

Setting Boundaries with Screens | Ep. 66

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SUMMARY

Jim Jackson and Chad H discuss the challenges of video games in parenting, emphasizing the importance of relationship over control. They explore how video games can create both connection and conflict between parents and children, and offer insights on fostering healthy communication and boundaries.

- Video games have evolved significantly since their inception, creating complex emotional attachments for players.*
- Many parents struggle with children who become addicted to video games, leading to conflict and anxiety.*
- Effective parenting involves understanding the relationship dynamics rather than just seeking to control behavior.*
- Parents should reflect on their own feelings and fears regarding their children's gaming habits.*
- Empathy and curiosity about children's gaming experiences can foster better communication and connection.*
- Setting boundaries should involve the child's input and be revisited regularly to encourage accountability.*
- Parents can model their own struggles with technology to build credibility and understanding with their children.*
- The ultimate goal is to maintain a healthy relationship while guiding children towards responsible gaming habits.*

[Music] hi friends welcome this is the connected families podcast I'm Stacy Bard your host this is Dad's month here on the podcast because it's the month we celebrate Father's Day this is the second part in a three-part series with Jim Jackson co-founder of connected families and Chad H who is on the connected families leadership team and he's also a marriage and family therapist today Jim and Chad are talking about video games welcome everybody Jim

Jackson here along with my good friend and colleague Chad hey anday hey Chad hey Jim we've been given an assignment today to talk about video games and parenting right on when I saw that the first thing I thought was I'm not very good at video games well is that a prerequisite to enjoying them or spending hours and hours being on them absolutely not and you know my history with video games is probably telling of of many parent child

experiences we got our first video game in I think it was 1977 and video games weren't really a thing yet they weren't mainstream quite yet but Atari and the game pong I think is kind of the thing that brought video games to the mainstream now pong for those who don't know is just this game where you have two controllers one for me and one for you or you can play against the machine and then it's just you and it's just a

knob that moves a little flat bar up and down the TV screen on the far right side while a little ball bounces

around the square and yeah ironically a square ball right a square ball it was a square ball the pixels back then were like a quarter of an inch across on my TV and the goal was really to not let that ball go past let the ball pass the paddle yeah exactly so we got that game and I was so

excited because my cousins who were a little more computer savvy even back then than I was they were doing stuff nobody ever heard of you know and they had sort of a little bit more complexity but the mainstream game that first came out was pong and we got it for Christmas and I could not keep my hands off of pong I couldn't quit thinking about pong I got revved up about pong you know I'm 16 years old 16 or 17 and and my parents

are like you have to go to bed it's time to go to bed right come on I don't want to have to have the struggle with you to get you off on the bus in the morning again you have got to go to bed and I'm like you're telling me this conversation was happening in the 70s sounds familiar right so this is about pong and I go to bed and I did this several times until I

just decided it wasn't worth it anymore I couldn't get any better but I'd go to bed but I wouldn't sleep I couldn't sleep I was too revved up I was so excited and then I would get up and go downstairs and turn the volume off on the TV and play Pong so you were sneaking in your pong I was sneaking in at night to this big Contraption hooked up to our TV in the family room and did

what I had to do to play Pong then I went to college and they introduced Pac-Man and sorry Space Invaders and Missile Command and those were the simple ones and then Tetris I think came out I think that's the name of it where you had to fit shapes together and stuff really F I couldn't do that I just couldn't my left hand did what my right hand should do and I gave up on video games I finally decided I hate video

games but I was a video game addict you know for several years Whenever there was a video game around I couldn't keep my hands off times have changed a lot right yeah just consumed your thinking it sounds like too like when you weren't doing it you're were trying to figure out when the next time you were or you're going to get that in without maybe other people you know Chad I've always looked up to you you're a little

younger than I but I've I've looked up to you I have a lot of respect for you you never had struggles like this with video games oh my goodness screens were so I played pong that was the first video game that came into our house and I'm not even sure I mean calling it a video game sounds a little little fust it it was what it was and but Atari in the 80s was kind of where I jumped in

with Pitfall and you know you're talking about Missile Command and Space Invaders and asteroids and and all the deals a Pac-Man came out and I had explicit instructions from my father that I should finish the game of Pac-man that I was playing he was going to be gone for probably three hours or so when I was done with that game the Atari went off and I played that game without dying I was actually building up more Pacman

lives I had found a pattern in the game where I wouldn't score very many points like get the blue guy as the

ghost but I would not die and you found it out oh my goodness I figured out pattern and my dad walked in the house he's like what did I tell you I said Dad I'm still on the same game it was like this Euphoria of I've accomplished this amazing thing but now I'm going to get in trouble but

