THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 4 – Episode 4

Future Proofing our kids_ Nurturing Healthy Screen Habits for Kids

Are you being held hostage to tech by your kids? Well, I'm here to tell you it's never too late. I'm Ashley Costello, psychotherapist at The Resilient Kid. And we're talking

this month, our theme is kind of well-being, but really digging down into how do we future proof our kid? How do we build their resilience?

And I think nurturing healthy screen habits Is a real major must for us. It's hard, isn't it? It's the one that causes the most arguments. It's the ones where we come up against our kids the most.

And also, it's really hard because it's hard for us as adults, as fully grown adults, it's hard for us.

You know, if we were trying to restrict our own fortnight playing, that might be easier, but actually phones and stuff lead into that and, and trying to lead by example is difficult. So really want to get right into it straight away and tell you I love technology. I love the fact that my phone has everything in it.

I have a camera that I can take snapshots of the new puppy. When the kids are playing well at sport, you know, if the youngest is at theatre, things like that. I love that having it in my hand. I don't have to carry anything extra. I can go to, you know, the local bar, meet me and I've got my cards on me.

I can pay for a drink, you know, things like that. He's amazing. Technology is fabulous. Okay, absolutely fabulous. So that's my camp. That's where I stand. All right. I love technology. However, I don't know about you depending on how old you are listener, but I didn't grow up with tech or even a mobile phone.

When I was at primary school, they used to wheel round. And I mean, I would have been kind of mid primary. Wheel round this computer. I don't know if it was

a spectrum BBC, it said on it, and they used to take it from class to class. So you were lucky if you got it an hour a week. And I was 22 when I bought my first mobile phone, my granddad, I remember him having this sports car and having this really gigantic like phone that was in the car.

I'm just thinking he was so fancy. And it was 22 before I bought my own. You know, I was 22 years old, I was doing a bit of traveling, not everybody had it and actually I bought it to go to work and back because I was working late. And yeah, it was just purely a safety thing and that's all it could do.

It was literally just a phone. Like it was the best phone I ever had. It was a little flip phone; you know what it's like. But, you know, I think. They have developed, phones have developed so much, so, so much, as they've developed, I've grown into an adult. You know, a responsible adult, well, like most of the time.

And actually, all these gadgets on our phones, like the games, the banking, the apps for sleeping, the apps for meditating, the apps for playing games, the emails, all our social media apps, they often for our kids, what we forget is they come at once. We might be lucky if we kind of feed them slowly, each of the social medias as they get older, but actually there's a huge number of gadgets on that phone.

And I'm really glad. I feel really lucky that I didn't get them all at once. Because I think it's really overwhelming, and now, you know, we take it for granted. But our kids are never, known life without technology, and you can say, well, I didn't give them a phone until they were in like year six or going into year seven, and that's great, but do you remember the first time you handed the toddler a phone?

You might have been in the middle of a conversation. You might have been in the middle of, giving some bad news and you needed to keep them quiet. It's easy, isn't it? It's easy. We all have done it. We've all done it. So whatever their age, they'll get access to technology, whether it's your phone, their own phone, games console, iPad, Switch, you name it.

There's lots out there, isn't there? And with handing that over comes great responsibility for us to teach them how and when to use it.

Now, I'm going to give you a little stock. Reality check here. Technology companies are absolutely amazing and what they do is they go out and they get the latest research and they go out and get the latest researchers.

To use in their software over their competitors, so that we keep coming back and we're loyal to them.

Let's just take the Android iPhone argument. You very rarely switch. Once , they have got you, we are loyal. We very rarely switch over. You know, and I, I am true testament to this. I love Apple. We have Apple Macs.

We have Apple iPhones, iPads. And their, their camera on a Samsung is absolutely outstanding. I cannot change, even though I really want that. I will not change to an Android phone because I, even though I really want that camera. It is amazing, but I will not switch. Is that because I'm hooked up everywhere?

Like for the rest of the family? Maybe. Is it because I'm used to that? Is it because I'm loyal? Because I keep coming back to the same and just upgrading? So, when we think about that for kids, as an adult, they've already got me. And, and actually, they got me early, so now my kids, now I didn't start off with Apple, Apple wasn't around.

I started off with a Samsung phone. And now because I've got Apple, my kids have got Apple. Of course they have. That's generational income for these people. Let's go to social media, right, just to give you an example. So social media apps, they go to neuroscientists. Their software developers have neurosciences on the payroll.

So every time we create a post, whether it's Insta, Facebook, Snap, whatever it is, it creates like a miniature reward loop, triggering the brain's dopamine response and keeping us engaged and coming back for more.

Excuse me. We take Instagram in particular; they hold back some responses. So if you post something up and they get like a hundred likes, I know I've sure I've told you this before on the podcast, they hold back 80 and then they trickle them through over the next hour.

Comments they hold back trickle through because then we keep coming back, checking, checking, checking to try and get that dopamine. response. That dopamine reward, we keep going back. Neuroscientists work with them to get this effect. They look at the brain and they go; how do we replicate that dopamine response?

