

# Growing Up in Public with Devorah Heitner

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That was Devorah Hytner on psychologists off the clock.

**Yael Schonbrun:** We are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile high Denver, Colorado, author of ACT Daily Journal, the Act Daily Card Deck, and the upcoming book ACT for Burnout.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

**Jill Stoddard:** And from Coastal New England. I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, The Big Book of ACT Metaphors and the upcoming Imposter No More.

**Debbie Sorensen:** We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Jill Stoddard:** Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Hi everyone, this is Yael. I'm here with Debbie to introduce an episode with the author Devorah Heitner, who's written a couple of books.

Her most recent called Growing Up in Public, Coming of Age in the Digital World. and I loved meeting with her and having this conversation because her work touches on so many important topics in our modern world, the role of technology, privacy, intrinsic motivation, and how, apps like grade apps can interfere with our motivation, trust between parents and children, connectedness, and how technology can interfere or help grow connection.

So to me, this conversation and this book are really perfectly timed and really important for parents, children, and community members to be tapping into because she offers so much wisdom on these really complicated topics. And so Debbie, I was just curious what stuck out for you in this conversation.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, this was a really helpful one for me. I think all of us who are parents are navigating this world of technology and YouTube and social media and TikTok, and it's so different from my own childhood, back in the Pretty much the 80s is the kind of the core of my childhood and this didn't even exist.

And I think what I really appreciate about her is that she's very thoughtful and she lands in a little bit of this middle ground, right? I know that some families just have a very strong no stance on technology in general. And I understand that and respect that. , and that's not really where I'm landing, I think everything got so complicated with, with COVID and technology, and she talks about that, but I think I'm really focused on trying to teach them responsible use, trying to teach my kids how to manage it instead of having it be this forbidden fruit, where I lay down really hard on the no access.

, I know my kids have, which is why. friends who are in that whole spectrum, some kids who have some pretty unlimited access to it. And so I just appreciate she's thoughtful. It's more about having conversations with your kids about it and teaching them skills. And what are you trying to work on?

And I really appreciate her voice on this really tricky terrain. I think,

**Yael Schonbrun:** Absolutely. In the book, she gave some advice, for example, don't snoop on your kids texts or don't look at their grades without their permission. And then she sort of would follow it up with, if you do do that, here's some advice for ways to do it that are most likely to foster trust and connection between you and your kids.

And so I do think she strikes a nice balance of giving some advice, but doing it in a really nuanced way that you can figure out like how to follow the advice, given your own constraints and circumstances.

And I think that's really powerful. And as you said, you know, she talks about it in all these ways that are so tricky for parents. And one topic that we got into pretty heavily was the topic of sex and pornography and how we parent around that. And, and I'm curious how that part of the conversation felt for you.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, I love that it's consistent with what we've talked about on the podcast before we've had some previous episodes about how to have hard conversations with kids. We've had a few where we mentioned the research on the more you talk to kids early in a developmentally appropriate way about sex education and body safety and pornography and who can and can't touch you and take pictures of you and body safety, that we know that kids who are able to talk openly with their parents about that are, that's a protective factor for things like childhood sexual abuse.

And so I love that consistent message. We had a couple of episodes in the past of Feather Berkower comes to mind, who's a childhood sexual abuse prevention Educator talking about that and she has some recommendations for developmentally appropriate Books for parents and for kids and I mean for a lot of us.

This is another area that gets tricky It's like how do you talk to a three year old a five year old a 15 year old about these matters and often we don't know what to say or how to say it. I actually just recently previewed a book, too, that was terrific called Sex Ed for the Stroller Set, which is funny because she's talking about how do you teach body words and start sort of early with sex education with really, really young kids so that they're not uncomfortable talking about their bodies and private parts.

So if you have a young kid, you might want to check that book out. And of course, there's book for kids as well. But they give very practical ideas for how to have these conversations, which I think as a parent myself, sometimes I almost wish I could just Avoid having to deal with this, but that is absolutely not the answer.

You know, kids, they're going to learn about this. It's really important that they know they can come to you.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. And these things really are uncomfortable. And what I loved about the conversation with Devorah is that she gives you sort of a reason to tolerate the discomfort, of a value to abide by, which is, you know, that we're trying to raise kids that know how to handle this complicated world. And I just have to say, I hope people listen all the way to the end because she finishes with this piece of advice that just kind of stopped me in my tracks.

It was so powerful. So I hope that people get a lot out of this conversation. And I really hope people check out her work because I think it's really critical work and so timely and just offers you resources for navigating a really complicated area of life with your children.

But also, you know, if you're a teacher or if you're a kid yourself who's thinking about these things or a young adult, I think this is just really powerful work. So I hope you get a lot out of it and let us know your thoughts.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm here with Dr. Devorah Heitner, who is an author specializing in helping kids navigate tech using practical, research informed approaches. Devorah has a PhD in media and technology and society from Northwestern University and is taught at DePaul and Northwestern. Her work on mentoring kids in a connected world has appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, and CNN Opinion.

She is the mother herself of a teenager and the author of Screenwise, helping kids thrive and survive in their digital world, as well as growing up in public, coming of age in a digital world. This latter one is the one that we are here to discuss today. It is brand new and hitting the shelves in September.

I'm so excited to talk about it. Welcome, Devorah.

**Devorah Heitner:** Thank you. I'm so excited to be with you.

**Yael Schonbrun:** So I kind of want to start with what motivated you to write growing up in public and I'm particularly interested in this idea that there is a much more public nature of our children's childhoods compared to our own.

**Devorah Heitner:** Absolutely. So I was speaking a lot in the five years before I wrote Growing Up in Public about screenwise and balancing screens. And

obviously the pandemic pushed a lot of us to, you know, earlier and different adoption of screen practices with our kids that we might've wanted to avoid. Things like remote school with little kids, all kinds of stuff that maybe worked or didn't work.

So we were all kind of in the deep end. But when I would speak at schools, even before that time, A lot of parents would say, well, this is all right and good. And I feel a little bit better about screen time now that I've talked with you. But what about the dumb things that kids say or think that are just going to be out there?

And I'm really grateful that my middle school years, my high school years, and let's face it, even my college years are not shared, you know, in a public way for everyone to see and search forever. And how's my kid supposed to deal with that? It's a lot. And I really started thinking about the ways that kids are surveilled both by their peers on social media and sometimes getting in trouble with peers and also by school and ultimately by us with all the tracking that we do.

And I recognize that this level of scrutiny really is worth thinking about and talking with kids, like, is it stressing them out? What do they think about it? So then I kind of dived into this research with growing up in public, both interviewing families and talking with clinicians and researchers. And, yeah, spoiler alert that they do have a lot to say.