I have obeyed I've done what you said so that probably was the origins of a bigger issues well it's so nuts isn't it how these little electrical impulses and pixels on a screen can ignite something in us that is so profound and so so rewarding and create such an attachment to the accomplishment to the victory to the progress to the learning to you know and then of course the video games over time got more and more layered and more

and more sophisticated to keep us going after the next thing the next thing the next thing and it feels so good to get there and there's you know there's this almost quasi sense of significance right that builds up inside of us as we do this relative to video games and then they got smart enough to add real people to the mix when you were young did you have tournaments with your friends and stuff yeah so College Nintendo came out

and that was techmobile and that was you know setting up the tournaments I remember the challenge of taking the worst team on techmobile to the Super Bowl undefeated right or to The techmobile Undefeated so now you start have games within the games of how good are you really sort of thing but yeah we we would play in college and yeah so I think those those kinds of situations scenarios I think we can relate to on on

varying levels but then even working at the youth Outreach organization that we work worked at and then Xbox comes out and Halo and now you've got kind of more real life at least early on not compared to what it is now but you know you used to know that you're were just playing a game now it almost can feel like it's hard to separate out whether this is real life or whether this is really the game yeah and with all this layering and

with all of this sophistication and of course the video game companies maybe spend more than anybody on what keeps people compelled to do things and to learn things and to grow in the thing that they want them to grow in we have parents now calling us frequently for help with kids who won't get off their screens I had a dad tell me a little while back but he was talking about you know what do I do my kid won't get off

the screen and I said well you know it's important it's limits and but what about the relationship and all the things he says right now if I do anything to take that video game away from him I am literally afraid he might burn our house down yes he would be that angry he would kick and scream and yell and become violent how well how old is he he's 15 y you know for me the brain works of all

of that is beyond my comprehension but what I know is is even based on how this dad was talking to me about his son and the judgments that he had and the condescension that he had and the anger that he had toward his son and I mean it's natural to be afraid and to worry when your kids are are unable to control things but then if we bring to them in an effort to help them a toxic

relationship that's not going to help them that's going to probably make matters worse and so our work here at

Connected families is less about what are all the methods to get kids off of video games than more about what kind of relationship do you have by which you can discuss these things understand your example and how your child may or may not be following it and so on right right have you done any coaching recently with parents Chad about this

issue this is not an uncommon issue the video game side of things probably being a little bit older child in terms of uh Community like like the pre-teen maybe but teenagers in particular playing certain games are getting online to play the games to connect with a lot of other people some of them are actual physical friends they know others are virtual friends that they've connected with through this game so I think the the parents of teens in particular when they

reach out they're kind of in a place of worry and you know catastrophizing the future of this child will they ever get out of our house or how are they ever going to have a job and there's they're filled with lots of anxiety and fear about what this might mean for their child I mean I'm thinking about this and I'm like okay I'm the dad that calls you you know we arrange a phone call through email because I reached out and I'm

interested how you help me and there's a half hour consult and I I call you and I say Chad thanks for taking my call here's the deal I got a kid that just won't get off the computer whether it's video games I don't even know what it all is frankly it's all over my head but he's got so much stuff going on and when it's time for dinner when it's time to do chores when it's time to do homework

you know we get the same resistance every time and the harder we try the worse it gets I hear you over there connected families helped people like me so tell me what I need to do to get him off that computer you set it up really well if it were just video games but chores were getting done and attitude was great and school homework wasn't an issue I think most parents would be able to kind of roll with that or maybe have

less concern but they start to see those things slipping away so that's what we would dive into then in the connected families framework is such a good introductory piece for parents to start thinking through it Beyond and you said how do I get my child to stop doing that right to get them off that I mean that's the goal that most parents would have honestly Chad where in my roleplay hat right now I'm already getting impatient

