

Video Games, Cyberbullying, and More: How To Guide Your Child Through The Digital Wasteland

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SUMMARY

Dr. Lisa Strohman discusses the challenges faced by Generation Z, particularly regarding their digital upbringing and the implications of technology on their mental health. She emphasizes the need for parents to engage actively with their children about technology use, including video games, pornography, and social media, while fostering open communication and resilience.

- *Generation Z is the most digital-native generation, facing unique challenges around privacy and personal freedom.*
- *Early exposure to online pornography can lead to anxiety, depression, and distorted views on relationships and sexuality.*
- *Video games can be both beneficial and harmful; moderation is key, with an emphasis on social interaction and creativity.*
- *Cyberbullying is pervasive in digital spaces, often leading to trauma and mental health issues due to the lack of escape from online harassment.*
- *Parents should foster open conversations about technology and its impacts, while also implementing boundaries and monitoring usage.*
- *Emotional regulation and resilience are crucial skills for children to develop in navigating both online and offline interactions.*
- *The importance of family rituals, such as shared meals or tech-free time, can strengthen connections and provide a safe space for discussions.*
- *The cultural shift towards safetyism may hinder children's ability to take risks and develop independence in both real and virtual environments.*

- This is the most digital-native generation that we've ever had. I feel bad in many ways that they don't have the personal freedoms, the privacy, the things that they should have as children. They should be able to make mistakes. - Zoomers are a generation of digital natives, meaning they've been plugged into the digital world since birth. This unprecedented change in upbringing can be hard to see for parents like me and probably you, who spend every waking hour on a screen.

But this is new and comes with serious challenges

our parents didn't face or prepare us for. Take online pornography. Did you know that on average, today's kids are exposed to hardcore porn by second grade? That's a far cry from '90s teen boys trying to unscramble the Playboy channel. Then there's video games and social media. 10% of adolescents show symptoms of video game addiction, and 5 to 10% of the US population meets the criteria for social media addiction.

As parents, how can we protect our kids from being on the dark side of these statistics? And how do we work with them if they already are? This is why we invited Dr. Lisa Strohman back to Dad Saves America. She's a licensed psychologist and the founder of Digital Citizen Academy, an organization addressing the issue of technology addiction and overuse. She's the author of "Digital Distress," which guides parents on raising children in a digital world, and includes chapters on the topics of video games, pornography, social media, and screen time management.

- The more you isolate someone, the more dependent they become. And so it's very interesting to me, over the last decade, for instance, I've seen these children become more and more tied in and less and less social, which creates more and more anxiety and depression. And the only way to fix it is to untether them. - Dr. Strohman's perspective as a psychologist and technology wellness expert offers necessary tips and tricks for keeping our kids healthy and happy, both online and IRL.

(disk scratching) I can hear my son cringing when I say IRL right now. (upbeat music) (air whooshes) All right, Lisa, welcome back to Dad Saves America. - So happy to be back. - So our last conversation, we only touched on the surface of several things that I wanted to go deeper on together. Specifically, I want to talk today about video games, pornography, social media and cyberbullying, and Gen Z, who are the crazy kids we've birthed.

- How many hours do we have? - And what do we do about them? So let's start off with Gen Z. - This is the, to me, the most digital-native generation that we've ever had. They grew up technologically connected at all levels. A lot of them started before birth. Parents were putting them online, right? They were setting up accounts for them before they were ever born. So it really is like a different generation I feel, from that perspective.

I really struggle because
I feel bad in many ways that they don't have the
personal freedoms, the privacy, the things that they
should have as children. They should be able to make mistakes. They should be able to understand that the
world isn't perfect. But they've grown up in this place where it's almost intolerable
if they don't fit in, or if they don't agree or fall in line, particularly in the technology space. - Well, I was told by
really smart people that they'll own nothing and
have no privacy and be happy.

I don't think they're happy. - They're not happy. - So tell me about that. - I think generally they
live day by day, right? So it's almost like being
on vacation all the time. They're not really thinking long term as what we would've maybe. Like, putting things
aside
for our kids in later, or we wanna have retirement,
or those kind of things. They're more hedonistic
in that way, I guess. So they just wanna be happy, and they wanna be happy in that moment, which only lasts
for a fleeting moment, and then it goes away, which
makes them even more unhappy.

They're not really connected to this kind of generational lifestyle that we really need to look at if we're gonna be
successful
in all phases of our life. - That sounds like looking
at kind of the older side, the kids that are now
starting to come out of school and wreak havoc in HR
departments everywhere. - (laughs) Right. - Hone in on that. When you say living day to day, does any kid look
out
and have perspective?

- So the difference. Like,
even the younger kids, right? Like, you would say like, "Oh, I'm gonna like, join
the high school team, or I'm gonna join my middle school." Or at elementary school I'm gonna do this
after-school program. And I'm like, "I can't wait
to go see my friend." Right? And you kind of look forward to things. They are so used to having things pushed
into their awareness that they don't really
look outward for it.

Does that make sense?

- Oh, yeah. That's interesting.

- Definitely. Even the younger kids
are just kind of like, they wait to be told, or what is important and
what isn't important, and what should I or

should I not agree with? And I think that that happens across all of the ages. - How do you know that? You know, like, in our last conversation we talked about the suicide rates, the anxiety, the depression. Those are all measurable, and they're high.

But then these other, these personality traits you're talking about, they feel like a harder thing to measure. - I would say that, by my almost 20 years of practice, like, working with the kids, speaking on a national platform, you know, going to schools, it's the same everywhere I go. I can be in Amish country in Iowa, which I have been, and I was wondering why they had me there, and they had technology-related issues with their kids that were coming into the school and finding ways to get on technology, as much as the folks out on the East Coast.
- Amish TikTok is big.

- It is, it is, right? To me, it's the hard work of those sessions that I have individually with families, with kids, talking to parents, going into churches, all of that. That's how I have this impression of what Gen Z is. - You're experiencing this across a lot of people in a lot of timeframe and seeing these similarities. - Right. And not just in therapy. Yeah, like, in just normal I'm going out and like, trying to share what I know help people on a grander scale.

And so I don't want your audience to think it's just people who are in distress or need. It is just generally we all are in this world together, and so a lot of people have shared kind of their journey in that. - You know, so my son's gonna be 18, and we're thinking about college. And our show reflects my own skepticism of the value proposition of college these days, but we're still, like, trying to explore what to do next.

How have you dealt with this sense of like, listlessness or purposelessness? They don't have a plan, like you're saying, or a sense of the thing that they're passionate about that they want to do next? - I always start with strengths. And I always say like, I think that you've probably done more than you've thought that you've done. Because I think when we look at kids, like, they have taken in their moral/ethical compass usually by the time they're 11 or 12.

They have the ability-

- Damn it. - to like, make right from wrong, right? We're just at that point, the bumpers, in the bowling alley, you know, after that. And they kind of should be guiding themselves. And I think that those early years are where I would say that work is done. Those kids in that generation, they do have some ability to understand, like, think of a buffet. You can go to an all-you-can-eat buffet. You teach your kids, right?

You should moderate what you take and what you consume. For my kids and the people that I work with, I always talk about that as an analogy. It's like, you need to understand that there are some things that could be offered to you in life, drugs, illicit things, that you don't want to have in your life. So don't choose that. Like, avoid those places. And so generally I think the parents have done the work. They just haven't connected the dots.

- I've heard, like, Jonathan Haidt has talked about that he thinks that the average 18-year-old today has the emotional maturity of between, like, a 14, 15-year-old of my generation. Do you agree with that? You know, how do we think about that? How do you think about that? - I think that in some ways that's not entirely true. I think that there's a tolerance issue, and I think that there is a lemming issue, right? Like, I think that there a lot of people jump in and follow each other.

They get frenzied around an idea to become something that they aren't. In terms of emotional maturity, I think that our kids are guarded too much nowadays. Like, we don't allow those boundaries down as much as we used to. And so kids don't get as much resilience built in. I tell people all the time, it's okay if your kid fails. It's okay if they fall down. You can't get resilient any other way, and you can't get to be a stronger human, unless you've understood what it feels like to be on that other side.