The kids have many feelings about how surveilled and compared and shared they are.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, it's so wild to think about that even from birth, We really have eyes on our kids in ways that is really unprecedented. I was just thinking about like the baby video monitors

and it's so well intentioned, it's for safety, and so that seems like a positive in so many ways, and yet you share some real concerns about constant kid surveillance. So how does it change child development to have everyone know about everything from your toilet training to your academic difficulties due to your family sharing on social media or your parents just having eyes on you at all times?

**Devorah Heitner:** I think it's a lot, and a lot of kids have this kind of profound moment of disillusionment or sort of eating the apple, if you will. I wrote about in the book moments where a young woman, a teenage girl, finds her mother's

Facebook for the first time and sees all the videos that she's been sharing and she was very upset and had a lot of feelings about it.

And other kids are, grow up much more aware of that level of sharing. But sometimes kids also find out about a specific thing because they get teased about something that their parent shares very innocuously. And I mean, no parent or very few parents have shared with the intent of shaming their child or embarrassing their kids.

I mean, we know that there are examples of that kind of abuse, but most parents share with absolutely positive intentions. And the thing is, the most innocuous detail can be embarrassing because our lives are lived in different contexts. So your fourth grader might live in a context where at school they feel like they're like a, cool man about town, you know, and you might think your nine year old in their footie pajamas is adorable and you might take a picture and maybe your nine year old's public image is not about footie pajamas, you know, and their, their public image is.

they think of themselves differently. And even that little bit of contextual collapse where you're sharing and their friends parents are seeing it and somebody's like, nice footy pajamas, nice Star Wars PJs. And that doesn't seem that embarrassing for a fourth grader to us as an adult or really for anyone.

I mean, I would wear Star Wars PJs, right? But, but when you're nine and that's your image of yourself, it's like, wait, why are you sharing that? Like, why are my pajamas? And again, this isn't even like toilet training. I mean, some of the examples I gave in the book, which are real examples are, you know, parents posting about school refusal, anxiety, things that are much more private.

But even something as simple as like, what is your sleepwear choice at home? You know, that's at home. That's your family self. And to have that self kind of bleed into, you know, your parents posting and sharing with their friends, who happen to be your friend's parents in some cases, still has some implications.

So I think kids need to feel like home is a safe space. And nobody's gonna share certainly their meltdown or tantrum or their tears or their, ups and downs or their diagnosis that they're keeping close and private or their struggles in school or their friendship drama, but even little things that we wouldn't think of.

And it's, it's the same for us, right? Like, You know, if my spouse was taking a picture of me and posting it, he would check and ask permission. And that's what I think we should be doing with our kids. And that's tremendously

reassuring. And I, I've seen families find that they didn't even know how stressed their kids were, that they were sharing these photos of them until they started asking permission and their kids were relieved and felt they could relax more at home.

**Yael Schonbrun:** One thing that I think about a lot is, so my kids, now that I'm writing and I podcast, they actually would like for me to share more about them. They think it would be fun to be whatever my level of famous, which is not that famous. But I get worried that they might feel differently down the road because they're not yet at the real self-conscious phase of life, but they absolutely could get there.

I was a pretty self-conscious young adult. And so I think it's not even necessarily what they feel right now, but you almost have to take the long view.

**Devorah Heitner:** A hundred percent. You have to think about them as their most self-conscious, whether that's going to hit it 13 or 17, and absolutely, an eight-year-old who's begging to be shared doing the cute TikTok dance, and you hear the lyrics of the song, and you're like, I'm not going to put that out there, like you are having a great time jamming to your jam and I'm going to keep this in the family because you're going to feel differently about this video in five years.

And it's not that there's anything inherently wrong or that we should look at an eight-year-old, again, like dancing, say to explicit lyrics, like we shouldn't be sexualizing an eight-year-old, but that eight-year-old, when they understand the lyrics still might not want that video out there in a different way.

Or videos of them, like. Say swimming in the swimming pool or at the beach and, another piece that I learned about that I didn't think about before I worked on this book was talking with Stephanie Zerwas, who's a specialist in preventing eating disorders, is that especially in the puberty years, we may want to post fewer full-body pictures of our kids.

just to give them less of a record to obsess on if that's going to become an issue for them. And again, most kids don't develop an eating disorder, but we live in a culture that has problematic messages about body image and kids need to gain a lot of weight. Their body is going to change dramatically in shape and size during the puberty years.

And it's a good time to maybe have like fewer images to fixate on. And if you think about your own years growing up in that stage, I only had my school



pictures, maybe some holiday photos. Right. I don't have 300 days of pictures from seventh grade. I have like my bat mitzvah photo in that, you know, horrendous Laura Ashley dress that was very cool in the eighties and like some other images from that year, but it's not like a lot.

And I think that that might be okay to not have that sort of micro ability to sort of focus on the changing body.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Okay, so I'm sure that readers and our listeners will be so curious about how you, as a parent, have approached these issues with your own teenager. And you write about this a little bit in the book, and I wonder if you can kind of share the process that you went through with your own child .

**Devorah Heitner:** Yeah, I mean, so he's quite private. So you would look at my Instagram and be like, wait, she has a kid. And that's, I mean, it's a bummer for me because of course he would be my best content or certainly I would get a lot more likes if I could share. And because the like button is designed to speak to our brains in a way that we crave, like, of course I want those likes, I want you to follow me and like me.

And, and if I was showing my kid, who's very adorable and funny and wonderful, I'm sure everyone would be like all over that, but his privacy and his requests that I don't do that, obviously, are more of a priority. And knowing that I've been writing a book about privacy, he would certainly, in a very 14 year old way, call me out on my hypocrisy, as only a 14 year old can do.

I'd be on very shaky ground if I violated his privacy, especially given that this is my work. But I do think all kids have feelings about being posted and shared. And it's just worth checking in. And I would definitely err on the conservative side, even if your kid is asking to be posted, like if you sort of set them up to see like, Oh look, your last gymnastic routine got this many likes.

Like you may not want to be kind of promoting that because if you know that that really speaks to your kids and they want to be a little famous. And a lot of kids do because it's. It's a quantifiable thing. You can see when you follow someone on YouTube, how many followers they have and who wouldn't want more, right?

If your kid is like into that, then I would say we have to be especially careful about sort of feeding that. And again, it's, it's not a bad urge. Like when your kids say, Oh, I want to be known. We'll think about, well, what do you want to



be known for? Or if you did have that many followers, what would be an important message?

Like say you did get 10, 000 followers one day, like what would be important to say to that many people? We don't want to sort of, Dismiss their desire for fame or platform because we live in a culture where that's important. And frankly, there are young people doing really cool things with a big platform, right?