though yeah yeah yeah no and I'm not even talking to the dad I'm just giving context here yeah I mean is that something you want to play out a little bit or what how do you want to move forward with that in a call like that I'm calling to sort of check out whether you can help me and I'm looking for quick evidence that you can cuz I'm impatient I've got a lot of intensity about this issue I've read a bunch of

things online that you know tell me to set limits and put the timers on the thing and do the tracking software and you know all that stuff and I've done all that stuff and the more of that stuff I do the matter my kid gets so Chad I'm looking to you to give me hope quick before the commercial okay there's plenty of Hope and I will tell you that the Quick Fix is probably not something that I can give you but I can give you

something that will help help you develop relationship with your son while holding him accountable I think that's likely what most parents are after would you agree Jim is that what you're after here is is well our relationship is a mess I mean I'm so mad and he's so mad that we can't even sit in the car together without fuming at each other so it's just getting quiet these days because every time either of us talks it

just leads to you know something volatile again yeah and how willing are you as Dad here on a scale of 0 to 10 where zero is you're completely unwilling and 10 is you are ready to do whatever you might need to do to make some changes for yourself before moving into making changes for your son I got to do something different so cuz what I'm doing sure isn't working very well yeah it's a high number I don't know

seven or an eight or I mean yeah I want to learn to say some different things and to do some different things so that my son starts liking me again that's important right to have a relationship but also have accountability and those but I don't want him to get away with using these computer games over and over again either so so I think what I'm hearing you say is you'd like to have a relationship you're not quite sure how

to get there you'd like to hold them accountable you're not quite sure how to get there and the framework that we'll talk about at Connected families will be a good guide for that yeah and we've been able to guide lots of parents through using that framework in situations and scenarios much like you're describing yeah okay I'm going to take my roleplay hat off here and just say after break we'll come back and we'll talk about this process maybe

we'll role play we'll see how it goes but what I hear you saying Chad is is that there's kind of a whole holistic view that has to be taken around all of this that's not just about what method to get my child to do X Y or Z but it's a bigger package than that and you're going to help me figure out some new ways of thinking about this some new things to say maybe even some New

Attitudes to have and help me with that we're going to get to that after this short break do you imagine your kids would be best friends with a house full of laughter fun and cute memory making moments here you are struggling with constant fighting badgering and teasing you know your kids are capable of a close relationship but even with all your effort you feel like you're getting nowhere and sometimes you wonder if you're making things even worse well

what if you could use the inevitable conflict between your kiddos and actually strengthen their relationship we want you to know it is possible connected families has a self-paced five session online course that's called conflict follow the link in our show notes to register and help move your kids from bickering to bonding so we've been talking about this video game issue that so many parents call us about and want help and the

classic question is is how do I get my kid to stop and we've introduced this idea that as parents if if our effort is going to be effective long term it helps to be more thoughtful about bigger context not just the video games but the context of our relationship something we didn't mention before the break but I think we'll start to unpack right now is is that we want to make sure when we address these hard issues with our kids

that they're getting the messages from us about who we believe they are that are consistent with what we'd want them to get right so often the way we engage our kids with hard things communicates to them you know you're a pain you're a problem you don't listen you're a failure can't do anything right you are headed nowhere we don't mean for our kids to hear those things from us but that's kind of the messages they receive

from us as we put our best efforts behind the good intentions of helping our kids right so as it relates to video games you know I'm this Dad that called Chad before the thing and I want this to stop right now Chad what's the sense that you get from me and from other parents like me in that roleplay that are real parents what's your sense about the messages their good intentions of helping their kids off of video games

give to those kids I think there's kind of the you're out of control an inconvenience maybe child you're an inconvenience why do we have to keep talking about this all the time you're an irritant to me you know you are hopeless in terms of having a future you know I think those messages that our kids get from us in those situations really just send the you know just full of disconnection you're an embarrassment could be another one like I didn't raise

a child to to do this we're a family of hard workers and we're disciplined and you're embarrassing me right now so yeah I think those are you're out of control would be probably one of the the number one yeah I was teaching this framework already when our oldest son was in ninth grade and he had a video game problem and we put locks on the doors and we put filters on the thing and we took privileges away and I believe in

retrospect we were communicating the very kinds of messages by those efforts that you're talking about Chad and I mean we teach this stuff we need to be firm and we need to be strong and we need to be graceful so we were nice about all of these things but the message our son getting from us is you know your life is headed for trouble because of this and one day we came home he'd been home before us and we'd been