So I don't necessarily think that they're less mature emotionally than the generation. I think that they're definitely less tolerant. They're less open. You know, they're the first to tell you that they are, but the reality is, is they're not. They want you to believe what they believe. - Before we even started doing this as just part of like, trying to work out my own thoughts, I wrote what I thought were like, 10 things that constituted being an adult.

They ended up being pretty stoic. A lot of it's about, can you control your emotion? Is that a useful proxy? Like, emotional regulation? Like, how should I think about what it means to be a mature adult? - I think that that's a better term. Emotional regulation. How do you take in some sensory, and have a reaction to it, and process it before your impulse? If somebody's saying something to you, or somebody's doing something to you, is your immediate reaction to like, counter that argument, or to say, "Well, that's interesting.

Like, how did you get to that opinion?" But that's pulling in information. The emotional maturity that I think when originally you said that was, is this person able to value the person in front of them, or value the situation in front of them, and be able to respond without just that, I guess, like, raw emotion? That's, to me, maturity. - So calling people a racist the second they say anything that you disagree with is not mature.

- Not mature. Yeah. - What role has kids' interaction with technology and with screens and digital connectivity played in the sense in which they don't have tolerance? And what does tech have to do with it? - There's an anonymity to it, right? It's like you're driving in your car and the windows are up, and you're like, cussing out somebody who's driving next to you because you know they can't hear you. I think screens tend to allow that piece of them to go out and just kind of throw up their emotions into the world and like, share, like, kind of vitriol, if they have it, and without any like, real worry.

Like, it just goes somewhere, and they don't really have an attachment to it anymore. The other piece of it is like, that they don't see themselves as the same individual online and in real life. So the kids that are constantly telling me IRL, and I was like, you're gonna have to... You know, like, in the beginning I was like, "So in real life, right, this is how I am." And so there's this like, definite dichotomy where they have this digital life, and then they have this in-real-life life that they feel like they have to be different for.

And so you're not gonna see the same human in those situations. They wouldn't act the same, and they definitely are getting closer to living in that digital world more and more. - Friend of the show, Martin Gurri, former alphabet agency guy at the CIA, he's actually said that he thinks that, and he's not a psychologist, he's just sort of making an observation, that our kids are probably more sophisticated and have developed more ways of navigating the digital landscape than we, their like, boomer parents.

I'm not a boomer-

- I was just gonna say. - but I am called a boomer by my son. I'm like, "I'm not a boomer." I grew up with "Beavis and Butt-Head." It's a different thing altogether. That we don't give them enough credit. That they actually are more sophistic. They are developing a kind of new digital immune system. What's your experience of that? Are you seeing in your practice and in your work, like, a new kind of sophistication developing?

- I think sophistication's an interesting term. I wouldn't have thought of it that way, but I think that that probably is accurate. I think to me, I look at it as a bit of an apathy. Like, that they just don't let things impact them anymore, and they kind of just disregard. To me, it seems like a one-way feed for them. Like, they wanna share their vision, and they wanna be able to like, take in what they kind of choose.

And so in that respect, I would say it is more sophisticated, 'cause they just kind of ignore some of the noise, a lot of them. - Jean Twenge who wrote the book "iGen" and, you know, is this demographer sociologist that I know you and I have talked about, she pointed out in something I'd read from her recently that, to your point about connection, you know, there's this phrase like, catch the feels. It's probably already old. I'm probably already causing my son to cringe by saying this.

- It was yesterday. It's done.

Yeah.

- Yeah, this is already done. That's like dabbing, Dad. Don't say that ever again. But that there is a kind, there is a apathy and a kind of emotional withdrawal. What have you seen with that? - Mostly it's based on fear and insecurity, that I think she's absolutely right that they're pulling back. I think that there is some kind of nefarious things that are happening, maybe intentional, maybe not intentional, from algorithms and trying to work kids into certain areas.

But the more you isolate someone, the more dependent they become. And so it's very interesting to me, over the last decade, for instance, I've seen these children become more and more tied in and less and less social, which creates more and more anxiety and depression. And the only way to fix it is to untether them. At this point, if they're already so connected, they can't. So she's right that they're pulling back. She's right that they're isolating.

I see a lot of kids that are joining communities, like incel groups and things

like that, that are like, "Oh, now I have like a established place to be." But you shouldn't be in that group. You don't want your child in that group, right? It's dangerous in a lot of ways, but it's what they're doing to become more social. I think it's no surprise they call it social media, and then they sell it as if this is a way we're gonna be more social.

- We're more connected. - Yes. Way more isolated than we ever have been. - One of the things that is interesting that I've read is that this generation is actually doing less drugs and having less sex. Is that true? And how should I think about that? You turn on HBO and you see "Euphoria," and you're like, "Oh my God, we're living in a hellscape." But then you read, then you're like, "This is great. They're having less sex, less teen pregnancy.

Isn't that a good thing?

Are we getting better?" But are we? Is that good? - Yeah, and I don't think that's actually totally accurate. So I work with a group, Gaggle, and they have like, 5.2 million kids that they oversee in 1,500 schools district across the United States. - Oh, wow.

- So it's a massive amount of data. So 2019 to 2021, those two years of school, you're looking at massive increases in like, the amount of elementary school kids, for instance, that are talking about and communicating about drugs and alcohol that we didn't see before, which is like, during the pandemic, right?

2019, 2020. So parents were doing it, right? Monkey see, monkey do. And so you had a lot of kids that had access to things in boredom on their side. You had like that, isolated effect where we were all locked down for a period of time, and kids couldn't get to one another. So if you ask a child how they define sex versus how we're defining it in this forgotten generation that is not boomer generation, right, if you ask a child how they define it, it's very different than how we would define sex.

Because I think that-

- What do you mean by that? - I think, statistically, when you're asking, you're saying like, "Oh, they're having less sex than ever before," you're talking about and the media is talking about intercourse. But if you talk about sex as interactions between children or between individuals that are sexual in nature that aren't specifically intercourse, then that's happening at a massive rate. - What's going on there? Is it more understanding about pregnancy? So we're just doing a lot of other stuff instead?

Is that what's happening? - I think, like, someone on your staff was talking about it. The transactional nature and how fast it can be, right? - Swipe left, swipe right thing.
- Swipe left. Yeah. There was a study that came out that 28% of millennials check their phones during sex. - Check their phones during sex. - During sex, right?
- Just gonna say that's not very good sex if you're checking your phone. - (laughs) So like, where's the intimacy and the emotional connection?

And how are they defining it? So that's where I would start. - I think this also feels like it speaks to like, definitions of maturity. You know, what is a mature relationship? What has changed in this generation about relationships? - This generation, I would say, is having a hard time really diving into the depths of like, the emotional connection with people. So it's more about the possession, or it's about, this is mine, here's my label, here's my girlfriend, or this is my whatever.

So once you get to that level, then it's about can I keep it? And it's like a win or lose kind of like, mentality oftentimes. And it's really more about who do I have on my hit list? Like, there's all these terms that these kids have and- - Wait, unpack this-
- I know. - a little bit for me.
- I know. I'm worried for you if I tell you all of them. - Last time we went down some dark "Quantico" doors.

What new horrors do you have for me now? - Well, so it's not a negative to have had multiple partners that I'm like, having sexual interactions with as a teenager. And in fact, they publicly share these, quote-unquote, hit lists. And there's only a certain level that if you cross over, they call it kind of a run-through girl. I don't understand how you get from pride to, you know, this journey of hell, like, where now everybody calls you this other name.

So there's like this weird dichotomy that's happening in this generation where they're like, proud and like, kind of really open about who they've been with, and they're excited about it. This piece about them that, again, like, I'm actually having sex. It was just like a thing that we did 'cause I got a ride, or they did me a favor. You know, there's like, that piece of it. So to me it's very disconnected in terms of like, the intimacy that we need if we're gonna have a partner that we really truly want to have that relationship with.