I just think it's something to go cautiously on. I mean, another thing you could say to a kid who wanted a bigger platform would be what were you super into three or four years ago? And like, imagine if you were known for that now and think about like how much you're changing all the time in terms of what you care about and how you self present. Being really well known as a kid can be tricky.

I mean, you and I both exist in this kind of funny region of like, I will say like, we have a public life, but we're not like so famous. We can't go to the grocery store. Is that fair to say? Right? Like, I don't have a paparazzi following me around Skokie, Illinois, where I live. But there are people who know my work and know things about me that I've shared in my newsletter, for example, who I don't have the same reciprocal knowledge.

Like, I don't know them. Right? Or I've spoken at their school and they might recognize me or something. Maybe. I mean, I probably am going too far with that. Like, I don't, I don't know. But, but what I'll say is having a public life as a late 40s person for me is not that stressful because I'm not changing as dramatically like I'm still wearing the same outfit that I wore to give my TEDx talk in 2012, you know, like I'm like, Oh, I still have that sweater.

So I'm like a lot of the things that I identify with are pretty much the same. Like I'm not changing. I mean, I'm hopefully still growing. Right as a human, but I'm not changing like the years between 12 and 15 and 17 and not right like 9 to 12 to 15 to 17 is dramatic. Right. Like when I look at an old picture. You know, I'm not going to cringe in the same way as like your 15 year old might cringe seeing a picture of them at 13.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, yeah. I want to transition to talking about how this ability to monitor our kids can be costly for the parent child relationship because I think this is an important thing that we don't think about as much as we think about Our intention to protect them to make sure that we know what they're up to for their safety so that we can support them. And I want to read another quote from your book, which is you write what I've observed through interacting with

thousands of parents and kids is that a fear based approach, i. e. a consequence based approach can breed more secrecy and distrust. It makes our kids feel like they are being watched, but not seen monitored, but not understood.

There's a lack of privacy when we're constantly surveilling our kids and we have the means to do so and it has a positive motivation and yet.

You write that we need to think about some of the consequences

**Devorah Heitner:** Absolutely. A lot of families, for example, will get their kids a watch because they want to track their location or they want to contact them at school. And I think there are some pluses to that and there may be families where it actually, that reduces anxiety and makes them Give their kid more range or feel more confident.

The flip side is when I hear from teachers, you know, about parents contacting their kids all day at school and really distracting their kids and not being able to kind of resist that urge to reach out. And the same thing with, you know, monitoring software, like whether we're monitoring the content of what our kids share using software like bark, or there's a million other ones, or whether we're monitoring their location, it feels like it's going to make us feel less stressed out, but then it's giving us data that can also

feed anxiety and as someone who struggles with anxiety as a parent. I feel like I'm already anxious with the data I have. And so for me, adding more data doesn't always help in the ways that I might imagine. And I think there's a general sense that we all need to be doing more. And so parents feel like, oh, if I'm not monitoring my kids texts, am I a bad parent?

And then there's that anxiety. And we want to make sure we're available to actually talk with our kids. And sometimes if we're surveilling them, they're aware of it. It can make them go underground. And especially with adolescents, it's very important that they have some privacy. And it's, it's, it's typical and developmental for them to pull away from us as their main confidant.

Right. So your 10 year old might come home and be like, I have a crush on someone or, you know, share like really personal things about what's going on in their friendships. I never had that kind of disclosing kid, but some people do developmentally.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I hear that some people a kid shares that kind of thing.

**Devorah Heitner:** as kids get to be teenagers, it becomes less typical for the parent to be that level of confident, or it happens maybe more occasionally, like maybe in like a, you know, deep moment of connection late at night, your kid might open up to you, but in general, your kids may be not coming home from school and like giving you every bit of dish from the lunch table as much when they're in high school or middle school as they might have an elementary school.

And it's okay for them to move to a space of wanting more privacy and it doesn't mean, and I think it's really important for parents to understand, your kid wanting some privacy in their communication doesn't mean they're doing something bad. It doesn't mean that your kid who otherwise seems fine and you have no other reason to worry, you don't need to worry that suddenly your kid is like selling drugs because they don't want you to read their texts, right?

If you have other reasons to worry about substances, yes, you want to be talking with them, but even then reading their texts. It may not be the way to get them the support they need. So it's really important that they can come to us if they need support, that we can go to them if we're worried, and that we use reading somebody's text or doing a deep dive into their personal data as like a code red situation.

Like if you are really worried about your kid. Self harming or you think that there's a credible concern that they might self harm or that they are talking about suicidality or there's a substance situation or something like that. And they will not talk to you and you go to them and they won't talk to you.

Yeah, you could look at their phone. And I think if I was in a life or death situation, I would absolutely do everything I could as a parent, including potentially sort of invade my kids privacy. But I think. If you're just curious, like say, you just kind of want to know because your kid's been a little bit to themselves, that's not a great reason and that's going to undermine their ability and their desire to come to you and open up to you and it may push them away and have them find a more underground place to go.

And that's not, a good situation at all. We want our kids to be able to come to us. We don't want them to focus on evading us. And we don't want them to be so worried about getting in trouble or getting their tech taken away That say they've made a mistake like say they've gotten into a really bad conflict with someone online Or they're being harassed online or maybe they've shared a suggestive image and now someone's threatening circulate it, Those are situations where that kid needs an adult in their corner and you don't want to be

the adult that has You know, threaten to take away their phone if they ever mess up, and so they're not coming to you.

You want to be the adult that they're like, well, I know my parents are gonna be thrilled that I shared this photo, but I'm sure they'll help me out because somebody's threatening to circulate it, and I need an adult right now. I need support.

**Yael Schonbrun:** So you have this line in your book that I really loved, which is, you know, making your kid install an app on the phone so you can pinpoint exactly where they are is easier than having the tough conversations about what you expect from them.

It's easier than developing mutual trust. So it's like we undermine the trust by invading their privacy and by giving them privacy, they are far more likely to come to us. I was actually asking my 13 year old before I interviewed today, like, how he would feel if I looked at his phone, if I, like, read his text.

First of all, he said, I'm not doing anything interesting in there, so I don't know why you'd want to, , but. That he would be less motivated to want to share things with me because he would feel like, why is my mom going into my phone? And it would kind of pull him away. So it's like the more that I tried to find out about him, the more he would pull away, which I think is a paradoxical feeling, right?

You feel like I'm going to get to know my kid more and get closer to them by finding out more, but actually it's It results in distancing.

