

"Parents will greatly benefit from all the solutions in this remarkable book!"

LAURA KASTNER, PHD, Psychologist and Author, *Getting to Calm*

Parenting

in the

...

Screen

Age

A Guide for

Calm

Conversations

Delaney Ruston, MD

From the maker of the acclaimed **SCREENAGERS** movies

Parenting in the Screen Age

A Guide for
Calm Conversations

Delaney Ruston, MD

From the maker of the acclaimed **SCREENAGERS** movies



STARHOUSE
MEDIA

Copyright © 2020 Delaney Ruston

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.

ISBN: 978-1-7356396-0-4 (Paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-7356396-1-1 (eBook)

Front cover images © Shutterstock.com

Book cover and layout design by *theBookDesigners*

Printed in the United States of America.

First printing edition 2020.

Publisher:

Starhouse Media, LLC

121 San Anselmo Ave

Box 2832

San Anselmo, CA 94960

www.screenagersmovie.com

415-450-9585

Dedicated to Peter, Chase, and Tessa with immense love.

Contents

...

Introduction.....	1
 1 Social Media.....	17
Appreciating Positive Aspects of Social Media	18
What is the Right Age To Give a Phone With Social Media?.....	23
Why Teens Choose Different Apps for Communicating	29
Feeling Lonely in a Hyperconnected World?.....	32
Distress Signals on Social Media.....	35
“Cyberbullying,” Reworking Conversations so Kids Engage.....	38
The Risk of Superficial Social Lives	43
The Need To Be Seen and the Allure of Fame	46
College and Other Transitions — Does Social Media Help or Hurt?.....	51
When They are Feeling Rejected, How To Help.....	53
Should Social Media Not Have Likes?	57
 2 Video Games	61
Recognizing the Positives of Video Games	64
What Video Game Developers Learn From Casinos.....	66
Beware of Loot Boxes.....	68
Different Parent Approaches Concerning Violent Video Games	70
The Upsides of Having Intermittent Breaks From Gaming.....	73
Video Games and Making the World a Better Place	77
Strategies for Effective Video Game Limits.....	79
Clues To Uncover True Addiction to Video Gaming.....	86
Advice to Parents From a Recovered Gaming Addict.....	90
 3 Mental Health.....	95
In a World of Happy Posts—Why Expressing True Emotions is so Important.....	98

How Tech Impacts Teens' Stress and How To Help.....	104
Helping Youth Understand Clinical Depression.....	109
Exploring Why Depression Rates are Increasing.....	115
Anxiety — What Every Family Should Know.....	120
Talking About Our Emotions Builds Their Resiliency Skills.....	129
A Dozen Ideas for Finding Support.....	132

4 Sleep..... 139

Sleep Deprivation — A Major Public Health Issue.....	140
Have Kids Think Like Public Health Officials and Devise Solutions.....	145
Why Screens and Smartphones in the Bedroom is a Risky Act.....	149
Creating Healthy Sleep Habits in Younger Kids.....	152
How To Help Safeguard Sleep for Teens.....	156
People Share Their Rules for Sleep Time.....	160

5 Essential Preparation for Screen-Related Conversations..... 165

My Roadmap for Productive Conversations.....	166
We Worry Our Youth are Losing Communication Skills, Let's Help Them Gain Them.....	170
The Four Key Cs.....	174
Working To Prevent Emotional Dependence on Tech.....	177
"I Hate That I Wasted the Day Away".....	180
Setting Boundaries is Hard for Many of Us, Including Me.....	182
The Science of Creating New Screen Time Habits.....	185
When They Know They are Being Manipulated — It Can Help.....	188
Family Meetings Replace Family Fights (The Inspiration Behind Tech Talk Tuesdays).....	192

6 Contracts and Family Rules..... 195

Four Steps Before Making or Revising a Screen Time Agreement.....	197
Sample Contracts, Including My Daughter's.....	201
Our Family's Tech Rules — Always a Work in Progress.....	207
People Share Their Summer Screen Time Rules.....	212
Creating Consequences is Hard but Necessary.....	214

Using More Positivity to Get More of What We Want	217
Ideas To Help When Struggling With Screen Time Rules	223
Co-Parenting Tech Time: Working Through Differences	225
Tech Tools To Help With Screen Time Limits	231
How To Model Improving Screen Time Balance	235

7 Challenging Conversations 241

Drugs, Alcohol and Social Media	243
Talking About Sexting With Non-Judgemental Curiosity	248
A Confusing Legal System and Sexting	252
Girls Feeling Pressured Online	254
Talking With Younger Kids About Pornography	258
Talking With Teenagers About Pornography	262
Lying About Screen Time	266
Being Crude and Swearing Online	271
To Track or Not To Track	273

8 Screens in Schools and Homework 277

When Computers Replace Textbooks, How Do We Optimize Benefits and Decrease Downsides?	278
Addressing Cellphones in Middle Schools	282
Empowering Parents With Our “Away for the Day” Campaign	285
High Schools Get Students To Put Their Phones Away	288
Hold That Text	291
Multitasking: When is it Effective and When is it Not?	292
Tips for Improving Study Time That Work During and Post Covid-19	296

9 Fostering Human Bonds 303

Expanding Their Connections With Humanity	306
Siblings and Screen Time	309
Building Communication Skills Via Jobs	313
The Art of Asking People To Put Their Phone Away	316
Why Talk To the Cashier?	318
Building Good In-Person Digital Etiquette	321

Raising Helpers Starts at Home	323
Confessions of a Distracted Parent (i.e., Me).....	326
The Power of Helping Others and Feeling Needed	328
10 Cultivating Creativity, Insight, and Focus.....	333
Fostering Creativity in Their Online and Offline Lives.....	334
Creating Via Tech To Make a Difference.....	337
Unplugging — Restful or Stressful?	339
Phone and Device-Free Vacations — Possible?.....	342
Gaining Insights Through Hack Challenges	343
How To Improve Mental Focus in Our Kids and Ourselves	347
Building Brain Attention Skills With Mindfulness	350
Notes.....	357
Acknowledgments	371

Introduction



It goes without saying

Well, it goes without saying, but let me say it anyway. Our tech revolution is incredible beyond words — the ability to get and share information is beyond anything I could ever have imagined, the ability to connect with others around the world is remarkable, and the list goes on and on and on. I would not go back, but I do think things can be improved upon. I often think that the new stresses of parenting and the new challenges we face are high prices we pay for all the millions of “goodies” the revolution has brought us. I see these parenting challenges as opportunities — reading this book will help you change the “price” of technology into “pay off” by exploring ways to raise kids in the digital age who will be better communicators, more emotionally aware, and more mindful and compassionate than if we weren’t encouraged to parent more intentionally in this world of screen supremacy.