- I mean, I think we should jump into talking about pornography, because it's like, that this-
- Can't dance around it. - (laughs) It's on my list. And paint a picture for

me of the current state of our kids' relationship with pornography. - It's a lot to unpack. Because, you know, the average age, as we talked about in the last time, is eight, right? Chronic viewing begins at 11. There's multiple cases that I've had in my practice where I have 20-something-year-olds that present with erectile dysfunction.

Like, they can't even have an erection because they've had so much exposure to pornography. And porn is not all equal. To me, I was terrified. I'm like, "Are we raising a generation of pedophiles?" Because you've got a bunch of kids that are like, in these elementary, middle school years having their first sexual experience, and now as they age out into their 30s, their connection with sex really started when they were young. So do we have a bunch of people that are no longer enticed because their first sexual, like, connection is at that young age?

- Oh, that's really a weird and horrible thing to think about. (laughs) - So there's that. - Okay, we're in the dark. - Okay, I know. I'm sorry. - I'm sorry. - No, no, no. I took us here. Let's stay here. All right. - And again, like, I think that if you look at the industry, we in the United States by far are the number one consumers. And you can go on- - Of pornography? - Of pornography.

If you go on Pornhub, they actually do the stats for you. It's kind of exciting. And they show you we're like, we're winning. - We're number one. - Yeah. (laughs) I don't know if that's winning. - Great. Great. - Yeah. And you've got teen is the number one searched term in pornography, which is terrifying. So you have to look through and say like, "Okay, where's the injury, where's the harm in that, if you are introducing sex in a way that is so obviously not real, and that they think that that might be real?"

There's no real life experience that will make up for what they're watching, a scripted nature of like, how porn is presented to these kids. - Help me understand like, the nature of your experience and dealing with families and kids where porn has become a problem. - So a lot of my cases involve this because I think it's naturally, it's the one thing that gets really unsettled, and parents- - And for people who are just jumping into this for the first time with us together, what do you mean by case?

- So if a family comes to me, and like, I'm a psychologist. So if they come to me and it's a patient, they're coming in, and there's like, some sort of issue psychologically, a large majority of them have been exposed and are struggling with the psychological ramifications of that. It's hard as a kid, if you think about it. It's hard if you are exposed to something that is a natural drive, right? Food, water, and sex. And so it's a natural drive.

You get exposed to something you're not used to. You're not really sure about it. You're curious, but then you feel bad about it because you know you're not supposed to be doing it. And you can't really talk to your adults about it. So now you live in this life of, my parents are looking at me, my mom's trying to give me a hug, and now I don't really know how to handle that. And so it causes a lot of anxiety. It causes depression.

It causes a lot of PTSD sometimes in kids, because they don't really know how to shut down some of those graphic images that are coming into their brains. - You said that eight years old is the average age in which our kids today are being exposed to pornography for the first time. - Yes. - That's prepubescent. That's like - Second grade. - You're only beginning to be like a person. Like, you know, the age of reason is seven.

So what happens to an eight-year-old who sees these images and doesn't have context for what that even is? Like, what is going on? What are these people doing with each other? - Usually one of two ways. Either they get scared and they turn it off, and you don't really hear much about it until maybe they're asked later. Like, hey, like, has this happened? Like, how old were you? And they're like, "Oh yeah, like, I remember that one time."

And they don't really jump into it. The other thing that happens is that they're exposed to it, and then they're like, "Hey, I wanna show my friend because I don't wanna do this alone." And so now we start to have like, incidental exposures that are happening to other classmates. And then it becomes a bigger thing because typically, I mean, elementary school, middle school kids, not great at secrets. (laughs) So the more you bring into that, the more it gets public.

And then some parent will find out, and then there's like, a conversation that happens. - Is this mostly boys? - They get exposed at equal rates because of how it works. And if you look at what happens, is in second grade, at that age of eight, that's when they're searching terms online for school work. And so because we ad bundle and we're trying to get more eyes on things, that's how they get exposed typically. - So you're saying that the pornography industry is effectively buying search terms- - Correct. - against second-grade social studies curriculum?

- Correct. In order to get exposure because they have 10 years even more.

- That's really heinous. - Yeah. The business model has worked. I got incensed. I was watching Elon Musk had published, like, his first board meeting on SpaceX, and I was like, kind of nerding out. I was like, "This is super cool." So I click into it, and all of a sudden there's porn on the side of my thing. And I was like, "Oh my gosh, like, this is ridiculous."

And I'm like, calling everyone I know, like, trying to get Elon to understand, like, he's got this attached to it. - Kids like Elon Musk and SpaceX, and it's cool and an influencer.

- Yeah. You should know about it. Yeah. And like, nobody cared. Nobody cared. And I was like, "Wow, you've got billions of people, like, that are probably watching this, and it's attached to it." So it truly is, to me, like a very calculated run at trying to corrupt our young generation.

- So boys and girls are getting exposed around second grade. Help me understand what is going on at that age? What's going on with them as far as their sexual identity, their sense of what sex is, like? - So if you look at it from a perspective, just physically, like, everything looks different, right? You're prepubescent. You're not gonna look like the videos that are getting presented to yourself. And so you're immediately like, thrust in this position of, where is it that I fit in this?

Because that's nothing like, is that what things are gonna be? Like, is that what it's gonna look like? You know, I'm obviously not there, so that's not good, right? Like, this is what it needs to be. And so like, there's this crisis in that space of like, will I ever be enough? Or will I ever look like that? Or will I do that? So there's like, I've had typically boys talk about that, right? And it's not a fair representation of what anything should go like or anything.

So there's this crisis of, this is how I think I need to interact. And my work a lot of times with them is, you know, girls don't

show up and just like, tell you they wanna take their clothes off and like, you know, bend over. Like, that's not how it goes. Like, you need to have a conversation, and you need to be kind, and you need to, right, like, all of those things. So there's the physical piece of them at that age struggles with like, how do I have a relationship?

And now I'm looking at my-

- Yeah, my body looks nothing like that.

- Looks nothing like that. - And if I'm a girl. In both sides.

- Right, right. But I still have the feelings of like, I might have a crush on the girl that sits next to me in class, or we might be friends on the playground, and now I've got this narrative running in my head about, am I gonna do that to her?

Like, which is terrifying for

me to look at and say like, you've got these kids now

trying to care about someone, but really fighting this

kind of natural urge that they've been introduced to. And that's the biggest

challenge that I see, like, of having those

conversations with our kids and with our families. - How is this impacting

boys and girls differently? Are there differences in the experience at that young, prepubescent, really super confusing age? Who's giving eight-year-olds

the sex talk as parents?

- Right. - Probably, I gotta imagine, not many. - No, hardly any. Girls are more social. They're more amenable to talking. They tend to be a little

bit more, in my opinion, go to parents more at that age and say if they see something. And at that age, like, the boys and girls are

pretty separate already. Like, they might be friends, but there's definitely alliances have been like, have been taken at that point.

- Yeah, they're still icky.

There's still the icky factor. - Yes. Yeah. So it's a little bit separate in that way. It's traumatic, I think, more for them. And I think that if you think about what it must look like as a child, it's almost like witnessing

an assault take place. - Well, right. Like, what's he doing to her? What's she doing to him? What's this? This all looks like pain. Is this painful? What's happening? Like, there's a lot of stuff that you can, if you try to put yourself

in a beginner's mind.

- Right. And not understanding it. And to your point of like, are kids having less sex? And it's like, well, were they presented

something that is terrifying? And so maybe it's easier to do things that don't look like that. It's to be seen how difficult

and how challenging it's going to be unwrapping some of that, like, in terms of years of after that exposure at that age. - I mean, trying to put myself back, and I'm gonna say something really like, personally embarrassing, but it's like, I remember when I was little.

I remember asking my mom. Like, I didn't know what my testicles were for. - Right. - I remember that pretty acutely 'cause it was, you know, a weird, we remember these things. The fact that I even remember that- - Conversation. - moment with clarity is itself kind of interesting. There's not a lot of conversations I remember before the age of nine with clarity, but that is one. This must be radically changing the way kids approach their parents, or don't, about their own bodies.