out and about and and he was sitting on our living room couch almost expecting us and he was flipping his school ID little credit card looking thing he was you know kind of just flipping it and he was looking at us with this look that was like you want to know what this is about of course we looked at him and what's going on and he said you can't stop me from playing video games you know what are you talking about he said

my school pretty good at breaking into the office and I've been playing video games for two hours and he told us and it's always interesting to me that he told us this yeah right right but but I think he told us because our approaches thus far had been you know graceful but they were still communicate we thought but we were still communicating all of these unintended messages to him about his inability his incapacity trajectory was not a good trajectory and this is a bad

thing and it occurred to me in that moment that he trusted us enough to tell us plus that for a reason so I don't remember all the specifics but we had you know we sat down we had a conversation you know what would work the best and you know how do you feel about it what do you think about it what do you think are good ideas about all of this and he wasn't he wasn't far enough

into all the things that he just said I just want to play the computer whenever I want to play it and I don't want you to ask me any questions about it which some parents report their kids tell them but I realized that like I said at the outset I wasn't very good at video games and by the time they got sophisticated I kind of was on to other addictions in my life golf fishing lawn care you name the different things that

hook us I thought you know Daniel I'd appreciate knowing more about the games you're playing would you teach me to play one of them he's like what I said yeah just show me and so he brought me in and he showed me I think the game was Warcraft World of Warcraft was that the thing back then and it was one of these deals where you're you know you're strategic and you see different layers and there's people all over and you're

communicating with whoever else is playing and you're trying to make plans against the enemy at first I was like oh my gosh this too much and then but then I realized what was happening and I looked I was like man you're really good at this game aren't you yeah you're very strategic and the way that you communicate with the people in the game has got just a very strong and graceful and authoritative sort of a tone and you've developed kind of a

following I can see why you love this yes he shut the game off after an hour or so and well he gave me the controllers and I was a mess cuz like I said I do things backwards but we laughed and I laughed and but that meant so much to him that I would come alongside him that way way that the conversation about what to do about all this and the pros and the cons there are

Pros to this that we could spend some time thinking and talking about you know we did that as a family so you know I sort of did all of that intuitively Chad but when you guide parents through this process you really kind of lay out some questions to help parents think through what do I do when my kids are struggling with it's not just video games but video games you know the typical first question is what should I do and it's a

great question it's really important to answer but we tend to back parents up to a couple other questions that will come before the what should I do question and and I will say that when I lay out for parents in a even a 15minute phone consultation or whatever I I just try to help make sure that parents know that if you're looking for a trick or a quick snap your fingers and this is going to be over I probably am not your guy I can

help you manipulate your child I suppose for a little bit but it won't create relationship and it's actually not going to build wisdom in that child but if you hang in there for a little bit and start working at the first question of what's going on with me like what is it about you as a parent where this video game stuff drives you crazy what do you believe about you what do you believe about your child in this situation and

I'm imagining so I'll go back to me in that situation with my son I mean in some shape or fashion I was going back to my early obsession with all of this and my parents didn't temper for me we didn't relate to me in ways that compelled me to do things so I stayed underground and I stayed hidden and I went on a trajectory that was not helpful for me for a season of my life so as a parent I can't help but divorce

myself from my past and if I'm honest I think I have to say I was afraid that Daniel is an awful lot like me and that he could take this into you know he could get into the same kind of trouble only worse than I got in as a youngster cuz I ended up not being very good at these things he's really good at so I'm even more scared I've got a lot of fear yeah fear and anxiety in

parenting typically moves us into a place of more controlling uh responses to our kids that we're we're anxious about or we're fearful of the choices that they might be making and control is not a great place to come from it does not create relationship but actually pushes it away so as it relates to video games what are some controlling consistently controlling things that you've seen put in place that instead of building bridge to relationship actually put up bricks it tends to be a lot of

telling and yelling or finally just I've had enough and this is the way it's going to be there's generally not a lot of conversation trying to really move into what the next question then would be for you know in the framework that we're talking about what's going on inside of me the next question and is a curious one about what's it like to be my child what is it about video games that he or she thoroughly enjoys and