**Devorah Heitner:** And I think we're doing it because we want to prevent them from making mistakes that they have to make developmentally, too. And that, I mean, that's not to say it's not painful. Again, I struggle with this anxiety and there are mistakes I don't want my kid or anybody's kid to make and mistakes that feel especially unfairly kind of harmful in the digital age because things are so public and permanent and yet we have to, to a certain degree, trust our kids to kind of make those mistakes and move through it.

And we should instead be fighting for, I think, a more tolerant society, a deeper developmental understanding, a community where yeah, Kids get grace from one another and move forward and, that we're not cancelling each other for every dumb mistake because everybody makes them. And maybe even legal changes, like I'd like to see legal changes to the sexting laws, I'd love to see us get the right to be forgotten, you know, and have a little bit of a clean slate when

we turn 18, and so Those are the kinds of changes we need to make and part of it is even resisting the outrage when someone else's kid makes a mistake and not sharing that image or that video or that poor choice or a screenshot because we don't know what our kid might do.

So if we can cultivate a society that sees kids in a more developmental and forgiving light, that would go a long way. I think that people wouldn't feel as much like they need to invade their kid's privacy and prevent every mistake, which you cannot do.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think you're pointing to exactly the issue, which is that. As teenagers, their developmental responsibility is sort of to take risks, to try things that may not go well. And that is where the learning and development happens. And, you know, in decades past, there was messy things that happened, but they were mostly private and largely unseen.

At least they weren't seen in the way that things can be seen now, where all of a sudden it's on the internet and everybody has access to it and it makes a permanent mark. And That is a real difference in how kids are able to grow up and learn that can be pretty scary for kids, but so is scary as parents.

**Devorah Heitner:** It's terrifying. And I really get it. And I, hope that growing up in public will be reassuring for people. But I know that for some people it will, you know, especially for maybe for people with really little kids who are like, they're not there yet and like could add to their anxiety, but I think truly a lot of the stories are actually about how kids made a mistake and got through it or learn from watching someone else make that same mistake.

And so I don't think we should be living in fear, but I do think we want the tech companies also to cooperate with us as well. And, if we do need to issue a takedown notice or if there is a problem, it would be great if they would get a little bit more helpful.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, and I want to ask you a bunch of specific questions about how to move from monitoring to mentoring, because this is largely where the advice that you offer in growing up in public lands. And I think it's, Um, so brilliant because rather than try to avoid all the negative stuff, it's more about teaching our kids to be wise, wisely engaged in what they're going to be engaged in technology, because that's a part of our modern landscape that is absolutely inescapable at this point.

But actually before before we do that, I just wanted to ask one question. So when it comes to monitoring our kids, I do think that it's nice to say in general, if you have a relatively trusting relationship with your kid to try to stay out of their private business and invite them to come to you whenever and as often as they can, because you, as their parent, are curious and want to support them and know more.

But what about when kids break your trust? What is a parent to do then, like, if you've caught your child doing something small, like stealing candy, or large, like, you know, bullying somebody, or using substances in a way that is very concerning, the temptation is then probably to monitor them pretty intently, but I think your advice is more nuanced.

**Devorah Heitner:** It is more nuanced. And I also think depending on several of those scenarios, I'd probably bring in a third party. I would work with a clinician, you know, and either do family therapy or make sure my kid had access to a good therapist to talk with. So this is a good, you know, for, for this audience. Like, I think, I think you can't really go wrong with a tween or teen getting some access to therapy because even a very typically developing kid is going to have some bumps in the road.

And it's just a time where so much is happening with identity that it could be good. And maybe it's a short course of family therapy that helps you set new boundaries. I certainly think that taking away the tech is not the only solution or the most helpful solution in some cases, but certainly if a kid is misusing an app and bullying someone on that app, maybe they do need to take a break from that app and hit the restart button there.

So I'm not suggesting that you could never take it away. I just think the reality is our kids need Chromebooks and iPads for school. They're gonna need, at minimum, texting to make any plans socially with any peer ever. They probably have their coach texting them on the remind app about soccer cross country.

So the reality is like fully unplugging kids. I mean, you see parents on listservs who are really struggling talking about how to raise kids without a phone. And I think, you know, you can go there if you have to, or do a brief period of a reset, if that's like the only option left.

But I think it's a tremendous burden on everyone to do that. And I think if there's a way forward. That involves, you know, limiting tech, certainly. And I think all kids, even if they haven't messed up, for example, like shouldn't have



their devices overnight. Like what middle schooler is going to benefit from having their phone in their room overnight?

Like even the most happy kid who is doing great is still going to maybe get a text that wakes them up. It's going to disrupt their sleep, which we don't want.

It's very difficult to unplug at night, but if we can model that for our kids, that's great. I think a lot of us are, of course, in the sandwich generation, caregiving, or other things, and we feel like we must.

But I know I end up reaching for it in the morning and checking my work email before I'm even out of bed, and I don't think that's a very healthy practice. I'm working on that. My kid just called me out on it the other night because he was looking at something stressful before bed, and I said, I don't think that's good bedtime reading. And he said, well, you know, you look at your work email at night. And I said, no, I don't. And then I had to think about it. I was like, well, lately. Yeah. Okay. I've launched this book and maybe I have been, but I shouldn't be, and it's not good. So, and I think, I mean, I think about the drug commercial from our childhood of, you know, I learned it from you, mom.

I think a lot of our tech habits, including sleeping with our phones is something our kids pick up on and they're very quick to call us out on our hypocrisy.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Totally, totally. I think that's a really good way to sort of realign or reconnect to your values around like how you want to relate with your technology is remembering that your kids are absorbing those kinds of relationships and probably going to model themselves after you. They're designed to be very addictive and to sneak right in.

So it is, I think, an ongoing practice to keep reminding yourself how it is that you want to be using technology and, you know, finding the motivation by remembering that your kids are watching.

So I wanted to move. To talking about the general world of social media, which is where our kids are spending a lot of time. And there are a lot of confusing reports about the effects of social media on kids. So can you share your impressions of what parents should be concerned about and what is really just panic clickbait?

**Devorah Heitner:** Well, I think social media is definitely a factor in kids mental health, but it's probably not the source for most kids, like the originator of mental health issues. Now, I'm not saying it can't be, ever. But most kids, like,



say everything's fine. Everything's going well, and you add Instagram to your life, it's not like suddenly those same friends that you were hanging out with every day after school turn into monsters because you're on Instagram with them, right?

So I think it's important to recognize that it's not like we just add social media to a kid's life and things get weird, it's that social media comes in at a time where things are getting weird. Right. Things are getting more difficult with peers at the, you know, sort of early adolescent stage when a lot of kids add things like social media or discord or more gaming to their lives.