Like, what's happening there? - So asking about what a part is that everyone has and like, getting that explained is very different than going to a parent and asking what an action is that the parent may not even understand or know how to respond to. And then I feel like that we as a parent, we're trying to protect our kids. And so, like, protect them from this. And so do we come in, and is our first reaction anger, frustration?

We're fearful, right? This bad thing just happened, and now we've just assigned that with a negative energy versus- - It's very traumatic. - Yeah, very traumatic. - My kid, my little 8-year-old baby, comes to me and describes something that I am instantly horrified she's describing that she's seen. What's your advice? What should I do as a parent? - I would say, first of all, take a deep breath. Like, let's talk through, like, how is it that this happened?

Like, how are you feeling about it? Let's talk about what is okay and what's not okay. But very similar to the way that you might watch a TV show on TV, where you have actors and you have people that like, put on wigs and put on makeup, and they do all the things, like, there's also this other thing that we have actors, and they do these things, right? Like, I think that you explain to them at their age, right, if I have an 8-year-old.

And ask them what it is that they would like to know about it. How is it making you feel? Like, are you okay? Like, I'm here to answer those questions, right? Like, I just think that if we don't work on de-stigmatizing it, and we don't get ahead of it and talk to our kids first about it, and they kind of silently go through it without us, we've lost, right? And they're going to make

their own assumptions, and they're not going to probably put the best context on.

And they'll probably overuse and do things with that and end up in places that I've seen that, you know, escalate in dangerous ways. - Do you feel as a psychologist that works with families that, you know what, they're gonna get exposed, so you should have this conversation at seven or eight years old? And what should that conversation even be? How much of a birds in the bees do you get into at that age? - My recommendation is always like, if you're deciding to hand over access to the internet with your child, have the conversation before that.

The minute you hand them access online is the minute that you lose control and the potential could happen. If you're not okay taking your eight-year-old and dropping them off at a stadium of 80,000 people that are there to watch a game and pick them up four hours later, then why are you letting them go online with 5 billion people? Why are you letting them go and explore the dark recesses of the online world without holding their hand and explaining it to them?

I just think we have to be more realistic in that sense. And I think it starts even earlier than that. I think children, even in that toddler phase and elementary school age, before the age of eight, there's a lot of self-exploration of body parts and like, in baths. And like, you know, things happen, right? I remember my son, you know, he was in the bathtub, and he was like, "What's this mommy?" And I was like, "Sometimes that happens."

And I went and got my husband, I was like, "You should probably talk about this." You know? Like, I didn't make it weird. I was just like, "Sometimes that happens," right? And I was like, those are the conversations of like, okay, this does happen. This is a natural reaction in your body, and you should have these conversations. Same thing with young girls of understanding that you can't, it's okay to love your body and love who you are, and that this is a part of us being human.

If we talk about it in those ways, then it doesn't make it seem like it's bad. And it shouldn't be bad, right? How we present it is really the fundamental issue here. - So we get into this older zone, and you talked about some of these movements that have happened. Incels and this like, sort of relational dysfunction that's going on. What does pornography access

and use do to teenagers? - Let's add another layer, then, and put on the VR headset.

So what we know, like, in the virtual reality world, that we have like 100,000 videos per month being developed in porn. - Wow.

- And you- - It's always been the leading edge of technology. - So you put that on, and I watched a demonstration on it. And so you put that on, and then you add in a haptic technology. Haptic technology is like, imagine a yoga pant. And you put on yoga pants, and now if you have a young woman crawling up your legs to come to you, you feel the heat and the pressure from the haptic technology in a VR world.

- So we're getting into the like, world in which there's no more reproduction on planet Earth. - Right, so you could potentially lose a generation of young men that would be able to be stimulated and satisfied without ever having a connection with another human. - Break this apart for me. So what is it that this exposure does to, let's just stick with boys. What's happening there that's fundamentally unhealthy? - Most importantly, to me, would be consent. Right?

A lot of porn, and again, all porn is not created equal, right? You've got regular porn, if you wanna think of it that way. You have aggressive, you have rape porn, you have bestiality. There, I wanna say, last time I checked, was like, 130 different categories or something like that. I mean, there's a lot of different, like, nuances in that. But I think that consent, in the work that I do, it seems very non-consensual, and it doesn't seem like it is something that both parties are kind of in the same place with.

So that bothers me the most. The other part, I think, is that ability to turn on, like as a teenage boy is talking about it. Like, if you can just like watch something in three minutes, like, you're where you need to be, that's not really how in real life you're gonna interact with a girlfriend. And that's not really how you're going to get aroused in real life, unless you're asking her to watch that with you. There's a disconnect, and it's harder or it's different.

And so if it's easier to do

it without a person there, then why wouldn't you just do that? Like, so how do you connect the dots for that? - So you had mentioned- - [Lisa] Having never been a teenager before myself. - Well, you had mentioned, like, 20-year-old erectile dysfunction. Do you have numbers on what that looks like? - I don't know the statistics. I just know, like, it was hard for me to connect the dots in the beginning.

This is like 10 years ago and thinking, "Oh gosh."

- I know it's gone up substantially.

- Yeah. And it can't have the same flood into that dopamine reward pathway. It gets just indoctrinated with, this is my norm, and this is what I need to see. I mean, I've like, marriages falling apart over it. It's terrifying. - There seems to be a feedback loop. You know, my conversation with Warren Farrell touched on this. There's like a ratchet effect of it getting more and more extreme the more time you spend with it.

Is that actually what's happening with- - It's exactly what happens. - Biologically, that your brain is like, not, it's just like, "No, that's boring. That's not interesting." - Two things. I think, yes, there is a ratcheting effect, and you need more in order to get the same reaction that you had, but I also think that they tie in and start to introduce the same way they do, in other words, like, if you like this, you're gonna like that.

But I think that that's it. Like, they start to track you, and they start to like, give you and introduce things. And then you can understand, like, how they get to that place, because I shouldn't have, you know, 20 something or 30-year-olds that are having like, problems or trying to download like, child porn or rape porn or those kinds of things, unless there's some sort of dysfunctional path that got them there. That's just not a normal behavior.

- As a dad, what advice do you have for me for how to talk to my son, not just as a kid, but even as he gets older, about porn and sexual relationships? - Like, sitting down and saying like, "Here's the good, the bad, and the ugly of everything, right?" And say, like, there is this industry, and it is an industry that is built on selling a product to a consumer that has this natural need. And consuming that, for any sort of recreational purposes, if you're with a partner, and you're both consenting to that, is very different than individually consuming that and then getting taken into these kind of like, nefarious areas on it.

Two adults that wanna watch pornography, like, I'm not against it, but understand what the industry is. Understand how maybe some of the people got into the industry. Maybe understand them as humans. Understand whether or not

that's what you wanna support or not support. - Right. You had mentioned off the air, so to speak, your work with human trafficking organizations. So where have you seen the connectivity there? Because again, one of the nice things about Gen Z, although it gets perverted, is that they are very socially conscious as a generation.

What should I tell my kids about the connection between porn and human trafficking? - You know, I think, specifically, it's connected in ways that it's a consumable, right? And when you have somebody who has a need to be met, and you can't find maybe a natural partner, they're going to go out and try to buy that natural partner. It's almost like, you know, you can always tell if it's not somebody's, if they're a serial killer, it's not their first kill because of some of the...

I know it's getting dark, but like, you can tell there's- - Getting to "Quantico" time, your FBI time. - But there's some certain things, right, that you can tell. And so in the trafficking world, a lot of times that you've got women, and you have consumers that come in that really are replaying and looking to kind of play out some of these fantasies that they see in the porn industry. 'Cause you can go in, you can buy a product.

A lot of times now we're seeing a lot of the post drug dealers, right? That you have to buy a product to sell and then the product is gone. Whereas you can resell a product if it's a human. And so we we're seeing a huge amount of trafficking that is increasing because they've realized that they know how to do this, and they're really good businessmen, and they tend to know how to manage their products better. - Am I hearing that you're saying that there's like a movement from drug dealers into human traffickers?