what is the child receiving from them they're getting something from this and it doesn't mean that we excuse addictive behaviors or things like that that's not what I'm saying but we are at least looking through the lens of I wonder what's going on here what does he get from this what's the big input that the big win here for him or her that allows them to keep moving in this direction and then if I'm able to do some of that

thinking what's the benefit of that to me how does that help I think it brings a level of at least some level of compassion or empathy it's like I don't have to agree with you to understand you so there might be a lot of things going on and this child is locked in that screen is like a a vacation of sorts from all the other things that are going on okay so if that's what's actually happening is that's a place where my

child's actually comes to a peaceful place I go wow peace is pretty important to me that's interesting that he's finding it there yeah and I wonder you know then then we can start wondering about where are we going to go or what we're going to do but I think compassion empathy also joining the child's like oh wow what do you like about that anyway you know that just a curiosity tone of trying to understand what's going on

with the child here is super important it's also very respectful to the child as well although I will say this is if you asked that question to the child and you've been just going after them about video games and how bad or wrong they are they will likely not receive it in a even if you say it really really curiously because their defenses will be up yeah I know one of the things again just reflecting on my own story but then

with a number of other parents I've helped through this over the years it's like when we can get to this answer to the question well what is it like to be my child and do some empathizing and some compassion you know then we can join the conversation in a much more relatable sort of a way way with our kids and when I understand a need that my child has or a desire or a passion it's likely a need or a desire or a

passion that I've had maybe not over video games and maybe it is over video games for me it was like you know what Daniel I get what you're going through I remember when I was your age and even these days you know with my smartphone or with whatever I well I didn't have a smartphone yet when we were going through this with Daniel right on the cusp but but you know even then just having constant access to technology I

understand sort of the pull of that I understand how how important you can feel or how good it feels to succeed you know most of the parents listening to this podcast are have the technology in their hands too and so there's an yeah there's an authenticity that needs to come through as well and I think this is a good place to insert the our own struggle or our own at least the Allure of just flipping constantly through

Instagram or what whatever it is how we can get stuck you were even talking about you know fishing or you know your yard or how that can become consuming our kids see and notice things so we gain I think a lot of credibility when we can join in on hey we all struggle rather than you need to knock this off yeah so this is all good stuff and it's really it's back to sort of the heart of

the relationship as it relates to the video games figuring out a way to stay connected in it because as soon as our lectures come at our kids we tend to disconnect from them even even if we don't feel it that's what it tends to feel like to the kids they tend to want to go underground they tend to want to hide they tend to want to keep their stuff a secret but if we're moving toward them in Connected relationship

authentic honest humble confessing even the ways we've struggled I heard a mom the other day say how can I tell my kid to get off the screen she was only on 10 hours today I was on for 12 yeah you know and there are different roles too I get it I mean most people are on screens at least during the day for work purposes or presumably there's something else going on that seems like it's a necessary function but yeah I think that

being real with our own stuff is important so then quick in the time that we've got left it's time to set some boundaries it's you know so we've done the work the relationship is there our child continues to struggle we're with them we're for them we've joined them we we're compassionate we've empathized I always worry that parents hear us take a lot of time talking about this relationship stuff and then they're like well yeah but isn't that awful soft like

when is it time to to do some things and to set some boundaries and what are some things you've heard parents put in place that help their kids learn accountability here yeah so having the conversation is important move into really asking the question what can I affirm and then what skills does my child need to need to have that apparently they don't have and that might be time management here it might be you know just some self-control about

not going on endlessly taking care of responsibilities that that they have before they move into to video games things like that and so you know with that I'm asking them some questions I might say how much time do you think is reasonable for a kid your age to be able to to be on screens inevitably you're going to get an answer of well all my friends and all the stuff and all my you know their parents they don't

even care and okay that's all going to come and I just tell parents expect it and then when that happens say okay yeah yeah I hear that now my question to you was how much time do you think is reasonable for you to be on screens and what do you know about screens and how they impact you and this could be a conversation most most kids if they're really they don't want to have this conversation I'm not expecting that

they're going to just jump in right and go oh wow that's a great question here's what I've done I've thank you for asking dad the brain research suggests this and all the other stuff right but I am putting it out there and I you just really want to invite them into the conversation about they already likely will be pretty defensive about that then you can move into well here's what I've been noticing and I don't know if you've