It also goes without saying, but I will say it anyway, screen time is not “ruining a generation,” a phrase I have heard and read repeatedly across news outlets. Dooming a generation is unfair, untrue and downright mean. Our kids are wonderful and doing the best they can with the inner and outer resources they have at any given time.

This book is relevant during and post Covid-19

When Covid-19 hit, we all became more grateful than ever about the upsides of our tech revolution. In a matter of weeks, screen time became our lifeline, allowing for ongoing learning, the ability to connect with others, entertainment, news and much more. Tech often allowed for classrooms to go online and for work for us parents to continue.

At the same time, the challenges of screen time balance became even

more pronounced. This book is all about how we, as parents, can feel as empowered as possible to help our kids maintain healthy screen time — whether during summer vacation, a busy school year, or stuck quarantined through a pandemic. The skills and strategies parents need around screen time endure. I wrote the vast majority of this book from the perspective of not being in a “shelter-in-place” situation, but there are suggestions woven throughout that are useful if you are sheltering in place. The book is full of hundreds of ideas around how to approach tech-themed conversations with your child and these themes are timeless.

How it all started

My stress around screen time issues and my kids began to form in 2011 when my son Chase was 12 and my daughter Tessa was 10. They started asking for more and more screen time. We had struggles when it was time to get off a screen. I felt at a loss of what to say or do.

I would think to myself, “If only there was a book like ‘What To Expect When You’re Expecting’ that included a chapter called ‘Expect a technology revolution and here are all the solutions you need.’” But alas, no such book existed.

Tensions could flare suddenly around all of this screen time conflict. It caused me to feel so many emotions — sadness, frustration, anger and then guilt for being angry. And, of course, worry.

At the time, Facebook was just starting and Chase, in seventh grade, was using it to interact with friends. At that time, I was worried about how it was such a time suck, as well as the crude and often offensive things he was seeing on the site, such as things being shared from a site called 9GAG.

This was the early period of “social media,” and I was not yet thinking of the deeper issues to come.

Meanwhile, screen time in general made me worry about all the things my kids could be exposed to — all sorts of things in the media like violence, harsh words, intense shows, the risk of seeing pornography and more. What if they put up a little YouTube video that was not well-received? Would they feel left out of things others were doing? Would exposure to violent video games change them? Would video gaming overtake their free time?

Between my husband, Peter, and myself, there was mounting tension

because we saw things differently when it came to screen time. Peter would say, “They just need to learn how to manage screen time themselves.” Allowing our kids to learn from experience, with guardrails, of course, has always been something my husband and I greatly value. So, I understood his logic, but I would respond, “Wait, the pull towards screens is so strong, aren’t we just setting them up for failure?”

As the days rolled forward, I was increasingly aware that this was exactly what we were doing.

I could see that the pull was so great on our kids and I thought a lot about how this Herculean pull was only to get stronger. Smartphones making screen time possible everywhere were just emerging and meanwhile, one-to-one programs were springing up all over and homework was increasingly shifting to computer screens.

Many schools began to give each student their own mobile device, such as an iPad or Chromebook, for school work. This allowed kids to defend unending screen time in the name of needing to do homework. When I first heard my son say the now-infamous line, “I need it for homework,” I shuddered.

Questions started to nag at me, both as a mother and as a primary care physician. I worked many years as a researcher and wanted scientifically-backed answers to all the questions I was asking myself, such as, what is the impact of social media on kids, what is the impact of video games, and how much time on screens is healthy?

I was desperate to understand what types of limits were necessary around screen time and how to enforce such rules without ruining my relationship with my kids or my husband. My days were filled with a thousand questions and my nights with a thousand worries. Talking with parents, teachers and others about these issues, I knew I was not alone.

What surprised me most was how little discussion there was in schools and the press about all the topics that consumed me. Where were the public forums about screen time and youth?

I wondered how I could help get discussions going in order to answer the questions that were on my mind and share the findings with others. I knew what I needed to do, and that was to make a documentary. I had been making documentaries on key social issues that impacted me personally for over a decade.

The decision to make a documentary

My interest in documentaries began while I was growing up in Berkeley, California. I lived with my mom, who would rent out space in our small home to help supplement the rent. I didn't have siblings, so I often talked with the renters. One was an editor for documentary films and when I saw her films, I was immediately enthralled by the power of watching people tell their real-life stories.

When I was in medical school, affordable consumer video cameras hit the market and I was so excited when I bought my first one. I filmed strangers when I was out and about, asking them all types of questions, such as what they liked about their job. Other times the interviews I conducted were a bit more playful, like the day I asked people for their opinion on the tacky shirt my friend was wearing (my friend had worn the wackiest shirt we could find just for this very purpose).

During my Primary Care Residency at UC San Francisco, I started taking filmmaking classes when I was not working in the hospital. During this time, I made a short educational film involving a family who didn't want their elderly mother to know she had cancer, which is a common practice in certain cultures. I felt ethically torn about what to do and how to best handle the situation. Withholding information from patients was not something my peers and I had ever learned about in our medical education and I hoped to provide insight into all of the cultural and ethical issues that a circumstance like this one raised. With the family's permission, I filmed my journey to understand how to approach the situation. That is how my first short film, "If She Knew" was born.

What really got me hooked on pursuing documentary filmmaking alongside my devotion to being a doctor was that I began to see how documentaries could be used as the centerpiece for social movements. I saw how these films could be used in community screenings across the country to bring together citizens, policymakers and others to spark conversations and reveal solutions.

I found that the issues that often surrounded families dealing with mental health problems were not being addressed in our society nearly enough. I knew this all too well, both as a physician and as a daughter of someone with schizophrenia. My dad's illness began before my birth and as I was growing up, things were really hard.

As an adult, I had a lot of questions about my own relationship with my father, as well as the way in which our society failed to provide enough support for those who were in similar situations to mine. I wanted to find ways to help my father and grow closer to him. I also wanted to understand how society could better help all families dealing with serious mental illness. With my dad's permission, I decided to make a very personal documentary about my family's journey in order to find answers. The goal was to use the film as a vehicle to inspire conversations and motivate people to take action.

What resulted is a deeply personal documentary: "UNLISTED: A Story of Schizophrenia." In partnership with the United States' largest mental health advocacy organizations, "UNLISTED" was screened in communities across the country to bring people together to discuss the issues that are often regarded as taboo and rarely discussed.

