to make dinner right but I don't have to allow screen time that's going to make it impossible for me to make dinner right if I can't do that then we can have that same skill based conversation th I this is not a game that's available right now it needs a lot of my attention

I have to make dinner and I cannot be over here so today you can play X or Y and if it's really important to you that you be able to play Z here the things that I would need to be able to see so that we can do that and we can practice that on another day so it's all so much inner weaving of those conversations the skill and the value and the way we look at it um so that hopefully it's

benefiting us and our kids giving them some skill yeah and I just want to say I could imagine parents listening to this thinking okay yeah making dinner that's me being productive I can imagine not feeling guilty about that but I pretty often s was a toddler would stick her in front of a screen so I could take a nap knowing that I would be a better parent at the end of that half hour in bed that I would be if I didn't get that

and so I just also want to give parents permission that this does not have to be productive work that you are doing while the kid is on screens right you also have permission to take care of yourself as well I'm so glad you brought that up because yes yes we talk about how like everyone deserves Leisure and it's okay if kids are doing this just for leisure and your right so often then the conversation is like but you're using

their Leisure for productivity but you're right it can be both yeah a friend of mine when I told um I was going to be here today asked me um if you had any thoughts on the way that intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation shows up in games because when we externally reward we know that intrinsic motivation to possibly do other things decrease is um do you see that coming up with gaming um and how

might we address that so that gaming is useful and doesn't diminish that intrinsic motivation oh for other things oh interesting okay um oh that's that's an interesting way of phrasing that question uh okay so the way I would probably answer that question and I'll I'll like wrap back around but I think that's interesting because that kind of assumes that that it's like a pie you know that

there's like a finite amount of intrinsic motivation and that if we like if we give too much to games that can't go somewhere else and and there I think there is an amount that's true to that I mentioned earlier or a different part of the conversation I mentioned that um you know games can easily provide what we call what is called you know the these satisfying these needs these basic psychological needs this is self-determination Theory from desie and

Ryan talking about what leads to intrinsic motivation and they say that it's you know feeling these needs getting satisfied of competence autonomy and relatedness and Ryan then went on to write a whole book about how this shows up with gaming with another researcher and has talked about how gaming provides these things in many many ways and that not a bad thing right any activity that provides those things makes us feel intrinsically motivated which means we're doing it because we genuinely

enjoy it uh not because we have to but because we love it and we love intrinsic motivation I should say like in education and we love it as adults if we saw our kids doing something like soccer or knitting or learning the cello but as soon as they have that intrinsic motivation for something like video games now the video game is addicting them and I just think it's so interesting how we frame that because actually psychologically no it's the

same thing it's satisfying their needs and it's doing so it's doing so in a way that tends to be more dense than a analog activity um because the feedback is really consistent and frequent and so it's a it's a dense activity of satisfying those needs um but that's it's not fighting against other activities and I think the more that we are willing to acknowledge that video

games can satisfy those needs we actually can help our kids find other things to satisfy those needs it's sort of ironic the more that we kind of resent the fact that video games might be satisfying that the less likely we are to point out the needs that it's satisfying to our kids because that would feel like we're condoning it right if I say oh wow you did so much you're accomplished then I feel like I'm praising the game so if I think games

are a waste I'm not going to do that well the irony is then I'm probably not going to point out to my kid the other things they could be doing to also make them feel that way and so then my kid is going to think if I want to feel good then I should play games and that's absolutely the opposite of what we want so um we don't want kids to think the only way I can feel these things is

through playing a game we wouldn't want that them to think that about anything right but we don't want that for many reasons one of which is it is such a dense experience that it is easy for there to become this discrepancy between gaming and other parts of their lives because the the learning curve is going to be different so uh it might not feel the same and that's okay but if we notice that they're you know working

really really really hard at a task in a game and like you mentioned earlier with like like Risk tolerance or frustration tolerance if we notice then that they are trying a little bit in a craft kit and then they're abandoning it we can try to make that same comparison and say I know you can do this I've seen you not give up you don't give up when you're playing you know Mario Odyssey or whatever uh and make that comparison and