And so, yes, it can be a place where more conflict happens. It can kind of intensify what, if your kid's already feeling excluded or in between social groups, having that Snapchat map that shows you where everyone is isn't necessarily going to help that feel better. But it's not, like, again, that Snapchat just originates the problem, you know, is the catalyst of the problems for most kids.

And I think that's really important, so I do think there's a lot of panic out there. Social media can be fun, it can be distracting. Kids will find other distractions, though, and certainly YouTube and TikTok, I would definitely include in this, that they can also be incredibly distracting, they can be rabbit holes that eat our time.

And they can affect mood, especially if we're watching content that's more negative, um, and the algorithm can cycle on itself. So if you're watching positive, inspiring content, usually you'll get more. If you're all about crafting, you'll get more. If you watch things that are more violent or more upsetting, you also may get more of that.

And so that's really tricky. Uh, so we do need to teach our kids algorithmic awareness and teach them to kind of self check in about how they're feeling on social media and ideally have ending times when, especially if you're doing something that's like a bottomless pit of time, like Tik Tok, if you can have a plan, like, Oh, I'm going to check Tik Tok for 10 minutes and then I'm going to go do something else and set a timer for yourself.

That's kind of the dream. You know, a lot of families are, you know, might be like, that's never going to happen, but it can get to that place of self regulating with their time. It can really help them balance the joys and pleasures of I enjoy a good TikTok video myself with the never endingness of it and and frankly the

high quality algorithm that really is good at figuring out what you would like to watch next.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Totally, totally. I will share that we have a rule in our house that, um, usually while I'm making dinner, my kids are allowed to have some screen time because they've had a long day and I really enjoy my quiet time. I usually listen to a book on audible. And the rule is they like that. can be something that they enjoy and can look forward to regularly, so long as when it's dinner time, they very willingly shut it off and come and join me at the table.

And we talk about that, that's kind of the flexibility teaching tool for them, that it is hard to turn it off, right? Especially if they're really engaged in it, but that by building that muscle of saying, okay, now it's time to move on to the next thing, that they can. continue to do it on, uh, you know, most of the days of the week basis.

**Devorah Heitner:** Yeah, and I think having a condition of transition time that's positive is is a good condition. If you have a kid who there's a game they can't walk away from without not just a minor, you know, I mean, most kids will have like a minor like, but but you know, but if it's really intense, and they really can't Transition from it, maybe that game only gets played on the weekends or, you know, that game might not fit into your family life during a time when there's a lot of transitions to be made because it's such a difficult transition.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, I think that's really good advice. All right. So I want to move on to something that's very related to this and where I really do want your advice on how do you move from monitoring to mentoring? And that is that if our kids are on TikTok, YouTube, especially they're gonna bump into some. pretty graphic content at some point.

Like pornography is there and even if you're into crafts at some point, you may bump into it in some form or another. So I have a story to share that, which is that my two older boys were playing some random game online, which they do. And I actually don't monitor it that carefully, but I happened to be in the room while they were playing.

And it was some game where they were adopting random jobs. Like they were, acting as avatars who had different professions. And I overheard one of them saying, wait, what does a pornographer do? It's like, Oh my God, what are you guys playing? So, kids these days are finding games or poking around and finding straight up pornography.

What is the best approach here in terms of Parenting and mentoring around this inevitability.

**Devorah Heitner:** I think porn you have to talk about with kids at every age, like whether it's little kids playing Roblox. I mean, my kid ran into some porn in Roblox at one point as a pretty young kid. There's many reported stories about Roblox porn, unfortunately. So any open server game can be hacked.

I mean, that's not, you know, from Roblox. com, but it's like malware that someone's putting in there. People are putting, even, even some stuff gets into YouTube Kids that shouldn't, although theoretically YouTube Kids is a more locked down environment than like regular YouTube. And the problem is, there are people who are really, uh, want children to see pornography.

So they're making like a Peppa Pig or a Thomas the Train themed, you know, it's very troubling. And so we have to tell kids if you see something that feels weird, or if you see naked people on the screen, you know, X out of it, that kind of thing, like be very clear. And the younger they are, the more I would just, you know, talk about it like naked people or whatever.

And as they get older, you can be clear, like, you know, people having sex or people talking about sex or anything that seems too grown up and you can talk a little bit about the industry, the pornography industry and how problematic it is, and as kids get older, you can say there's a lot of ways that I would like for you to learn about sex and sexuality, like here's these books about puberty and sex and relationships and consent.

You know, here are stories that you can read that are okay. I think when you see, when, when you're watching with an older kid and you see, you know, a love scene come on or someone asking someone out or anything related to relationship, sexuality, consent, like it can become a sort of teachable moment.

Like we've all seen really questionable consent. Um, and especially in older shows, sometimes newer things too, but especially like older movies, it's like, Oh, that's problematic. Like my kid even noticed it in Friday Night Lights, which I would have thought would have been more, like, my memory of it wasn't that bad.

Um, West Wing, even more so. He was like, this is some terrible stuff.

**Yael Schonbrun:** It's so weird to go back to shows that I watched as a child and be like, wow, that was inappropriate. I had no idea.

**Devorah Heitner:** Yeah, and I watched as an adult. I mean, let alone, yeah, the kid stuff is even worse. I mean, the 80s movies and 90s movies were very troubling on consent. I was really kind of proud that my raised in the, in recent years, feminist kid, like, was able to identify these problems.

But these are things we can talk about, is like, what is appropriate flirting? And again, you know, no kid wants you to turn every TV viewing night into, like, After school special, but if you do see something problematic, you can also bring it up later. Like, Oh, remember that scene, right? You don't have to do it in the moment all the time, but watching media with kids is actually a really helpful way into this stuff. Making sure they do have books about puberty, sexuality, consent, making sure they have resources that are inclusive. Cause you don't know how your kids can identify ultimately in terms of gender and sexuality. So you want to make sure that anything they're reading is inclusive and supportive.

And then. Also making sure that they don't get overwhelmed with too much information. One of the things I would say about looking for information about sex on the computer is even though there are some good, you know, there's girlology and, um, scarlatine and, you know, positive sites. I still think the computer is a dicey place to look for information about sex.

And you don't want your kid going there. I mean, when we moved to our current school district, District 69, from the neighboring district, District 65, my kid was like, why is everyone laughing about D69? And I was like, oh gosh, I've got to tell him. Because otherwise he could Google it, and I don't want, you know, my then 11 year old Googling this stuff.

Because he might see something he can never unsee.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Devorah Heitner:** any questions we don't feel like answering, or that we might be hesitant to answer, I think it's really important that we answer as best we can, or get our kids something to read, and let them know why we don't want them to Google it. Even though that feels so like, oh, they're gonna go Google it.