What made the film such a success to me was hearing from so many people about how the film not only made them feel less alone, but also helped them feel more comfortable talking with others about their own mental health challenges and inspired them to discuss ideas to increase access to help for their loved ones. I was working day and night on advocacy but it never felt like work because it was so gratifying.

Inspired by "UNLISTED," I wanted to understand how people experienced mental health problems around the world. I was amazed that while global health was getting lots of attention via organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, global mental health was almost completely ignored.

I was able to spend time in many countries to create the film "HIDDEN PICTURES: A Personal Journey Into Global Mental Health." Again, my goal was to bring people together through community screenings to encourage discussion about how to ensure that individuals and families all over the world get the support they deserve. The reach of this film extended even further through the organizing of various events, such as a global screening with 141 organizations on World Mental Health Day, and later by partnering with the World Health Organization in advocacy work. There had not yet been a film on global mental health and I was delighted to receive so many messages from people around the world thanking me for bringing attention to stories like their own.

The experience I gained from my earlier films gave me the confidence to make a documentary about screen time that I hoped would be an important tool for social change.

I thought about how such a film would need to be geared toward kids, parents, teachers and anyone who is interested in children's well-being because our tech revolution is massive and ever-growing. It was and is clear to me that we need everyone to come together to find solutions to ensure balance. I knew that community screenings would be the perfect way to foster conversations and build a movement.

The birth of the film "Screenagers: Growing Up in the Digital Age"

In my search for families who were willing to share their concerns about screen time, I was shocked to find that this was much more difficult than I had anticipated. I knew that I was not the only parent struggling to understand how best to raise children in our tech revolution, so I had expected that finding families who would want to talk in the film would be fairly straightforward. After all, we were not talking about mental illness. Finding stories for "Hidden Pictures" in places like South Africa and China was extremely difficult since mental health stigma is so prevalent. I had really believed that finding people to interview about screen time issues would be so much easier, but I was wrong.

Once I thought more about it, I realized that parents' hesitations made a lot of sense. Parenting is the most important thing we do. Sharing things we have tried to do, either attempts that have seemed to work or ones that have outright failed, makes us worry that we will be judged. I know that I too had this feeling at times while appearing in *Screenagers* with my family. Was I too lenient? Too controlling? Were the rules we came up with in the film "fair?"

Another reason parents were so hesitant to be filmed is that growing up, many didn't have the same exposure to screens as their children do today. This was brand new territory and feeling really unsure of any and all policies made perfect sense once I thought about it more.

Originally, I had not planned on filming myself and my own family

for this new film, but I wanted to show, in real time, the challenges that families are experiencing. I also felt that it was important to show that the struggles that feel so personal are actually happening in almost every home in America. Given how hard it was initially to find families willing to share, I realized that mine had to go first.

So with their permission, I started to film my family. These clips mainly focus on my continued failed attempts to get things right with my kids concerning their screen time. As the film progresses, you see the lessons I learned and several solutions that started to work in our home. Fortunately, over the 3 1/2 years of making the film, I was finally able to find many families and youth who wanted to be in the film, even though it wasn't easy.

The finished film, *Screenagers*, explores the impact of things like social media, video gaming and tech in schools and considers all types of solutions that have the ability to create healthy screen time balance. Interwoven into stories of families are insights from psychologists, brain scientists and other experts attempting to shed light upon some of the impacts that tech can have on youth, as well as ways to ensure healthier screen time in our homes and schools.

Before Covid-19, more than 4 million people in 80 countries gathered to watch the film in person and discuss solutions afterward. Once Covid-19 hit, we started to hold community screenings online. The goal has always been to promote community participation that continues beyond the film screening. This type of work is hard and important and we all need to be working together for the long haul.

The birth of the film “Screenagers NEXT CHAPTER: Uncovering Skills for Stress Resilience”

A couple of years into the film's screenings, I was reading news reports and hearing from many parents about their teens' concerning levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Questions about the social and emotional impact of screen time were beginning to circulate.

Then, my daughter started having symptoms of depression and even as a doctor, I didn't know what to do. Often, when I stepped in and tried

to help I would make her more upset! That was the last thing I wanted to do. Meanwhile, I wanted to understand how her time on social media, YouTube and other platforms was impacting her emotional state. What could I do and how was screen time playing into this?

I wanted to find solutions. What do we need to know about screen time in order to minimize any negative impacts on mental health? What skills can all teens learn, at home and at school, that can help them handle challenging emotions including stress, anxiety and depression? What specific things can all parents do to raise emotionally intelligent teens in our screen-saturated society? Finally, what could I do to support my daughter?

All of this led to the creation of “Screenagers NEXT CHAPTER.” The film interweaves my personal stories with those of my own teenagers — particularly my daughter Tessa, who was struggling with depression. Featured alongside personal stories are experiments and brain science that I found fascinating, as well as insight from researchers, psychologists and parenting experts. The film reveals all sorts of steps that can be taken in order to provide teens with skills to navigate complex emotional and social challenges that have always been a part of growing up but have been heightened by our tech revolution.

All about improving our conversations about tech with youth

My goal for the *Screenagers* films was to improve conversations about screen time occurring between adults and youth. To this end, I geared the films for both kids and parents. I hoped that families would watch them together so they could see the story and science in the movie and then would have a not-so-personal way of discussing the often charged topics.

But this goal went beyond just sparking short post-screening discussions. I hoped to find ways to help foster productive ongoing conversations in homes. I knew this was really important to encourage because research shows that approximately 30% of parents and youth in the U.S. reported that they fight daily about screen time. That is, millions of families. For many other families, this fighting is not daily but it is still very frequent.

Some argue that it is inevitable and even developmentally appropriate. Nevertheless, ongoing battles can erode relationships in profound ways.

Why calm conversations can be so hard

There are many reasons why productive conversations between teens and parents are so difficult. From my own experience, I can relate to these three common points.

First, the elevated emotions of parents

My emotions ran high when I thought about the many factors that related to my kids' screen time. I worried about them feeling excluded, feeling inferior or watching shows that modeled values I disagreed with. I admit that I'm a bit of a control freak, but I hated to see them wasting so much of their time online. Why were they not outside hiking or doing some creative writing?

I would often, without thinking, start talking about all of my concerns not *with* them but *at* them — pouring my fears onto them in hopes that I could worry them into not doing or seeing the things on the internet that worried me.

It took me a while to realize that my emotions were making them not want to talk with me about screen time issues. Even when I was speaking very calmly, they could still sense my negative feelings.