- A lot of ex-drug dealers have moved into trafficking. - Is there any advice you have for parents from a tools perspective for how to try to protect our kids as best we can from, you know, unhealthy exposure to pornography? - There's definitely like, screen monitoring and like, ways to put on protections. Like, you could put in age. Like, I think my kids are 14 and 15 now, and I think that

online they
show that they're six and seven because I was like, way ahead of the game.

I'm like, I know I need to
put their date way later. - Oh, so like, you make their age younger whenever there's an age thing.
- Correct, correct Yeah, I make them much younger because in the US we have COPPA. They've decided that
the online protection of our children is over at 13, and after 13, you don't have
to protect them anymore, which I find insane. So I made them younger
in order to protect them. So it's like a simple
hack that you can do.

But manage what they're looking
at and what they're seeing. If you're gonna let them on YouTube. YouTube Kids does a much better
job monitoring that, right? Once they get into
their high school years, they're not gonna be
happy with YouTube Kids. But when they're younger, right, you can do that, and
you can explain to them, "Here's why we're doing this, and this is what I'm trying
to protect you from." And then they tend to be better reporters if you are honest with them on why you're
trying to protect them.

- Have you dug in at all that, like, you know, Disney has like the Circle. There's these sort of like,
VPN-like filters, systems. Do you feel like we've
got pretty good tools at our disposal?

- We do have them. Yeah. I mean, I think that Circle is good. Family Time, iOS, is
like a really good one. - A buddy of mine, you know, works at a company called
Canopy that uses, like, AI to-
- Yeah. Oh, that's cool.

- to try to filter things and. - Yeah, I think all of the tools that are out there use them. And I think as a parent,
you have to know that
you can't protect them from everything. We can't bubble wrap
them and pretend like, that the tools are gonna stop it. - They'll just grab their buddy's phone. - Right. But like,
maybe instead of 100 exposures, they're only gonna have five. That's way better from a
psychological perspective.

And so use the tools that you can. Have the conversation so
that you can make sure that they're making the
good choices online. - So just because I know that they can still
probably get around it, that shouldn't make me throw up my hands. I should still use this stuff. - You should. I
would still use it. Absolutely. I think sometimes parents
are like, they're like, "Well, it's pretty expensive. It's 7.99 a month, or it's 10.99 a month."

And I was like, "Do you go to Starbucks? Like, how much are you spending, right? Are you autoloading that card?" Look at where you're putting your investment. Is there anything more valuable to you than your child? And think through, like, is it worth it? To me, it always has been. - While we were grabbing lunch together, you showed me a fairly disturbing YouTube video from "Grand Theft Auto." This is our transition to the discussion of video games.

- Gaming. Okay.

- Now, I am a gamer for a long time. Let's talk about video games as a whole. What's your take? Are they good? Are they bad? I'm sure it's somewhere in between, but like, how do you think about the role video games play in the health of our kids? - I think that there's some that are great and some that can be collaborative. Like, fun fact, during COVID, the number one video game cohort was like, 35-year-old women.

So I think all the moms-

- 35-year-old women. - [Lisa] Yeah, they were like, jumping, I think- - Which game was this? Or games. - It was just like, who's like, jumping on to gaming at the highest rate?

- Oh, for the first time. - Yeah, and so it was COVID, like, I think these moms were trying to figure out how to participate with my child. 'Cause we were all locked in, right? So I thought that was kind of interesting because it was a collaborative fun behavior and thing that you could do together.

I think that they're not all made equal, obviously. "Grand Theft Auto" is not a driving game. (John laughs) But they have like, some protections in place where it's kind of like the old TV PG, R rated, things like that.

- Yeah, there's a rating system.

- Right? So that rating system is helpful. Personally, looking at the science of the brain reaction, like, violent video games, first-person shooters to me are damaging, too damaging. Like, I wouldn't want anybody that I loved on them.

- Really?

- I know. I'm sorry. No, developing brains.

And sensitivity, right? Like, do you have a child who's more empathetic in nature, or do you have a child who isn't? Shockingly, having done the crazy stuff I've done, to me, I'm very sensitive as a person. And so like, if I watch too much violent content, it starts to like, erode into me. It's like, if you have a child that is like that, like, maybe it wouldn't be okay for them to like, play those games.

- Stick to Mario Brothers. - Or NBA or football or some of those things, although those ones are getting a little bit more kind of on the dicey side, you know, these days. You know, it's John Madden. You know, rest his soul. Like, it is not the same Madden game as it used to be. But you look at those things as a parent and like, participate, sit down with them, and do that. But the violent video games and some of these games that have explicit ratings, like, to me, it's just you're introducing this place that can like, hurt a child.

And it makes their brain fire up similar to like, somebody in the military. So you can see that on the scans. - So I remember Tipper Gore and Joe Lieberman, and there was this whole cohort of politicians in the '90s who were really all up in arms about how violent video games are corrupting our youth and the reason for gun violence and all this sort of stuff. My understanding is that the attempts to research this have not borne out that that's true.

That there's not been a correlation between playing violent video games and actually taking that out in the real world. - True. Yeah-

- Am I right about that? - You're absolutely right. Yeah. And I was actually part of that. APA, like, we like, dove in.

- Oh, wow. - And it was really interesting 'cause I think I was maybe 30 years younger than anybody on the panel. Like, you know, it's like all of these kind of like, psychologists like, looking at all the research and this meta-analysis.

And there really isn't any connection that shows violent video games begets violent behavior. Violent video games does increase aggressive behavior and aggressive tendencies, but it doesn't create an actionable. So you have to think about

your brain is highlighted. Like, you're playing a first-person shooting game, right, and you're like, crawling around-

- They're super fun. - So yeah, super fun, right? Like, and I've watched many of them. And I was on this whole thing. But if you look at yourself and you feel yourself and how fun you are, like, in that moment, and then you ask yourself, really, how long does it take me to kind of settle down and get to a relaxed state, it's probably gonna be about 30 to 40 minutes later before you calm down.

- This is really interesting because this is something I've observed. So my, you know, my son is a gamer. All of

them are online connected. He's on with his buddies
in a Discord channel, and they're having basically like a phone, well, it's more than a phone conversation 'cause
they're all screaming
like lunatics all the time. There's hard stuff to disentangle
here with his experience. I wanna understand how you
think about this socially. Help me think about
what is good and healthy in terms of gaming,
not about the violence, but just about gaming
and the time that's spent and the, like, casino-like
elements and what's unhealthy.

'Cause I also noticed with him growing up, there is like a ramp-down period. Like, if he's been in an intense
game, when he comes out of it, it's
like he's like, zombified. Disentangle this for me. What's good? What's unhealthy? How should I distinguish
these things? - So I like the social aspect. I think, like, having a community that you belong to is great. A lot of
them use Discord. And as anything in technology, the good comes the bad, right?

You can be part of a
server that is private with your friends, or you could be part of
like a global simp server, which you probably don't want your child to be part of, right? - A global simp server?
What's this? - A simp is-
- I know what a simp is. I think I do. But what
is a global simp server? - Well, just like, it's open, right? And so anybody can kind of join into it.

And so you'll see these factions of kids- - And they're all pathetic together? Why would you self-identify this? - I
have no idea, but
it's a belonging, right? We have somebody who gets us, and then you've got women
in those servers that, you know, like to participate. And like, the things I
have seen are not normal, and they're not typical. So they are able to stay connected, and I think that that's a
great thing. And I think that as long as
you have an understanding of who you're talking to and
who's in that group, fantastic.

That goes back to that dichotomy
of IRL and like, online. And do you really know and appreciate who you're dealing with? I just had a case where
somebody presented, and she was just horrified that somebody in her Discord server was threatening to come
and like, kill her family, and that if she didn't stop
talking to this other person in the server because this person like... You know, and it's like, okay, how does a
14-year-old
navigate that, right?