You know, we really want to help our kids also if they have seen pornography. There's a whole... piece in Growing Up in Public where I cite the Respect organization about a model for how to respond if your kids have seen porn. And as much as we can, if we can keep calm and move forward and let them know

that we, we still respect them, that they, you know, we understand they're processing what they saw, a lot of kids are pretty upset.

When they've seen pornography, it can be really, really gross and upsetting to them. And a lot of it's pretty violent. So we want to make sure they understand also that, that's not necessarily what, you know, sex looks like between consenting people in a loving relationship, that they don't have to do those things.

Like sometimes kids will see porn and they're worried like, Oh my gosh, is that what sex is? Is that what I have to do when I'm a grownup? If I want to get married, like it's not always what you think, like you might think, Oh, kids are going to get addicted to it and want to see more of it. And that can happen too.

But sometimes it's also just very traumatic and upsetting.

**Yael Schonbrun:** So I think that in essence, the advice that you're giving is sort of like what we figured out in the nineties, which is rather than teach abstinence or just say no, we want to teach our kids how to respond when this stuff comes up and you give similar advice in the realm of sexting. So I wonder if you can talk through a little bit about what you talk about in your book around sexy texts that people send back and forth, which is probably a part of most young adults, maybe teens lives.

**Devorah Heitner:** It is definitely more common than we think, most likely. It's still not everyone, so we don't have to believe that it's everyone. And sometimes our kids believe everyone's doing it, and I'm weird if I don't, and that's not the case. But for sure, especially for high school and beyond, it's less stigmatized.

And I would say especially for older high schoolers, like juniors, seniors, and beyond, it's, it's less stigmatized. Like if you share images in middle school and plenty of kids do, it can be much more of a reputation buster, like in the moment, like if it gets out, like other people, other kids will judge.

But by like, 17, 18, your friends will be like, oh yeah, okay, whatever you send a nude. Like it's not as big a deal in many social circles. And again, this completely varies depending who your kid is hanging out with and how, you know, how their friends think about this stuff. And I think just so many factors, but we really want to protect our kids by letting them know some of the risks of sexting.

And also, and this is where I think people might get mad at me, but talking about safer sexting and I cite my my friends and colleagues, Justin Patchen and Samir Hinduja, who are amazing cyberbullying researchers who've done a lot of research on sexting with adolescents. And they talk about safer sexting, including not being identifiable in an image, taking images that are more suggestive than explicit.

And that's partly to stay inside of legal bounds where many states can prosecute kids. I believe that that's becoming less frequent where you're not seeing as much pursuit in the, in the legal realm of young adults who, for example, sexed consensually and privately, right? But kids should absolutely know too that they should never send an unbidden image

that someone hasn't asked for, right? We don't want our kids to be coercing or cajoling other people into sending these kinds of images. You know, sending them consensually might not be like what we dream of when we think about our kid's first crush or romance, but that's less harmful in terms of their mental health.

If you, if a kid has shared consensually, if it stays private, we might never know about it. But it's also fair to remind kids that phones are less private than we think, that a kid might leave it on the kitchen table and their parent might see it, I mean there's all kinds of scenarios that don't even involve or escalate to the level of you break up and the kid sends it all over the, and everyone in 8th grade sees it, like that's the horror show scenario that we want to avoid and we want to make sure our kids know that that's really not okay.

Like it's never okay, no matter what someone has said or done to you, you never share an image like that. And if it comes to you, and a lot of times our kids are exposed to sexting, not by their own choices, but something goes around, you never share that. You take it off your phone. If someone offers on the bus to show you someone else's naked picture, you say, I don't want to see that.

They didn't consent to share that with me. Right? So we really do want to teach our kids that it's important to have those boundaries and that if they do share an image. And someone does threaten them with exposure that that is illegal and that they have rights in that situation and that we Respect them, and that we will help them ideally make sure it doesn't happen or at least take care of them emotionally and legally around what's gone on.

So, I think our message should not be just don't sext. I think it should be like, I think sexting is a pretty risky sexual behavior. Like, as these things go, you

know, like to me, consensually exploring sexual behaviors, whether it's like making out or other or all the way up to and including, you know, sex, um, It is a big deal, it's a lot of trust to have in a partner, and when you're alone, if you're too nervous to, for example, be sexual with someone in the room, like this is one thing I would say to teenagers, if you feel like I'm ready to send a topless photo or an underpants photo or a genital photo but I'm not ready to be alone with this person and, and get busy, You might not be intimate enough to be safe sending that picture, right?

So I think it's really important like kids feel like that's a lower level of intimacy But it's actually a pretty great level of trust that you're extending if you share a nude because that's something they have In an ongoing way, whereas even in a physical encounter, as long as respect is being maintained, like, you know, things can happen and then you can be like, I want to stop.

Right? And at any point, and this is something kids should know, like at any point in a sexual encounter, you should be like, it's always okay to be like, I'm not comfortable. I want to stop. This is right. Whereas sending a picture, it's now out of your hands. So it's tricky because we don't want to scare the heck out of kids because so many of them are going to do it.

Right. And I think talking about safer sexting feels really uncomfortable to adults because it feels like we're giving them a license to do it. And in most states, it is against the rules. And there's so many other risks, even if they don't get prosecuted. I think if we also emphasize the legal risks, we look like we're idiots because so many kids know other people who've done this and not gone to jail.

It's like if you lead with the like worst case scenario that feels really farfetched, then it kind of undermines your credibility. So I think I would lead with the more like immediate privacy and emotional risks and also say, and of course it's illegal, right? Like, and, and be clear that the, uh, the privacy and emotional risks are probably more imminent and that they probably know someone who's experienced the downside of that. Whereas like most of us don't personally know a kid who's gone to jail for sexting.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, this is such good advice. So, it seems weird to me that sexting would be illegal. Just, just put it out there, right? It's like a private thing that you do and it's often, you know, bidirectional. The other thing that occurs to me is that I think this is tremendously uncomfortable for parents to talk about with their kids.



I think you have to have a really high level of comfort to be able to say those things, and your kid has to be willing to hear them. So I was just going to suggest, I think your next book needs to be a guide for kids on exactly these topics, because your book gives such good advice for parents, but it would be so nice for you to be able to give this really wise advice to kids. What are good resources for kids in the meantime, until you, until you write that.

**Devorah Heitner:** I mean, I really love some of the puberty resources like *Girlology* and *Scarleteen* that I mentioned, and there are probably some other ones I can think about. I know there's some really good books now. I think John Sovec is the author of a book for parents of queer kids, I want to say, but I think there may be some resources there as well, specifically for LGBTQ plus kids.