Second, the defensiveness of youth

Youth feel lots of strong emotions when it comes to talking with their parents about screen time. Struggles over control and rules often come to a head when the screen is involved. Parents use it as a tool: "You can't have your phone if you don't..." to weaponize the conversation. Kids receive messages from the news, and other adults, that generally report very negative headlines about youth and tech use. Things like, "It's destroying a generation," and "It's causing depression." There is much less talk about how screen time can bring positivity to their lives. Over and over, youth have told me that all of this negativity makes them feel very irritated, defensive and even angry.

This scare approach also often happens in schools. Screen time discussions may only occur when a police officer is brought in to talk to the kids about cyberbullying or sexting. When an officer came to my daughter's middle school to speak about cyberbullying, I was surprised by the accusatory nature of her presentation. She literally said that she believed that all of them had cyberbullied in some way. I was speechless when I left the classroom.

Third, these are sensitive conversation topics

A third reason why screen time conversations can be challenging is that they involve complicated topics. The intensity of things that kids may see and read starting at a young age due to the internet is like nothing a parent would have thought possible just 10 years ago. For instance, they regularly witness intense pornography, self-harm, shark attacks, suicide and drug use in shows like “13 Reasons Why” and platforms like YouTube and Pornhub. This kind of content can also come off as “how-to” instructions, which is particularly upsetting.

Even if one has installed blockers such as Net Nanny, the truth is that kids will be around screens in many settings. And many teens are wily enough to get around blockers anyway.

Knowing that it is important to talk about a sensitive topic, and knowing what to say are two completely different things. For example, many elementary-age children can now be exposed to pornographic images and videos. How can we handle this challenging topic? How does that conversation change as they get older?

How conversations became calmer in our home

Years back, our conversations about tech were not calm at all — we were undergoing everything I mentioned above. At some point while making *Screenagers*, I realized it would be helpful to have an agreed-upon time in the family to talk about tech — our rules, our solutions and so forth. My girlfriend told me about weekly family meetings she had in her house when she raised her teens years prior and that planted a seed in my mind.

So I talked with my family and we came up with this idea: Tech Talk

Tuesdays, a time carved out in the week where we would discuss issues around screen time. These issues would include screen limits for our family and broader issues of screen time in our lives and society at large.

Having this weekly practice started to help our family dynamic. We felt much more like a team than like opponents in a battle of wills. We started debating the issues of freedom of the press and how far that freedom should go, given all we saw happening online. Of course, we also talked about our own screen balance goals, how our home rules were working or not working, and what rules needed to be modified.

Things were calmer in our home. The stress level was lower and we were all relating better.

All of this led me to begin writing a weekly blog called “Tech Talk Tuesdays” about the topics I was discussing with my family so that it might help other adults have productive conversations with the youth in their lives — their own kids, those they interact with at school, in after-school programs, in faith-based settings and so on.

I started by sharing these writings via the *Screenager’s* website and then they quickly spread via all sorts of channels, like schools who were posting them in their newsletters. I have been writing and sharing these posts every week for over four years now. I am fortunate that my Co-Producer and Community Engagement Partner, Lisa Tabb, has been an incredible thought partner in creating these.

Having spent more than four years researching and writing the “Tech Talk Tuesday” (TTT) blog and seeing how much they were helping families, Lisa and I realized that adapting the most popular blogs and adding additional writings into a book could be helpful.

The writings in this book draw from iterations of my favorites of more than 200 TTTs. The vast majority are either brand new or significantly revised. Each topic section has questions at the end that are meant to facilitate discussions between you and your kids.

What this book aims to do

My goal with this book is to help parents raise kids in the face of our new screen world and to give a roadmap of important conversations to have with kids and teens.

This book covers all of the topics that I believe are essential for everyone to be discussing in their homes and schools. Such topics include video gaming, social media, sleep, mental health and communication skills, just to name a few. The book also covers the critical topic of ways in which parents can work with their kids to create healthy screen time limits and to ensure that those limits are followed.

This book, with the many conversation starters it aims to spark between adults and youth, provides a means by which youth can better develop insight into the many complex issues associated with our tech revolution. For example, what are their views on the societal trend to buy so many goods through Amazon rather than in person at stores? How do they feel about our new “attention economy,” whereby companies employ all sorts of strategies to keep eyeballs on their tech products? Having conversations like these will help you raise compassionate thinkers who will be the leaders in their homes and beyond regarding tech issues.

Through my years of filming and speaking at schools, I have been disappointed with how few opportunities youth have to discuss the hundreds of topics that our digital age raises, as many of these directly impact them. The thing is, youth LOVE to talk about these issues. Granted, your child may not be open to talking about tech with you at this time — as was the case initially in my home — but don’t worry, this book has lots of solutions for such scenarios (you get to learn from my mistakes).

Another intention of this book is to improve our children’s science literacy by providing many research findings that can be shared with them. I have consistently found that youth are very interested in learning about research related to screen time. Unlike science that can seem incredibly abstract — such as chemistry (no offense chemistry) — experiments related to screen time and human psychology are much more relatable.

Being science-savvy is so important, especially now, as news headlines fly at our kids and media outlets try to distill research into catchy headlines. What is the actual science behind the words and are the media messages accurate? When Covid-19 hit, it only reinforced the need for us to raise science-literate youth.

How to have effective conversations?

Answer: communication science

Throughout the book, I share many evidence-based techniques that lead to productive, fruitful discussions that can help decrease friction and repair fractured relationships. It is all through using communication science.

Communication science is something I became interested in when I was a medical student, even though I wasn't familiar with the term at the time. I was intrigued by the fact that some physicians use words and mannerisms in a way that make patients and patients' families feel at ease and cared for. I could visibly see this on patients' faces. Then there were other physicians whose communication techniques would inevitably leave patients feeling worse.

My interest in interpersonal communication inspired me to do research in the science of it at UC San Francisco.

An ineffective communication approach: the “scare tactic”

When I started making *Screenagers*, I saw that the main way kids were learning about tech was via scare tactics. Think, for example, of the schools that teach kids about cyberbullying and sexting, and how some of them have police officers deliver the message so it is clear that they should be really scared of the consequences.

Unfortunately, scare tactics have not proven to be very effective for long-term behavior change. Let me give you one example: Massive public health campaigns designed to combat smoking showed images of damaged lungs and provided testimonials from people diagnosed with lung cancer with the intention of scaring us out of using cigarettes.