- Death threats from strangers. - Right, and I worry a little bit about like, younger kids, like, having headsets on, where it's not open, right? I always say like, the headset thing like, really bothers me because from a psychology standpoint, if I am piping in really caustic, like, hurtful behaviors and language, it's going to make me feel bad as a person, and now nobody else can see that. So that makes me a little bit concerned on that end.

The good parts, if you're with people you love and you care about, and they're friends, and everybody is happy about that, fantastic. It helps you stay connected. So I don't have any problem with that. - There's a psychologist, Peter Gray, who's written a book called "Free to Learn." I interviewed him several years ago. And the book is great. It's mostly about education, about school. And he's basically like, top down, sit-in-a-desk school sucks. It's antithetical to everything we know about and the way humans learn.

He basically said that open world collaborative games like "World of Warcraft" aren't as good as going outside together and playing in the front yard, but they're better than nothing in a world where our kids are no longer doing that the way they used to. How do you think about moderating that? - We did a rule in my own home that we didn't have any video games from Monday through Thursday, Friday, Saturday. You could earn your minutes.

And in my house you could earn your minutes if you play a musical instrument and you did a sport. Don't care what the sport is. You start a sport, you finish a sport. That's how we've managed it, and that's what I recommend, is like, looking at that balance of, are we actually building them up physically and emotionally and socially in ways that afford them to have those minutes online? - In our last conversation you talked about something called process addiction.

And I know in your writing, you know, one of the examples you use of a process addiction versus a chemical addiction is gambling. There's a lot of stuff in video games that are directly derived from like, the insights from the casinos. The most obvious ones are like, the short games, the sort of zinga games that have the same exact sound. - [Lisa] "Candy Crush." - "Candy Crush." You know, how should I understand like, the impact that the stimulation of games has on the brain?

- I have a great video of a "World of Warcraft" kid whose mom deleted his account. I use that often. He's like a teenager. And he loses his

mind. I try to share it with parents, and I say, "You know, this is their identity. They're so connected, and it's their entire world. It would be like me coming in and taking your entire resume, burning it, and saying, 'None of that matters. None of the school you did, none of the experience that you had.

You have gotta start from scratch.'" Because that's their whole identity. And so when you have a child that gets to that point, that's where I would say that there's that addictive or overuse. Like, that you're at that place where if they're dependent on it, and that that's all that matters to them, now you've got yourself a problem. And you should look at how do we unwind that? I think that there's genetic components in that. I think that there's behavioral, emotional components in it.

I think that you look at the family and say like, "Okay, what is it that everybody else in the family is doing?" You know, are we all kind of isolated, and we're all on our own screens, and nobody's really paying attention? That happens too. - Are there time guardrails? I think you had mentioned something like two hours a day for screen time in general. One of the things that's weird about screen time is there's different screen time.

So there's homework on the computer, there's being on Instagram, there's playing "WoW" with your buddies, there's composing. My son loves music. He's actually like, taught himself Apple Logic and builds songs, like beats and stuff, in Logic. Each of those is like, a fundamentally different kind of activity. It's still on a self-illuminating screen 24 inches from his eyes. So how should I think about limits and parsing the differences between homework versus games versus social versus internet browsing and YouTube versus content consumption, like just bingeing "The Office" on Netflix?

- So it's a great point 'cause it's not all made equally, and I think I look at it as a digital diet. I look at the pyramid, right? Like, if you look at the fact that that base of educational media, creative media, I love the fact that he's like, using something to create something independent and unique to himself. Apple Logic, that is using tech as a tool, not as a toy. So the quick line that I teach parents is like, is it tech as a tool, or is it a toy?

So if it's educational, it's a tool. If it's creative, it's a tool. Are they doing art? Are they doing something that's using their brain and that creativity, which is fantastic. If it's a toy, meaning I'm just gaming, or I'm hanging out with my friends, or something like that, what I would say is less than two hours of that media. - Of toy time. - Of toy time. Yeah. And that's where you get into

kind of like those places that I worry about if it's more than that.

- And then what about "Minecraft?" I remember he like, taught himself the scripting language for how to use command blocks to do automation things so that he could be a bear because he was like, replacing himself with the bear as he ran around. It's like, is that toy? Is that tool? "Minecraft" is a kind of Lego. So how should I think about stuff? There's some things like that that sit in the middle. - It does seem like it sits in the middle.

And I think that if you've got a kid that's learning coding, and I tell every parent I can get my hands on, like, teach your child how to code. Like, this is the future of America, and those of us that don't know how to code are probably screwed. So we should know and understand that language. So good for him, but that he's taken that and blended it from a toy to a tool in order to make it work for him.

You would ask yourself like, okay, that's what he's doing, and it's kind of like your Legos. But does he have an outside balance? Is he physical in any sense? Is he doing anything outside? You know, what's his cardiovascular, like- - Health. - system and health and all of those things? Like, are we taking care of that piece of it? That part still needs to be nurtured. - The digital universe, gaming, Discord platforms, it's all fundamentally social.

This transitions us to the next and sort of final thing I'm gonna talk to you about today, which is cyberbullying. Can you give me a little bit of a primer on what's going on on these digital platforms? - So I would say anything that you remember as a kid of where somebody was like, mean to you or picked on you, or those kind of things, happens in the digital world. Cyberbullying had put a lot of labels around it, and there's different things that can happen.

There can be flaming, there can be ostracizing. There can be all of these different kind of categories of it. But the truth of the matter is it's like, somebody is in an online situation, and somebody else in that online situation is able to create harm and make you feel bad. And that pain and that hurt, if you ask them to stop and it continues, that's the one category that they require on cyberbullying, is that you have to have asked them to stop, and they didn't.

- Oh, interesting.

- Right? So in terms of under legal definitions, cyberbullying happens every day. And kids normalize it at this point because they're like, "Oh yeah, that's just Joe. Like, he got mad, and he just spouted off or whatever." But when you're targeted, that's the case I think that you're talking about, is like, you're being targeted because you're different, or you're something about it. - One thing I've heard is... I got bullied as a kid.

I think most, you know, most people get bullied in some way at some point in their lives. I kind of feel like we're overcompensating in our culture around talking about bullying. And maybe I'm way off on this. So I'm gonna throw something out for you to push back on. Is a certain amount of bullying healthy because we have to toughen up? And does cyberbullying changed the game compared to being like, picked on in the physical world?

- So I'm sorry, right, that you were bullied, 'cause that does suck.
- That's fine. Screw them. - And I got bullied when I was a kid 'cause I wore hand-me-down clothes. You know, I probably smelled. I don't know. But the difference was I could go home, and the difference was that you could go home. And you were going into a family and a unit that loved you and protected you, and unless somebody had your phone number that they could call you, you didn't have to see them.

And you had this reprieve for a very specific amount of time where you could kind of regain your footing. In the cyber world, with the attachment of these devices and the need to constantly look to see that fear of missing something, or somebody sent me a message, and you're constantly always checking something and trying to stay in that, that's where that cyberbullying changes things, in my opinion. And that's why we have these high rates of self-harm and suicide, is because I think that there's no escaping, and they don't have a safe space anymore.

And the safe space would be let's take away the device, which is like taking away part of their body. That's not gonna solve it. It's not ribbing at that point. It is calculated, and it's painful, and it's intentional. - The word trauma gets abused in our society I think today. That's my opinion. But there is trauma. Trauma's real. Bullying can lead to trauma that's real. How should I understand what that is? Where has the line been crossed, that my child's being traumatized?

- The pieces that I see the most injury in are the things that you can't change of yourself. So a lot of times they're much more sophisticated in their bullying. They're much more calculated in it. So they're saying things to you about maybe that your family doesn't have X, Y, and Z, or the fact that you don't have access to go on the vacations that I do, or that you look a certain way, or you whatever.

The things that you can't change about yourself. Cyberbullying has gotten very pointed towards those things where I'm really trying to hurt you, and I'm gonna say the worst thing I possibly can. And it's easier to do that behind the screen than it is to your face. - One of the things that seems to be connected to this is FOMO and the like, ability to be somewhere and pointedly say, "Hey, you're not here." Like, this sort of intentional exclusion or showing off.