I do think it's important to make sure kids have access to a lot of good things, and I'm really a fan, honestly, of adult books and kid books that have some explicit sort of love scenes, like when people want to take away the YA, where the kids like make out or go further sexually. I'm like, no, no, like if it's in a YA novel, you know that a major publisher said yes to, I would much rather kids read something like that and when adults want to take away, I mean I was honestly at a school talk where I had an adult try to disrupt the talk because of the book, *It's Perfectly Normal*, which is a younger kid puberty book that's very basic.

And I was thinking like, while your kid is not reading as perfectly normal, if they google any of the issues and it's perfectly normal, you're going to be in a world of content that you don't want to be in. Like, don't you want them to just read the book? Like the book is, you know, puberty is coming for your kid whether you let them read the book or not.

So like, maybe let them read the book so they know what's going on. One of the worst things that I think happened when schools closed is that kids didn't get that basic health education. And I was really terrified for a whole generation of kids who I talked to teachers who were, you know, hearing from girls at home, for example, getting a first period who didn't know what it was. That should not be happening.

That's terrifying. And to know that in 2021 in this country where we have so much information that that, that some kid could still be, and it happened, I'm sure to many more kids. If I heard about it right from like one person, that's horrifying. Right? So we need to do a better job and, and because puberty is coming so early and I can give a plug for Vanessa Kroll Bennett and Cara Natterson's book that's coming out, I think in October about the new puberty.

We know that kids are experiencing puberty younger. I think their book is called, *That's So Awkward*, but like read about it. And it is awkward. And if you really can't talk about it. And I think, again, knowing your audience, I'm less worried about that, but for anybody who's listening, who's a parent, who's like the way I was raised filled me with so much awkwardness and shame around this, that I really can't talk about it.

Get your kid to their pediatrician or someone who can. Like, if you know that you really are not up to it, or if you have, you know, someone that you trust who's an adult who's gonna be able to give them the information they need, kids need information about sex and puberty. Like, bottom line, they must have that information to be safe, and, and they're much more safe from being exploited, molested, assaulted, if they have that information, or of perpetrating that kind of violence on someone else.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. Yeah. So talk to them so that they get the good information or find somebody that you trust to talk to them or give them a resource that you trust so that they have the information and are not looking on Google for whatever might come up or talking friend who you don't trust.

**Devorah Heitner:** Ideally, all of the above. Ideally, you're talking to them, they have another safe adult they can go to when it's something too awkward to talk to you about, and they have the book or two or three. Like, I feel like you cannot give too much information on this, and so I feel like if you're doing all of those things, then that's good.

You know, and they will still go to TikTok and they will still go to their friends.

**Yael Schonbrun:** But at least they'll have the balance of what you know to be trustworthy information. And that was something that I started talking to my 13 year old about as he was entering into middle school. I said, you're going to hear things and I want you to hear some things from me first to counterbalance the things that you're going to hear from people like other kids your age who are, you know, picking up things from their older siblings or I don't know where.

And it made me feel better. Even though I'm sure it was awkward for him.

All right. So I want to switch to a topic that's a little bit more vanilla than sexting or pornography, but just as important, which is grades and how we can surveil our kids on everything academic these days. And it really does start early. So you talk about class dojo, which is an app that is really common in elementary school.

My preschooler had it as a part of his curriculum that I could like, you know, see all the things that he was doing. So it is ubiquitous that we can monitor our kids, um, what they're up to academically, sometimes day to day, sometimes a little bit less frequently than that. And it seems like an obvious good thing for parents and teachers to be able to be in touch and support learning.

And think that was especially true as you noted earlier during the pandemic. But there is a dark side to these apps that has to do with intrinsic motivation, which we've talked about on the podcast before, but I was actually hoping that you could orient us with the analogy that you used in the book, which I loved of the fuel gauge in the car.

And so I wonder if you could sort of explain what intrinsic motivation is and how that applies to the grade apps that are so omnipresent in our modern world.

**Devorah Heitner:** Yeah, I mean, it's also like teaching kids to notice if they're hungry. I mean, there's just all of these, we want to teach kids to know how they're doing and internally and not be so focused on having to check the gauge and kids can really over check that grading app and I interviewed some kids who were like we have no idea how we're doing unless we can check that app and I was like, yeah you do. There's a lot of indicators about how you're doing. Like if you walk into your French class and you can't understand a word the teacher is saying like That's an indicator, right?

Like, these are things we can really help kids see, and I think with things like ClassDojo, where, or, or grading apps, where we're getting a lot of updates, anything we can do to turn it off, to let the teacher know, to send it less, especially in elementary school, where maybe we can let the teacher know. In high school it might be on us to sort of turn off the notifications, but just to unhook from getting that constant information.

Like, how would you feel if you walked in from work and your spouse was like, I hear your 11 o'clock meeting didn't go well? Before you, like, put down your stuff, like, that's how our kids feel when we pounce on them, when we walk in the door, or even worse, text them during the school day about a grade that we see before they've even seen it.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, and it doesn't give them an opportunity to come to you. And I love sort of this example of like, in French class, if you're so... focused on the grade that somebody else is giving you to be the way that you assess how well you're doing, where you're falling short, but you're not in touch with your ability to speak, your ability to understand, your comfort in the class, your

ability to relate to the teacher, because you're so focused on this external marker and maybe I'm sort of lumping too many things together because I think it's in part the external motivator of the grade, but it's also how those apps are providing this constant, opportunity to avoid looking at how it is that we're doing. I guess if I'm speaking for the kid, how it is that the child is doing in their class, how they feel about their learning, what they want to be learning, where they care less about learning and to figure that out for themselves.

**Devorah Heitner:** Absolutely, and I think we want our kids to own their learning, and I think there's so many factors. I mean, I'm not even a big fan of grades, so I'm really out there in that way, but, There's so much extrinsic motivation in school, but anything we can do to help our kids tap into what they love about learning, what they're passionate about, and to get out of this transactional relationship with grades with their teachers. Because teachers hate it too. I mean, when the kids are constantly checking the app, then they're always writing to their teacher, like, what do I need to do to up my grade? And a lot of teachers that I spoke to for the book were like, Oh, this is not how I want to be relating to these students.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. I think it is a problem. I know that in towns like mine, it's a huge problem because you have a lot of kids that come from families that are so concerned about the college trajectory and, it does become all about the grades and you kind of lose the force for the trees the learning and, sort of the appreciation for like where you're at in that developmental process.