It turns out that those campaigns had a surprisingly small impact on behavior decisions. What eventually turned the tide and cut smoking rates were two tactics: substantially raising the cost of cigarettes and placing firm limits on the places where people could smoke. Of course, continuing to educate people about the ill effects of tobacco is important, but if we had just focused on using scare tactics, we would not have made the significant progress we see today.

Scare tactics can work well for short term behavior change but it's important to examine a better way to shape behavior, which I call "share tactics."

But first, let's explore the science behind why scare tactics are not very effective when it comes to youth and screen time. The amygdala is the part of the brain that responds to fear and provides us with warnings that something scary is about to take place. Do you remember when you first watched a scary movie that played creepy music as the camera led you down an eerie hotel hallway? Even when you don't, the amygdala does. That's why you may get creeped out in empty hallways later on in life.

This is crucial. Learning from fear-inducing stimuli helps us avoid and escape danger. But what happens when your amygdala is shooting fear straight to your nerves and nothing bad actually occurs? You stop responding. This is exactly what is happening with our kids when we keep telling them, "Too much YouTube is bad for your brain" or "Playing violent video games will make you violent." If we constantly yell, "DANGER, DANGER!" and the warning is not in sync with our child's experience, they will tune out our words.

I understand that it is very hard to exercise restraint when things seem scary, since we feel like it is our job as parents to protect our youth. We worry about the risk of video games, social media, binge-watching, social cruelty, anxiety, grades and the list goes on and on. So what do we do?

Ditching a "scare tactic" for a "share tactic"

When it comes to getting our kids to engage with us on tech issues, I have found it more effective to engage in what I call a "share tactic" instead of a "scare tactic." A share tactic stresses the importance of sharing science and stories in a non-black-and-white way. It is about considering many perspectives when looking at topics. Scare tactics take the opposite approach. They are very black-and-white and one-sided.

People, especially tweens and teens, are not big fans of being told what to do and what to think. Instead of talking at them in a doom and gloom way, could you include them in the conversation? Listen to their

experiences and opinions about the dangers of social media, video games and too much YouTube. Calm conversations involving statistics, real-life stories and areas of relatability are what get people — including tweens and teens — to think and act preventatively.

Of course, these share tactics help us work together to define and follow the rules so that we can also have sacred, screen-free times in our lives.

Ideas for how to use this book

Please know that you will still get a lot out of reading this book on your own without engaging in the conversation topics and suggested questions that I provide.

If you can have these conversations with your child, that is great. One thing that really helps me stay consistent with them is to pick a certain time to talk each week — or maybe twice a week. My family picked Tuesday nights during dinner. If something prevented all of us from being at the table together, I found other times — such as when we were all in the car — to hold “pop-up” Tech Talks.

It’s also important to decide whether these conversations should be a time devoted exclusively to topics in the book or if they should involve issues taking place in your own home. For us, Tech Talk Tuesdays were a time to bring up any and all issues. For example, if Chase or Tessa would only turn in their phones after I had reminded them several times each night, then we would strategize about how to make the nighttime routine go smoother at our next Tuesday meeting.

I highly recommend starting most of your conversations by asking everyone to begin with something positive about the tech in their life. Examples of the positives of tech may be a good conversation a child had over Zoom with a grandparent, a new app they found or a new trending game or meme they like. When we started our tech talks, I quickly found that beginning with the positive significantly improved our discussions — my kids were less defensive and in a better mood. It was the perfect way to set the stage for talking about harder topics.

Before venturing forward I share these final thoughts

I know that many of us believe that managing screen time in our homes is extra hard because we didn't grow up with all of this tech in our homes. We didn't have parents dealing with these issues. Yes, this is true. Yet, I'm often reminded that just because one grows up with something doesn't mean they will know how to parent around it. For instance, think about drugs and alcohol.

I hope that when today's kids become adults and the topic of parenting and tech comes up, they will say something like, "I grew up in the tech revolution and at home, we talked about it all and things were managed pretty well. I feel pretty prepared." But they also might say, "I grew up in the tech revolution, and all I remember is a lot of fighting."

I want to emphasize one final point, which is that there is NO ONE WAY to parent! Each of us is different and that is the beauty of our humanness. The last thing I want this book to do is make anyone feel negatively judged about their parenting. There are so many factors at play in our selves and in our homes that make parenting such a wild journey. To me, the key is being open and humble with our kids about how we are on this journey to do the best we can, because we love them so darn much.

Chapter One:

Social Media

Youth today are inundated with adults telling them that social media is evil. They hear this via the press and from the adults in their homes and schools. In the meantime, they see lots of good things about social media. All of this works to make kids feel like we adults “don’t get it.”

Meanwhile, there are plenty of news articles and book titles that put kids down, with the idea that social media and cellphones are “ruining a generation.” This, not surprisingly, makes youth feel insulted and leads them to become defensive.

I am to blame for this too. I was originally so focused on making sure my kids understood all the risks of social media that I forgot the key step — first validating that there are also many positive things about tech. I have come to realize that this validation cannot occur just once or twice through saying something like, “Yeah, hun, I know it is great that you can talk with friends on social media,” and then returning to my fears of inappropriate picture sharing and on and on.

Talking with psychologists, I realized why it is important that we often let our teens know that we appreciate their feelings about social media. This is because we are asking our youth to hold two opposing views in their brains at the same time. On the one hand, social media has many positive aspects to it. And on the other hand, it also has negative aspects. Holding two seemingly opposite views side by side at the same time is hard for all humans, but it turns out it is particularly hard for younger brains. This is called dialectical thinking — holding two seemingly opposing views at the same time.

Young people’s brains rely on more black-and-white thinking than those of adults. I have seen my kids experience plenty of the upsides of social media along with the downsides. For example, my son Chase’s ongoing group chat with boys from his high school has been both a source

of great fun and hard emotions for him. I remember during his senior year of high school, after he had sustained a concussion, some guys in his main chat group were inferring he was faking it. They suggested he was trying to get out of doing things. It was incredibly hard for my son to be dealing with the pain of the concussion while getting accused of being a liar for it. As a mom, how could I best engage with him about his online social life in a way that felt supportive and not too intrusive?

My daughter loved the conveniences of social media to help coordinate with her dance team or to stay connected with friends she had to move away from. At the same time, I have also seen her in emotional pain from agonizing over posting just the right photo on Instagram or being made fully aware that she was not being invited to social gatherings.

The social lives of kids have always been a confusing ground for parents to navigate. It has always been hard to be both engaged and also to give space — what is the right balance? Now, with social media, this challenge is more complicated than ever.