Is that part of the landscape? - So there's a new app that just came out recently last year called BeReal. If I send you a notification, you have to post right this second. But if you don't, then it's gonna time shame you, and it's gonna be like, "Oh, Lisa didn't post at that minute. She like, did it an hour later." which is gonna show that like, maybe I took time to put makeup on, or. Like, all of this like, horribleness that happens with it.

And everybody's like, "No, no, no, it's BeReal. It's supposed to catch you in your moment of what you're doing instead of like, these curated moments that we usually see on Instagram." And if you haven't seen "Fake Famous," it's a fantastic documentary that came out during COVID. But "Fake Famous" really shows how you can create your own, like, influence status. And they literally take people, three people that are like, completely oblivious and make them famous. It is fascinating because you see the psychological derailment that occurs in two out of the three of those people.

But that's where I think like, there is a fear of missing out, but I think it's more than that. I think it's really more about that one-upsmanship of like, what am I doing versus what you're doing. Are you part of this party or not? All of those things. And that's why those apps are getting, they're so popular, because you can show that. - It feels really hard as a parent to navigate because I feel like a dinosaur.

I don't even know where I'd start. The language, the lingo, what's important and what's not. I'm already a cringe factory,

but it would be like, for the dads out there that have like, a 13-year-old daughter who's experiencing this stuff, how do we navigate this? How do we talk about it? How do we not be like, so horrendously irrelevant seeming that we are completely unhelpful and just seem like we don't get it, and leave me alone, and they run to their room? (laughs) - Yeah.

I mean, it's tough because I think like, that age group specifically is the most targeted and the most hurt by all of the social, particularly girls. And I think that if you as a parent or as a dad can really sit down and say like, "I love you more than I do the yes to let you have this, and I love you enough to say no and fight this for you," I think if you can keep them off of it and keep them understanding that, that's best.

If you've already opened that Pandora's box and they're already there, I think then you have to be way more of an active, like, participant, where you sit down and you say, like, "Every Saturday we're gonna go and we're gonna get a coffee, we're gonna go for a ride, and we're just gonna chill. And our tech stays home. You'd have to take off your watch." You know, and just unplug and teach them in these little micro-moments, it's okay.

Somebody doesn't have to know where you are at all times. - What do you say to the parent who hears, "Take it away. Keep it away from them longer." - It's too hard.
- Good luck. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- It's like, all of her friends have it, and she's already feeling excluded. All you're doing is condemning her to total exclusion. It's a network effect problem. If all their friends are on it, and I wanna hold the line for their mental health, how do I do that?

- I think you build those times and you build those experiences knowing that in the situation right at that moment, it may not feel like it's a payoff, right? Oh, I gotta go like, with my dad, and we're gonna go for a ride. We go every Saturday. But I promise you, having done this for 20 years and being in therapy, the people that come into my office the most is adults come in and they're like, "You know what?

My dad didn't show up." Or, "You know, I was in this sport, and I never had anybody, like, in the stands for me." Or, "I didn't have this." It's not the people that are like, "You know what, like, my dad like, actually like made me go fishing with him every weekend, and it was like the, you know, most irritating thing in the world." Those aren't the people I hear. And in fact, I did that for my dad.

For a 75th birthday, I
picked 75 different things that he actually taught me. Like, I hated learning
how to change a tire. I emptied oil in an oil pan
and dumped it illegally, which I tell him, like, you know, like I will hear at some point. - I love that we created an
EPA Superfund to your dad.
- Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Like, you know, all of these things. But I know how to change oil. I know how to change a
windshield wiper.

I know how to put a dimmer switch in. I hated every time that he made me take that time with him at that
moment 'cause I was a teenager, and I didn't wanna have it. But I will never, ever have
something more valuable to me than the time that he gave me and the tools that he taught me. So I just say push
through. Teach them that this
isn't as important as this and being together and
learning those things and doing those things.

- So what I'm not hearing is take it away. I'm hearing, and we talked about this in our last conversation that
it is about having moderation. I mean, moderation-
- Moderation. - in a certain sense, but also like, healthy deprivation moments. Like, the Orthodox Jews
have it figured out with the Saturday Sabbath. I have a lot of Orthodox
friends, and they're like, "Yep." They shut it off. - Yeah, just turn it
off and like, walk away.

I think that, to me, it's
having quiet and peace and like, having that space is
what we don't give our kids. So if you can disengage and just say, "Look, it's not forever. We're just gonna put it
here,
and we're gonna do this. We'll be back in an hour." And then you teach them that
it's not the end of the world. It typically takes
about two weeks of like, showing them that pattern
that it actually is okay, where they start to take it over and like, actually appreciate and want that space, because
it feels more
relaxing and it helps them.

But it's usually about
14 days that I see that. - If my son or daughter
is being bullied online, you know, so you've
talked about one thing, which is just providing
space to step away from that, leave it there. What other tactics are at my disposal? - So depending on your
school, some schools handle it poorly,
some schools handle it well. Most schools that I've talked to, I would say 99% of them,
have a zero bullying policy.

So they are pretty much on top of it and don't allow it, particularly if it's under their period of time that it's occurring on. So sometimes the school can be helpful, sometimes they can make it worse. So you kind of, your child- - How so? How would they make it worse? - They can make it worse by actually pulling the child into the office and saying, "Oh, like, by the way, John told me that you're bullying him."

Is that true or not true?" And then John goes out and tells everybody. - Being a rat. - Yeah, yeah. Right? So that's like, stitches end up in ditches, is what the saying is for the kids, right? So that can make it worse in that scenario. I mean, legislatively, if it's really bad, and I've had some cases that are really, really bad, where there's like, threats and things like that that are happening, then legally you can call any police station.

And there's actually, yeah, there's harassment, stalking. There's all these cyber digital legislations that have come through to protect you from a legal perspective, in order to get law enforcement involved, in order to shut that down. And then I think that the best way is to deal with it like, with your child and say, "All right, like, how did this start? Like, how can I help you? Here's a couple of things." I talk about green, yellow, and red to parents, and I was like, "A green moment is a child that can handle it themselves."

A yellow moment is they're not really sure it's causing them conflict, and they don't know if they need an adult to help them or not. And red is my child is distressed, and I need to step in and take this off their plate." And so anytime it gets from that yellow/red zone, I sit down and say, "Hey, these are the things that we could do. How about we have a conversation?" And I usually find that other parents don't like their kid to be a bully, and we can have conversations about that and like, handle it directly that way.

- If you've got a teenage son or daughter and they come home and you say, "How's school? How's life?" fine is probably the answer you get. Are there things I can look for that would indicate something's going on that they're not talking to me about? - A lot of times you'll have isolation, like, where they're pulling themselves out, they're withdrawing from like, things that they were normally interested in. Like, you'd watch a show with them, and they didn't wanna do it anymore.

They're going to their room. Look at behavioral changes in the sense of maybe being irritable, like, fighting back, like, being really short-tempered,

those kind of things, which I know sounds like
a normal middle school, like a high school student generally. So it's hard, but if as a parent you get that feeling
that there's something
that's changing in them, and you see those changes, like, you see them kind of pulling back, and they're just like,
not smiling as much, or they're not kind of
getting out of the groove and not playing with the dog
or the cat or whatever it is, like, those are like, the
key signs that I say like, "You need to have a
conversation and say like, 'Hey, I'm worried.'"

Parents sometimes think
that if you talk about it, it makes it happen, and that's not true. Having a conversation and saying, "Hey, I'm
checking in with you." I heard this story. There's this kid. He was
like, under a lot of stress. Parents had no idea. And I just realized, like,
we haven't had this talk. Like, how are things going with
you? How about your friends? Right? Do it in a way where it's like, you know, anybody struggling in your
world?