and try to kind of get them into to think of it in the same way what can we do differently this time what are we going to try this time so that when they hopefully feel some success in an analog activity we can praise it the same way we would with any other skill and so then we're showing them oh I can feel this in other parts of my life will it feel the same no it probably will not

feel the same um but lots of things we do make us feel those things in different ways so I think the more that we can be able to view games again neutrally we're more likely to see these actual kind of skills that they might be getting and then we can draw those comparisons to other things to help them realize that actually this is just one part of their lives it's not the only thing that's going to help them feel

this way they might like it more than other things that's okay you know I like certain ways of feeling and getting that feeling than others that's okay uh but it's not the only one because when it's the only one then it's the only thing they can turn to if that's the only way they can feel related to other people or in control then they're always going to want to turn to that it's like the lowest hanging fruit and then that's

when we can you know see their attention kind of get focused myopically on one thing and feel like they're getting preoccupied but when we can draw those comparisons to other things then they can find other ways of of Meeting those needs and having variety Nicole I'm also wondering I I see a lot of parents uh who have this idea that extrinsic motivation means rewards and so intrinsic motivations means motivation means not rewards and so I think it comes up a lot in like

household chores right like I don't want to reward you for doing chores I want you to be intrinsically motivated to do chores but that's kind of not what intrinsic motivation means right Ash alluded to this intrinsic intrinsically motivated means I'm doing it for the love of doing it some of us do household chores for that reason but not many of us and so just because we're in this kind of reward-based environment within a game doesn't necessarily mean you're a

kid if you you know cut that off your kid is suddenly going to want to do chores um and I would say the other piece of uh of evidence that's relevant to that is uh is related to food interesting and we've talked about sort of the correlation between food and video games is that when you uh make a food sort of a gate make vegetables a Gateway food for getting dessert the kid ends up hating vegetables more and

liking dessert more and so if we bring that to video games right if you're using video games as a reward for chores they're probably going to end up disliking the chore more and liking the video game more so um so I think that that those are two uh really relevant pieces of the uh the ways that we can approach intrinsic motivation and the research on intrinsic motivation so I hope the answers your your friend's question um should we close with one I

know you we have so many more questions that we're not going to get time to um to cover do you want to close with one last burning question I guess it would be how do you model your own gaming and screen time around your family I I think that's I'm I'm so glad that we're getting to touch on that one I think that that is like the

secret sauce that people forget is so so powerful I

see a lot of calls lately for like adults to never be on their phones around their kids and I have kind of pushed back against that um for many reasons but and one of them being um that you know if if we're told that we can't use screen time to meet our needs then okay if our kid is playing independently in some other way now I can't meet my needs if I need to you know use my phone for

any one of hundreds of like domestic labor tasks or invisible labor that might be needing to get done and that just does not make sense to me um you know I don't think that 30 years ago if an adult were sitting on a bench at a park reading a novel I don't think that people would have been judging them for that but we see an adult on a phone while our kid is at the park and we're

like oh they just can't they don't care at all it's like we have no idea they might actually be reading a book right or they could be doing Myriad things to keep their household afloat because they don't have time to do it otherwise and their child is safe and having fun and independently playing and also not on a screen in that given moment which is supposed to be what we want right and um but I think it's so interesting that

there's this call of like just never be on your phone because essentially what that is is abstinence education right we're abstaining from showing them any model of healthy technology balance in an adult's life because like in my household for example if my kid didn't see me on my phone they would they would quite literally like never see me on technology because their screen time and my screen time don't overlap like I'm not watching TV with them so if they

didn't see me interacting with my phone they would think that I just don't use technology like they know I watch TV at night time but they don't really see it so I think it's really really powerful for us to name many things with our own technology use I think naming the purpose of why you're using it is really important particularly because a kid see the device and they see fun right we see a phone and we see honestly not very