A Common Sense Media study found that fewer than half of parents in the United States regularly discuss social media content with their preteens or teens.¹

Now is the time to change that statistic and to empower parents with the tools to feel more confident in talking with their youth about social media.



Appreciating Positives Aspects of Social Media

There are pluses and minuses to social media — it would be ludicrous to claim it was all one way or the other. Yet, I am the first to admit that my comments were heavily biased for a long time when I would have conversations about technology with my kids. Surprise, surprise, eventually, they were very resistant to talk with me about the topic. I needed to change.

I consciously spent several days in a row exclusively talking about the positives about social media. Soon, they weren't just more open to

talking about it with me, but they also started to bring up things that bothered them about social media.

Having a conversation (ideally, more than once) about the upsides of social media and other communication tools in our tech times can be a very effective way to inspire calm conversations that can lead to deeper ones over time.

Let me start with a story I heard on Susan Cain's podcast series called "Quiet." Cain is the author of the book, "Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking." In an episode entitled, "How Young Introverts Can Thrive on Social Media," we meet a young professional, Davis Nguyen, who has been an introvert for all his life.² The core of the story is how social media helped him achieve many goals despite being an introvert.

Davis grew up in poverty and was attending one of the lowest-ranked high schools in the country, but he aspired to go to a top-tier university. He decided to use the internet and social media to reach out to other teens across the country to ask for tips on taking the SAT and for help with his college essay. He says that he was happy that several people he did not know offered to help.

Davis said:

"One girl from Harvard told me that one of my essays I'd spent 40 hours on was really bad. ... I'm so glad she gave me that feedback, because I was able to throw it away, and the next essay I wrote turned out to be the one that I turned in to Yale and Harvard. The fact that I was able to ask for help, I was able to get really good feedback." (Davis was accepted at both universities.)

But the part of the story that is most remarkable is that he realized that he could use social media to connect to people he admired, such as Rolf Potts, the author of one of Davis' favorite books, "Vagabonding." Davis not only reached him, but he was able to help when the author said he would like to speak at Davis' school. This experience was so positive for Davis that he decided to use social media to reach out to other people he looked up to, which led to many new connections, including with author Susan Cain.

Davis said:

“Every week, I would do my research on one person who I look up to, and I would find a way to be helpful for them. ... It’s not jumping completely out of my comfort zone, but just extending it just a few inches every week.”

So, being able to venture out socially and make small steps can be a helpful aspect of social media. And by no means is Cain advocating that youth hide behind social media. Cain says in the podcast: “And that’s the key. To help quiet kids to use social media as a tool for development but not as a crutch to avoid face to face encounters.”

Let me give some other examples of the positives of social media that teens often describe.

CAN HELP SHY AND INTROVERTED YOUTH TO COMMUNICATE

It is common for adults to talk about how they worry that kids can only say things online and cannot talk face-to-face. Yet, many youth tell me that they are saying things online that they want to express but are just not quite ready to be having such conversations in person. They still have in-person conversations with some people of course, such as family and good friends. They just find that with the aid of social media, they can have more time to compose themselves and have conversations with people beyond their closest friends. In this way, things like Snapchat, email and texting can take away some of the anxiety that in-person interactions can create.

Of course, the problem is that if they do not, over time, get more comfortable talking in person with people, then social anxiety needs to be considered. The good news is that the vast majority of older teens I have met, who told me how they were shy as tweens and appreciated that they could communicate with peers through tech, developed increasing confidence in face-to-face conversations over time.

DEEP DISCUSSIONS WITH FRIENDS

My own teens and so many others I have spoken to talk about all the deep conversations they have over text and social media. And when I

ask if these conversations are as meaningful as they are in person, many times, they say yes. On a few occasions, both my kids have shared deep conversations they had with someone on social media and I am always impressed with the level of honesty that goes back and forth.

STAYING IN CONTACT WITH FRIENDS FAR AWAY OR FROM PAST SCHOOLS

One great advantage of social media is the ease with which we can all stay in contact with people we care about. Kids can reach out to friends from their old schools or their old neighborhoods, making them feel connected even when they are far apart.

CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITIES TO FEEL UNDERSTOOD

Social media can provide kids with online communities that offer support. Kids who are feeling alone as they navigate life can often find fellowship in online groups of people who share an identity. Young people who are bisexual, gay, trans, etc., can find connections online.

MANY WAYS TO DO SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS FOR FRIENDS

Social media has made it much easier to support businesses and social causes with reviews on Yelp and sharing recommendations. My family and I love the little bakery down our street. It is a bit worn down, but the owner is an incredible baker. I wanted to help spread the word, so I was happy to be able to give her a great review on Yelp. I did not expect it, but one day when I stopped in for some outstanding carrot cake, the owner thanked me for posting a review.

Being able to spread the word about friends' work, such as a talk they are giving, a book or a show or their pop up bread stand (which our neighbors have sporadically done around Seattle) feels so great. We parents don't take this for granted because it was so hard to spread the word before the tech revolution.

HOW I CHANGED AS A MOM

I know if you are like me, your mind was probably piping in with all the worries you had while you were reading the positives of social media above. It is the same for me. One example from my experience related to Tessa and her interest in watching “influencers” — also called “creators” and “YouTubers” — who she finds on social media and YouTube. Usually, the influencers she gravitates to are girls her age or slightly older.

At times, Tessa has looked up advice from these girls. For instance, Tessa may type in, “What to do when having a bad day” and start listening to whichever YouTuber catches her eye.

I worried about all sorts of things, like what might happen if the YouTuber gave her bad advice and only made her feel worse. When I would try to talk with Tessa about my fears, she would tune me out.

I needed to change my tune. I started saying more validating things to Tessa, such as, “What you are saying makes a lot of sense.” I would also mention that it made sense that she would go to get inspiration from people online and that I did this too by listening to certain podcasts where people talked about psychology and life skills.

Eventually, by letting Tessa know that I understood that these videos did help her at times, she started sharing them with me. From this new place of understanding, we have been able to have interesting conversations about issues like when she should choose to reach out to a friend for input vs. turn to the internet, or if a sponsor behind a YouTuber could taint her genuineness.

IDEAS FOR CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1. How does tech help you make connections?
2. What connections over social media feel really good?
3. Do you think liking a photo is a small act of kindness?



What is the Right Age to Give a Phone With Social Media?

I get asked all the time what age is right to give a child a phone. What people are really asking is when they should hand over a small computer (i.e., a smartphone) with access to the world. Most parents are not concerned about giving their kids or teens a phone, per se. If it was just a phone, that would be easy. If it was just a phone with texting, that would be slightly more complicated, but it would still feel manageable.