been noticing it it but I I've been noticing that you know when you're on screens Beyond maybe two hours it feels like a different kid comes out of that room and I'm a little worried about that and I guess I'm wondering you know if you notice that maybe they will maybe they won't but at that point as as a parent I can start inviting some feedback but also looking at setting some boundaries I'm not trying to pull

the the plug out here I'm not trying to say it's all or nothing but at this point I'm worried about it enough and the fact that you won't have this conversation with me okay even causes me to get a little bit more concerned about this and I think we're going to need to set some limits but I'd really like to get your input on what the limits are and if you don't want to give me input

that's okay I'll just let you know kind of what I'm thinking but I would really value your input here because I love the fact that you're hanging out with your buddies and you're doing the stuff and you're playing the game and you're developing these skills and all the all those things but I also love the fact that we do some things as a family and you take care of your responsibilities before you have the privilege of playing

video games so let's have that conversation yeah and I know I'm sure there's parents out there thinking well it's so hard because the line between homework and video games or other just non constructive technology use it's such a thin line it's hard to distinguish it well I got to be on the computer to do my homework well okay and so I I know that parents and for me it was hard cuz I didn't know as much about

the technology as my kids did you know I was fairly Savvy and understood things and we put you know filters on and and some of the things that are recommended but we didn't let the filter do the work we wanted our kids' Hearts to be the filter and so we kept having the relationship and the conversations and kept walking through this rather than here let's just do this set of things that's going to control your behavior so

whatever the boundaries are you set them I like setting them for a limited time here are the boundaries for the week let's go Sunday to Sunday and Sunday night we can re-evaluate we can renegotiate CU what ends up happening is if you don't go week to week or 3 or 4 days or whatever it's up for negotiation every single day and the biggest most important thing is happening right now and I have to be on and everybody's on

you know and my standard response to that would be something along the lines of it sounds like you've got something to talk about on Sunday night what did we agree to for this week and we're going to talk about it again and I value your input I really want to hear what you have to say about that well and there's also in there at some level freedom to fail and if you're in the kind of relationship you want to be in

with your kids you can say you know what we're going to do some limits this week based on what input you gave based on the things have said we're going to shut the electricity off to that room that's tied to that computer at 10 o'clock right or you know we're we're just going to trust that you're going to shut it down and have your head on the pillow by 10:00 or you've agreed that you're going to have all your chores done before you

get on the computer tell me how likely it is that next week you're going to tell me you've done all of these things well well I think I can do it okay good let's talk in a week a week happens child says and you notice child didn't do so well but you don't have to just check up on it and Nag on it and you can just let the week go and say yeah now now we're going to talk about it how' it

go for you what would you say was your average game usage this week yeah well it was I think it was right on and the parents like are you kidding yeah yeah well my observation was a little different of that because on such and such a day and on such and such a day and did you get your homework did you get all the things done how are your grades this week you feel good about your school workor did you feel good

about your you know looks like you got all your chores done so high five it shows you however much you were using the game the chores were still important and you did them so that's great yeah you're working at managing you're figuring out how to manage different aspects of your life Y which I think is is really what we're after here is that's it is some management opportunity it's what we're really after and we need to wrap here but you know this

conversation we hope has provided you some ideas some thoughts you may have questions feel free please to reach out to us and ask your questions it's our hope that these ideas are helping you build the kind of relationship with your kids that you want because when that relationship is in place the kind of influence that parents want to have is generally more there than if not but if the relationship isn't there it's a lot harder when we see the things that scare

us when we see the things that worry us when we see the things that we just know our kids need to do better at and we try to engage in those things our kids are more like because they're at the age of needing to figure out who they are for themselves to push us away so conduct the kind of relationships you want to have with your kids they'll keep you near you'll gain the influence you're looking for and to the degree that we at

Connected families can help you let us know Chad thanks a lot for your time today oh man it was a privilege thanks Jim I hope you enjoyed our podcast today we would love to hear from you leave a comment and let us know what you found useful or a question that we could address in a future podcast don't forget get to rate and review so that others can find us more easily next time Jim and Chad will be back for the third

episode of our three-part series for dads discussing kids and pornography for more information about connected families go to connectedfamilies.org [Music]