much fun right we see email and grocery list and Banking and whatever right I think naming the purpose is really really important um I'm not advocating for like ignoring my child when we're trying to be connected right and there are moments where my child wants my attention or needs my attention and something is urgent um right now my spouse and I are often not in the same place physically at the same time so there's a lot of me being like I have to

text other parent right now like I have to do this I'm going to do this I'm going to put my phone away and then I will continue this conversation with you of just naming what I'm doing and and for what purpose and why like just giving them that little bit of information just so they know my adults aren't just like ignoring me right and also naming that I'm doing this for a given purpose and I'm doing this so our

household continues to run or whatever um and they can kind of see the work that's happening there the other

thing I think is so important to model with technology use is if we want our kids to be able to you know we talk about self-regulating if we want to be able to self-regulate they have to see us self-regulate and self-regulating is not abstaining right it's not just not doing it so I have when I have had the time to

you know be on a device alongside my child like they're playing games sometimes I will sit down and play games next to them or I'll be on my phone next to them or I'll use my computer next to them and I will just name whatever I am doing mentally might be executive function of like oh I need to get up in five minutes to to put dinner on the table um I'm going to finish up this

email and then I'm going to get up like I've just noticed the time I'm reminding myself I need to get up in five minutes just naming that out loud so that they don't think that I just magically get up and I'm controlled you know in some way um and same thing with the difficult emotions that can come up from screens or using screens to to um cope with a difficult emotion right one or the other so there was some day where I was sad

for some reason like just in a in a funk and I said to my kid like I just I am sad I don't feel great today I kind of want to distract myself so I'm gonna play some Zelda they were like resting in their room um and I did like half an hour and then I said you know I I feel a little better I still feel sad like this did not fix my problem and part of me

wants to keep playing but I know that we need to go about our lives and this didn't seem to help that much so I don't think doing it more is gonna help either so I'm gonna pause and I want to go take a walk will you ride your bike with me right so there's so much there we can model variance we can model emotional regulation or uh literacy of those things and show them the limits that we

might put for ourselves to just have that model in place for them too because so much of what our kids learn from so many thing about so many things is from our modeling so I think scripting some of that making some of the invisible visible to them I think can go a long way in their eventual digital literacy too yeah 100% definitely yes I'm definitely going to be doing that yeah I mean such a such a small but

significant step right of of actually saying what you're doing instead of it's so easy just kind of disappear into your phone for half an hour an hour whatever and then not say anything to your kid about it but instead noticing oh yeah this this is how it has helped me to shift my mood or not and so I'm going to try something else and do you want to come and do this with me I mean that

that I I have not done that and I will be starting to do that from now on so puts in some accountability which I think can be really helpful too of like sometimes you can even model of like it's going to be really hard for me like I'm tell I'm saying out loud I'm I'm going to spend five more minutes wrapping this up and then I'm going to be done to put in that accountability and then they'll I mean kids will love

to keep you accountable right then they can then they have a job yes they do well thank you firstly to Nicole for

suggesting this interview um we we you suggested it we got it on the calendar we got it recorded in record time so hope that's an incentive to other folks who have ideas for episodes so thanks Nicole I really appreciate it it was such a pleasure to be in this space with both of you because I admire both of your work so

much so thank you for inviting me to be a part of this awesome and double thanks to Ash for interrupting your vacation to be able to be with us today and uh illuminate a lot of ideas around screen time that maybe we hadn't considered before so thank you so much for being here for for doing the work that you do in the world um do you want to tell parents where they can find you I know

you're big on Instagram yeah yeah I pretty much just live on Instagram at the gamer educator um and you can find me there talking all these things H and sometimes a bit more technically so if you're like but how do I put in limits or you know settings or whatever like I I delve into all of that too so if you think it would be helpful find me there at the gamer educator and thank you so much for

having me such a great conversation yeah you're welcome and so all of the references for the things that we talked about today as well as a link to Ash's Instagram handle can be found at your parenting [mojo.com](http://mojo.com) SL gamer educator