I just wanted to ask one more question on the grade thing because I, I do think that there is like an issue of undermining intrinsic motivation and, really undermining the trust between us and our kids if we're constantly surveilling them. There is a function of our ability to check in on how our kids are doing, which is, you know, we can make sure that they don't fall through the cracks.

And so I'm curious, like, do you have advice on sort of how to balance that, how to make sure that we have enough knowledge, for example, if our kid isn't sharing with us and they are falling through the cracks, but that we don't fall into this surveilling, uh,

**Devorah Heitner:** Sometimes you need data like it maybe is going to need support through like MTSS or 504 or IEP or any of the sort of supports for kids who are struggling in school or or are neurodiverse or have another specific learning disability that's diagnosed or are just struggling in a specific subject. You do want that data, but what you don't need is sort of like the day by day, hour by hour, blow by blow.

Like, in no way is that helpful, but there are kids for whom like checking every other week might be helpful or, you know, certainly... If you have a kid who's really struggling on a certain subject, you might not want to wait till the end of the semester to see how it's going. But there's a lot of difference between checking multiple times a day and checking, you know, for example, once or twice a month and encouraging your child to be the main person who checks or having them check in with the teacher regularly and really manage their own relationship.

And I, I learned a lot about that from my kid. Like I would reach out sometimes early in middle school to a teacher. With a question or wondering about modifying an assignment or just kind of trying to understand what was going on because we were in a new school district and my kid was like, I own those relationships.

I need to be sending those emails. I was like, of course you do. And I really, hopefully, I think he would say and agree that I backed off, you know, that I didn't kind of lead the charge and writing to teachers after that. And if I was ever reaching out to school, I also got his permission because he would feel otherwise really frustrated that I reached out without checking in. Um, the other thing I do is just create more friction between myself and the app. So I don't over check, but I do think there are situations where it might be useful to check in a certain subject. And again, if you're trying to gather data, for example, for placement, or you're trying to gather data that your child needs more support, and you think you're about to like have a big fight with school because they're going to say no.

And you're going to say, but look at all of this. Or you don't want to be stunned. Like maybe you have a kid who's had a lot of absences and you need to be kind of on top of that to make sure that they don't have to repeat a year. But even so there has to be a way to do it where you're also making an agreement that with yourself and with your child that you're not going to do it at a time where you're going to like pounce on them when they walk in the door or you're not going to check while they're in school and then text them in school that you're going to have some boundaries around what you do with the data and maybe make a ritual like if you do need to check more often but I would say for most parents I'm talking to, they're checking too much, not too little.

I know there are school districts where they're like, oh, there are parents who've never opened this app at all. We have, you know, 80% of the parents haven't downloaded the app. I think we both live in communities where we see the opposite problem or parents are checking the app too much.

And so it really depends on the situation, but ultimately schools should be working with students to own their own learning and certainly by middle school and high school, navigating a lot of the advocacy themselves, unless it gets to the point where your kid is doing all their advocacy and then it's still not working.

Yeah, then you need to get involved and support them 100% and that does happen. But they should be ideally kind of leading the way. Or if they're coming home really upset and stressed about school, you could ask them, Hey, I'd like to set up a meeting with your counselor. You know, do you want me to come to that meeting?

Could I Zoom in and you're in person in the room so you maybe have more power in the meeting, but I'm there on Zoom? Like, what are the ways that we can work on this together that don't feel like I'm just coming in and, you know, bulldozing everything?

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. So it's taking that collaborative approach rather than taking over as a parent. And that leaves your kids with an opportunity to still be intrinsically motivated and to, to develop some skills in managing their own academic welfare. And, this kind of applies to other areas of life too, but I think it's such an important area for us to really kind of manage our own impulse to get overly involved so that our kids can be building those skills.

**Devorah Heitner:** A hundred percent.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Okay, so before we end, so Devorah, you're a highly sought after speaker, and I know you speak to a lot of students and parents and schools, and I wanted to ask, what is a question that comes up a lot that you think is a pressing one that our audience might appreciate your wisdom on?

**Devorah Heitner:** I think a lot of people are worried about what if their kid messes up and posts something they shouldn't. And ideally we want to really look with our kids at how they can do the repair, you know, in their own community. Like if they said something mean about a teacher, how they can repair with that teacher.

If they said something mean about a group of people, how they can learn more about those people and what they said and, and, and reintegrate their understanding of, of that community. If there's need to do kind of major repair, then it's ideal if your child either has two parents or two adults in their life that can support them.



One of you can kind of be on the public relations front managing the crisis, and the other one can be on the support front managing the mental health piece, because I think when kids get in big trouble or get iced out by their peers for making a big mistake online, obviously that can be incredibly painful, and we want to make sure we support our kids, even though we also want to help them make amends and do better.

I just think we need to take a more developmental approach and we don't want to encourage our kids to just hide and go underground. What we don't want to teach our kids when we talk about making mistakes online is just don't get caught. And I think so many of the messages that we share with kids are about like, oh, you'll never get into Princeton or Berkeley if you post that.

And that's a don't get caught message. Instead, if we can say, does that align with the kind of friend you are or who, how you want to be perceived? Those are better questions about, you know, talking with kids about what they post and what they share. Those are some big questions, you know, that, that people are asking.

And I think we're all looking for ways to make this less dangerous for kids and more of a either positive or at least neutral part of growing up and less sort of laced with, what feels like there's so many rocks that you can, you know, so many icebergs under the water that you can kind of run, run aground and, we want to help our kids, you know, get through this period knowing who they are not not looking at themselves so much from the outside in and that that is true with grading apps, That's true with what parents post about our kids We don't want our kids to just be looking at themselves as a graph on a piece of paper or you know Oh my I'm a collection of these videos My mom posted or this is all the likes I got from my friends. We want them to see themselves in their most deep humanity as as a human being as someone who's growing and changing and To get to know themselves and not be in this situation of seeing themselves always from the outside in.

**Yael Schonbrun:** That was so beautiful. I hope people listen all the way to the end cause, that was such a powerful note to end on. So before we go, where can people get more content from you, Devorah, in addition to picking up your terrific book, *Growing Up in Public*?

**Devorah Heitner:** thank you so much. Well, my website is [devoraheitner.com](http://devoraheitner.com) and then you can also find me on substack at [devoraheitner.substack.com](http://devoraheitner.substack.com) and I'm on Instagram at [devoraheitnerphd](https://www.instagram.com/devoraheitnerphd).



**Yael Schonbrun:** Perfect. And we'll link to all of that in our show notes. Thank you so much for all of your wisdom today. I think this is such an important topic and your advice comes at such a perfect time. It's research backed. It's practical. So thank you so much for coming on and sharing with us.

**Devorah Heitner:** Thank you. It's my pleasure to speak with you.

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