And a lot of times kids
know about other kids. We as the parent layer
don't know about it. So having those conversations. Like, everybody okay in your circle? What are you
burdening? 'Cause a lot of kids
end up being these kind of microtherapists for each other, and they don't really have the tools. - They have
therapy TikTok. - Yes, they have therapy
TikTok. (laughs) Right. Not always a sound piece of advice- - The wheels are coming off the bus.

One of the things I've heard
from a lot of different people is that family dinner is
this really special thing. Do you see that the same way? - It's mindset. So a family dinner is establishing
and creating boundaries and permission and
expectations of everyone that this is special. You could do the same thing at night. Like, I tuck my kids to bed.
They'll be horrified, but I
tuck them into bed every night. And every night, whether or not my daughter
and I are arguing or not, she's like, "You're
gonna tuck me in, right?"

Right? Like, and that's
a special moment in life- - I do the same thing with my son. We say a prayer every night.
We have since he was a baby. I did it last night. He's 17. He's probably embarrassed I've
said this. It doesn't matter. - It's okay because that's special. That's a special sacred time where, whether you pray
or not, but that moment that you have

carved out to have a ritual and have something where you actually connect with someone, and it's special to you, that's what matters.

So I know that the dinner is a nice placeholder. I think that that's why the statistics bear that out. But I really would say it's really more about the Saturday drive with Dad. - Is there anything in our time together that, you know, we haven't had a chance to talk about that, as a dad, you feel like you really want to say, or that we really didn't get a chance to talk about here? - One of the things that we didn't talk about is like, who is responsible for this relationship managing this technology?

Oftentimes what I hear is one person manages it, and the other one's like, "They've got it." And so if Lisa has it and she's managing it, you don't really have to ask questions 'cause you trust her. And so you don't always have all the insights, and you don't really talk through. And it's a lot of ownership on whichever parent is managing that technology. And so I think that it makes a lot of sense to have that conversation with your spouse.

Really understanding like, what is my role here? Right? What is it that I can do? How can I support you? How tough is this being? Like, do you need a break from that? In the beginning, my marriage, like, we would take turns doing the finances. And it was like, I just had this thing. Like, I never wanted to be like my mom. I wanted to always know like, where everything was. And then pretty soon I was like, "This is a lot of work confirmed," just feeling.

But I wanted to know, and I wanted to know that I could do it. And I think as dads, oftentimes they're burdened more often than not with the technology piece. - This is true. - Yeah. And it's a lot. And I think taking a moment to recognize, like, you could miss something, and that's okay. And understanding as dad, you're doing the best you can, and if you need help, or you need to like, talk to someone or whatever, like, it's okay to be able to be that dad who reaches out and is like, "How are you handling this?" or whatever.

'Cause I think I don't see that dad community talking as much as they do the mom community. - I mean, that's what

we're trying to do here with Dad Saves America, is model that. Is to say, hey, we aren't as inclined to do that. So we're trying to throw our hat into the ring with this show and with these conversations. I think this is a good subject to kind of wrap out on. We have the ability to basically create a digital panopticon for our family.

And I am living there 'cause we got all kinds of cameras. And how do you think about what is and isn't good about that? 'Cause that's part of our reality now, this sort of like, I've got a tracking device in my pocket or on my wrist at all times, and I know that. - I think that's that privacy piece of like, we are all being watched, right? License plate readers on like, all of our corners and all of the things.

Like, it's really hard to disappear in today's society. The psychology of it for kids, I think a lot of times that's a lot of that pushback from them, where they kind of intentionally push boundaries in ways. And they're like, "Well, I know you know anyway." And it's reminiscent of like, a kid that might be like, practicing a piano and like, loudly saying, "I know you're recording me to see if I do it or not, right?" back in the day, because they thought their parent was like, tracking how many minutes that they've spent online or play their piano or whatever.

- Now we actually get reports with graphs. It's in our email inbox at the end of every day. - Exactly. Yeah, yeah. We get notifications of our garage door opened or whatever. And so I think it creates this false sense of security for ourselves in many ways, that we think that our kids are safer because they're being tracked. And that's not true. And I think that parents should know that. I think the children are safer, the ones that are socially aware, the ones that are paying attention to their environment, the ones that are not like this walking around.

- Well, that's the thing that's interesting about this. Because the safety net problem of this connectedness, it's kind of part and parcel with the helicopter parenting. It's like, it's NSA parenting. It's, oh, well, I'm out doing whatever, but I know like, I've got like a real time bat signal for Mom or Dad to show up if anything happens, because my phone will notify them that there's something happening. So I know I don't have to really worry.

- Oh, absolutely. But it's working in opposite ways in many cases. Like, we had a lockdown at our school. A kid saw something happen. It happened to be a kid jumping over a fence with a computer charger, but the computer charger had fallen. And so the block was like, moved, and it looked like it was a gun. - Looked kind of like a gun. - And so the kids did what they were supposed to do, and they reported it, and a lockdown occurred.

There were kids tweeting and sending stuff out in live time in reality, in our campus, showing where they were, who was with them, all of the things. We had international reaction to the lockdown. I live in Cave Creek. It's a little country town, off grid, like, is, you know. And we've got international responses of people, like, weighing in 'cause they wanted to be part of this frenzy. And the reality is, is they would've been much safer had none of those tweets gone out, right?

Because if you really do have an active shooter, they can track- - Hey, shooter, here I am. - Here I am. And a lot- - I'm in the science lab on the second floor. - Yeah. And a lot of parents think it's safer, but the reality is it's not. Because now we as parents are like, "I'm gonna call my kid because they're in a lockdown." And if you have a gunman that's actually in that room, and that phone goes off, or the kid tries to answer it, where do you think the attention of the gunman's gonna go?

- I feel obliged to say that, don't worry, viewer, your kid's more likely to die from a lightning strike- - Yes, it's true. - than in a school shooting. - [Lisa] Totally. Absolutely. - Your drive to school is more dangerous than any other thing you're doing. - Yes. Yeah. And again- - But. - Right. 'Cause not to fearmonger. But I'm just saying like, we create these narratives in our head. Like, it's safer, and it's not safer.

And it's not safer to have like, a location service. Like, I will get home tonight, and it doesn't matter whether you were able to track me or not. Right? I want you to feel trust in that. And that's the part where I think we're teaching our kids. If we don't teach our kids that that's okay, to go kind of unplug and like, be okay off grid or those things, we're teaching them that

constant surveillance is what is keeping you safe.

And it's not. That's not what's keeping you safe. It makes you feel that way from a psychological perspective because you have the data. And what it really creates is this need for more data and need for more time and screen time to pay attention to it. - You know, the book "The Coddling of the American Mind" talks about this, like, ideology of safetyism; that we've shifted, in a sense, from liberty, from risk-taking to safety, culturally. We've spent a lot of our time together talking about the ways in which the digital landscape is unsafe for our kids.

But how do you think about the kind of culture that we have, where we're heading, and where we maybe should be mindful? - [Lisa] That's a big question. - It is. - I worry a bit about this kind of futuristic, you know, calling something meta doesn't mean that that's what it is, right? We already have a virtual reality platform and people can go to, go and come as they please. Building out a world where we can create avatars of ourselves and pretend like it's real life.

Like, if I can pick the clothes that I'm wearing and the house that I'm in and all of those things, I worry about that kind of digital divide that is occurring. You know, we're so, I guess, sensitive to the fact that we wanna make sure everybody is okay in this world, right? We have like, all have a footing. And we wanna make sure that people aren't marginalized. Well, imagine yourself in a position where you are in a space where you don't have enough, and now you've got this virtual world where you can't even participate, or you can't even, like, go in there and feel whole.

I worry about that because I feel like there's gonna be kind of these factions that are created and different worlds, like TikTok and TikTok alt. And so I don't know where that's going. I know that we can't stop it. - Right. - Right? So I think that we have to really pay attention to that kind of moral/ethical guide of, where's that ethical ground? And how do we teach this generation and the generations to come after that that you are a steward of yourself in the real life and on these online worlds?

And how do you become a better advocate and a better citizen in both of those places? - I think it's a great place to stop. Lisa, thank you for being back on Dad Saves America. - Thank you for having me again. (air whooshing)