Parents, like myself, often feel caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, we hear from our youth that everyone is on such and such app, like Instagram, and they are the only ones without it. It also can be really hard if a sports team or another group is using social media to make plans together. We also know there are perks to a smartphone, like seeing when the bus is coming or having a camera or a calculator available at all times.

And then, on the other hand, we have legitimate concerns about social media — such as exposure to strangers, internal and external pressures to post and respond, desire for attention, access to porn and more. We also worry about social conflicts such as being excluded, inappropriate group chats, sexy posing and posting, making inappropriate TikTok videos and on and on.

There is no science-driven data that tells us that there is a specific age that is the right one to allow a phone and access to social media. Granted, when I hear of elementary-age kids with a phone and access to social media, I worry. I hope their parents are helping guide their experience and putting firm limits on phone use, because the risks of these devices are much greater for kids in elementary school. We must be aware of the risk of elementary-age kids who have devices.

GET TO CALM FIRST

Before embarking on conversations about these topics with your kids, first stop and recognize if you are having feelings of fear or worry. Make sure you have thought about how you don't want to transfer those emotions to your kids. You don't want to seem one-sided or overly concerned to them.

I remember a few times in those early days when I would go to my room and take many deep breaths before talking about the topic of smartphones. It was hard for me to put on a calm veneer when on the inside, I was a bundle of nerves.

DECISION TO WAIT UNTIL AT LEAST 13

I have spoken with several parents who wanted to wait until their kids were 13 years old to give them access to social media. After all, the official "appropriate" age provided by tech companies like Instagram and Facebook is often 13. But it can be hard since many kids may feel left out if they are 11 or 12 and most of their friends have access to social media except for them.

When kids have friends who also do not have a phone or access to social media, it helps parents hold out until their child turns 13. There is an organization called Wait 'Til Eighth, whose focus is on this issue. It's a place where you can find support.

TALK WITH OTHER PARENTS

When your relationship with your tween or teen has spiraled down into negativity around this issue, it can help to get outside perspectives. For instance, it helps to talk with friends who have kids the same age about what they do. Consider talking with parents from your kid's social circle.

If you learn that your tween really is the only one in their friend group without a device and that they are feeling incredibly left out and sad because of this, it might be time to let them have a device. Whether you make that decision or decide to wait longer, the following are key steps that can be useful.

TALK ABOUT THE ANTICIPATED FUN AND THE CHALLENGES

Talk to your child about what excites them about getting a phone and some challenges each of you anticipates. Challenges might be things like what might happen when they feel like friends need a response and their allotted social media time is up. Or how they can limit who to “friend” to decrease all of the Snaps they might get. And how should people treat each other online as well as in person? How does it make a person feel when the person they are with is glued to a phone and ignoring them?

SETTING UP EXPECTATIONS

Establish right off the bat that there will be defined times regarding use and nonuse. Make sure it is not said in a belittling manner like, “We have to do this because we all know you don’t have good self-control.” Rather, this should be understanding — point out how there are dozens of reasons why phones and apps pull for their attention, like friendships and the fact that tech companies create ways to keep them on the apps.

Even before coming up with specific rules, have conversations about times and places where it makes sense to have phones away. I wish I had done this more. It is such a powerful way to let them know that you respect their brain power in all of this and that their input is important. They may not get (in fact, they most likely won’t) all of their preferences, but you are there to understand their hopes and wishes. Life is all about not getting everything we want. Life comes with all sorts of rules, but what is great in a family is that we listen to each other and care about each other’s perspectives.

This is also a good time to discuss how you plan to be engaged with their use. The more this is about working with them, the better. You want to be able to check what is going on and talk about it rather than conveying the idea, “I will be monitoring you.” From the start, it is about the idea that yes, things will be fun, but they will also be tricky at times and you are there to help them navigate this complex new social terrain they will be entering. It is not about your trying to catch them or their friends messing up. I can’t stress enough how youth have told me how frustrating it is when parents have that mentality instead of a supportive one. When youth feel the latter, they tell me that it helps them stay out

of a “sneaking mode.” The more you keep an open line of conversation between them, the less they’ll feel the need to transgress.

CHOOSING WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA

When starting social media, parents often feel better allowing just particular apps to start. If your child is really pushing for a particular platform because it is the main way their friends are communicating and they have felt incredibly left out by not being on it, then that is the app you will want to start with.

Some parents are more concerned about Snapchat than Instagram. This is in part because messages disappear once they have been opened and read. Other parents have expressed more concern over Instagram, with its flood of posing models and friends.

I decided to ask some teens what they would say to a parent who was wondering which social media app they should allow before the others. I share this to show that there is no clear cut answer and the key is having discussions with your youth to talk about pluses and minuses of each app and make decisions from there.

Tye, 15-year-old boy:

“Personally, I believe Snapchat before Instagram. Firstly, because that’s what I did and it felt so much more comfortable. Secondly, I feel like Snapchat is less chaotic because all you do is talk to your friends and see what they’re doing. While on Instagram, it’s very chaotic at first because you get all these ads, friend requests, and I always — and still do — felt like I had to post something. Also, there is a lot of responsibility that comes with Instagram because you have to be careful with what you post because if you forget that you posted something inappropriate and you lose a job because your boss found that old picture or video of you, it’s your fault.”

Isabel, 13-year-old girl:

“If deciding between getting Instagram or Snapchat first, I would have to choose Snapchat. For me, Instagram can cause more stress and feel toxic. While Snapchat, on the other hand, helps me

connect with friends and make plans. There are some dangers with Snapchat because teens feel more invincible, I think, when sharing photos and texts, but it really depends on how you use it. If the teen is well-informed and knows how to handle their digital footprint, then I would suggest getting Snapchat first. These are mainly my preferences, though, and it varies from person to person.”

Ellie, 18-year-old girl:

“I got my first phone when I was in 5th grade and Instagram had already been downloaded onto my phone off of my dad’s iCloud account. I had no clue what it was or how public or private it was. I would post anything and everything. After one year of having the account with 0 followers, I had 2000 posts. My parents had no clue I had Instagram, and honestly, I didn’t think much of it because it wasn’t popular yet and no one really had it at that point. But from seventh to eighth grade, Instagram grew into the huge social media platform it is now. That’s when I had to have a conversation with my parents about posting with purpose and that nothing is really private. I deleted the 2,000 posts I had up and made my account private to completely start over. Getting Snapchat was a lot more of a process because they had heard so many horror stories of girls having private pictures leaked. I had to put together a whole presentation to get Snapchat and then had a contract of what I could and couldn’t do on the app.”

Justin, 18-year-old boy:

“In my experience, Snapchat is just like texting while Instagram is used to document people’s lives. I don’t think you need to get one at a time though. I do not see any harm in getting both at once.”

YOU CAN REVERSE YOUR DECISION

Parents do at times reverse decisions about allowing a main social media app. It is of course not the goal to permit, and then not, and to keep going back and forth. But it is important to know that it is always an option to change a decision.

Here is an example from one mom, Jill, who has a 12-year-old boy. She allowed him to have access to Snapchat for a while but then decided to reverse it. Nothing bad happened on the app but she explained to me:

“The more I looked at Snapchat, the more concerned I got. The app, as you know, deletes pictures and messages once they are read, so kids can basically send anything, which is scary. I noticed my son had over 600 friends, which is not really possible. Some were girls who looked like they were in their twenties and so many of the pictures were of young girls in sultry poses.”

Jill went on to say that she was worried about the pictures of girls being spread at the school and she did not want her son to be at risk of getting such a photo. She wrote that she and her husband decided to have him delete the app.

I spoke with her son, and he told me that he was not that upset about no longer having Snapchat. He has Google Hangouts, so he can still communicate with his friends online, and he also talks with them while playing video games.

MAKING IT SAFE TO COME TO YOU

We want our kids to come to us when they feel they have made a mistake, or when people are treating them poorly. Yet, they are in a time of life where the pull for peer acceptance and connection is heightened, and there are reasons they might not follow your rules or values. For instance, they download an app you did not approve of; they exceed the time limits you have set for them; or, they send an inappropriate picture of themselves to someone.

I always tell my kids that I hope they will come to me with these issues and we will work them out together. The first step is talking it out and seeing what they are thinking and what their ideas might be for reparation. The actual situation would define how long, or if at all, there would be a consequence. And if a consequence is appropriate, the goal is not to over-punish them — when that happens, their anger toward parents can really become the focus rather than actual learning from their mistakes.

IDEAS FOR CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1. What age do you think is ideal for a person to get a cellphone?
A smartphone?
2. What are some of the fun things you want to be able to do on a cellphone? Smartphone?
3. What are some of the tools that smartphones have built into them?
4. How much time do you think you should have per day on your phone?



Why Teens Choose Different Apps for Communicating

My team and I have surveyed teenagers — both boys and girls — about how, when and why they choose to communicate via their many apps. It can be a fun exercise to have your teens explain how and why they choose to use certain tech platforms for specific kinds of communication. Or if they don't have social media yet, what they expect to do in the future. It is important to be curious without judgment if you want your adolescents to be as open as possible. So, be sure to frame the conversation in a positive light.

INSIGHTS FROM NINA, 16-YEAR-OLD GIRL

INSTAGRAM: “I rarely use Instagram to communicate with one person directly. I usually use it to communicate something to all of my followers at once and no one in particular. Many teenagers have ‘public’ — being followed by everyone — and ‘private’ Instagram accounts [also called Finstagram] — being followed by people you are actually friends with. Instagram has a simple button in their privacy settings if you only want people who you approve of to see your photos and videos. Otherwise, your account is open to everyone. Good quality photos that reflect well on me go on my public account. And posts that are more about the

caption [private thoughts, song recommendations, daily woes] and have pictures as an afterthought are relegated to the private.”

SNAPCHAT: “I use Snapchat for casual conversations like checking in with a friend after school. If I just want to say hi, Snapchat is the best place to do it. Since I am sending a picture along with the message, I don’t have to think very hard about what the message is going to be. Additionally, since it is possible to send Snaps [which are just photos with no text at all], a conversation is not a necessary part of a Snapchat interaction.”

TEXTING: “I use texting for actual conversation and communication. Many of the texts are in group chats and almost all of my plans are made in group chats. Texting is direct and concise, so I will usually text someone if I have a specific question or something that I need to coordinate. However, if I already have Snapchat open, I will just use Snapchat to relay logistics.”

CALLING: “My phone calls are usually with my parents, who are not as adept as my generation when it comes to texts. Sometimes I will call my friends, but only if I have to talk to them about something that is timely or if my hands are busy so I can’t text. If I’m on my way somewhere and need directions or want to know right then whether a friend wants to run an errand with me, I will call them because I am sure to get an immediate answer. Most of my phone calls are short and to the point and if I want a longer, more leisurely conversation I will use FaceTime.”

FACETIME: “FaceTime is usually best for longer conversations and conversations that I would prefer to have in person but cannot. Sometimes it is simply because I am bored or lonely and want the presence of one of my friends, and sometimes because I have something serious or long-winded to talk about that would be too much to type out or too sensitive to talk about over social media. Oftentimes this will be drama or family issues.

Did you enjoy this preview?

Please consider purchasing your own copy of *Parenting In The Screen Age* (372 pages). Available in Paperback and Kindle editions.

[Visit our website](#) to see the available purchase options.

Does every conversation with your child or teen about screen time blow up into a fight? Or maybe you avoid bringing up the topic but silently harbor worry and frustration. How can you better understand what you're up against — and most importantly, ensure the healthiest screen time possible?

In *Parenting in the Screen Age*, award-winning filmmaker, and mental health advocate Dr. Delaney Ruston distills more than a decade of communications research into a definitive guide for today's parents. Packed with evidence-based insights on screen time from researchers, input from kids and teens, and solutions drawn from Dr. Ruston's own messy parenting struggles, this guide shows you how to start — and sustain — productive family talks about technology. You'll learn how to:

- Bring up screen time without making your child or teen defensive
- Talk through difficult issues like online social cruelty, sexting, and mental health
- Engage your child in creating boundaries around Netflix, video gaming, and social media
- Have screen time limits that actually work — with less of the sneaking or arguing

During the COVID pandemic or after, this book will help you lead your child to become more tech-wise and life balanced — empowering them to build a healthier relationship with our digital world, now and into their future.

Delaney Ruston, M.D. is a filmmaker, Stanford trained physician, international speaker, and the creator of the award-winning films *Screenagers* and *Screenagers NEXT CHAPTER*. A trusted expert on screen time and parenting and improving the wellbeing of today's youth, Ruston has appeared on "Good Morning America," "The Today Show," and "PBS NewsHour" and has been invited to speak at Google, The Aspen Institute, the United Nations, and conferences and schools worldwide. To date, her films have been seen by over 4.5 million kids and adults at screenings in 85 countries.