Let's look at Fortnite. For instance, I get loads of emails about Fortnite. In the 50s, there was a well-known psychologist called Skinner, and he did like a rat box experiment. And what he discovered was you can control behavior through the use of a stimulus and a reward. So, very much, they had a rat, and they pressed the lever, and they got rewards for it.

And that's exactly what fortnight use right now. So you can pay $10 cheap, $10 battle pass, right? And you get extra skins. You get dance moves. You get the whole lot. Okay. And anybody who is struggling with fortnight at the moment, go back and have a look at the podcast fortnight, the debate.

But to just go into it a little bit more, you don't have to pay if you continue playing. And you will get the same rewards the longer you play, okay? So this is, kind of works in two ways. So one, they get that bonus, they get that reward, like the little rat with his lever. But the added bonus, they don't have to ask parents for money.

Which is a trigger for us, isn't it? Hold on, what are you playing? What do you mean you need money? And that is when the control would start to come in for us. When we realise that actually if we gave him £10, $10, whatever it is, right, for a battle pass that would last that season, and it only lasts that season.

There is some kids, of course, who would just do it faster. But if you know you get it for free, and you don't have to ask them in it, and all you have to do is play this game that you really like longer, why would you not? And also, for me, it's around the fact that they're not asking means that they're probably, they are playing longer rather than get moaned at for asking.

So you can see just in those two examples, how amazing and how much they've done their research.

Technology companies have done their research. And you can see now what our kids and us are up against. It's not just a game or a phone. It is shaping their behavior. It is shaping their brains. It is why our kids do not hang on, do not develop delayed gratification very well.

Because they want it now.

Because that's the world we're in. You know, we can Google stuff. And I'm not having a go at it. It is. But as parents, we need to be responsible and what we need

to do is really have a look at how we can shape those others, how we can counteract that.

So managing screen time, fostering those healthy digit habits is more crucial than ever because our brain, because we are adaptable as human beings, if we are not careful, we will evolve. And it integrates into every part of our life. So, let's understand what we mean by screen time. What are the facts? So, research shows us that excessive screen time can impact various aspects of children's development.

Language skills cognitive abilities, social and emotional well-being, how we interact. All right, and what I would say to you is, when we look at language, I have noticed there is more speech and language issues than ever before. Why is that? Is that because when we go to a restaurant, the kids have iPads and we are not developing those social skills, whether it's talking to a waitress, whether it's talking to or waiter, talking to us, us having those conversations, we are not pulling out those conversations the same.

And it is no. accident. So when we lived in Abu Dhabi, a lot of the children that were born in Abu Dhabi had an American accent. Even the Filipino kids had an American accent. And that is because they learn their language via the screen. The older ones, when I asked, like Filipino friends, how come you've got an American accent?

And they said, because we watch friends, we watch friends to learn English. And it was like, oh my God, of course, you know, of course she did. So we have to be really careful of that. Our cognitive abilities, everything that we do shapes our brain, everything from me remembering to empty the bin.

That makes a pathway in our brain. When kids are used to doing stuff on computers, it will form those pathways in the brain. And anybody who knows me, follows me, knows that I massive want tech into schools because I want them to free up other times so we can learn about resilience. We can learn how to fail, things like that.

It's not about banning technology. It's about using it. Because not all screen time is created equal. Educational content and interactive apps that offer valuable learning experience can be, could be a game changer for our education system. We could be ahead of the game like we once were in Britain.

So how do we do this? Well, I started by saying it's not too late, and it really isn't. If you have got a teen that takes their phone to bed, and you know, you don't, you have no control over their screen time, or you have a primary school kid that is attached at the hip to their iPad. It is not too late.

And what I will say to you is, it's going to be hard. I am not going to pretend it is easy. But what I am going to say to you is, it'll be worth it because it's not just about now. This whole series about future proofing our kid, it is so important that we get a handle on this. So important. So, how do we do it?

Well, set clear limits. Establish rules and boundaries around screen time for your kids, right? No matter what the age. But depending on the age, have conversations around reset limits. So, for instance, if they are under five, there is not free access to iPads. We cannot give it them. If we do, when they're older and you want them to do other things, you are going to find it really difficult.

So the earlier we get a handle on it, the better. Okay. If they are older, you know, if they're in primary, then set limits around when they can use it. So for me, not before school, I never even switched the TV on. I knew before school, if they were at primary and the kids do it now and they have their own habits now, but they do not go

on phones unless they're , checking in with mates in the meeting and before school, but they do not go on screens. They do not go even have the TV on. We have the radio on in the kitchen and we all chat over breakfast. We might not all sit at breakfast together, but a adult is around in the kitchen to have that chat before they go to school, not before school.

And we only set a certain amount of time during the week. My youngest goes to acting school, after school. He now has a girlfriend at acting school. So wants to go twice a week. Doesn't cost me any more if he goes once or twice. It is just the pain of getting him there. And actually it's a four-hour stint.

Doesn't get in till late. He wanted to give up his after school, which is just an hour on a Tuesday in the drama club. And the answer is a hard no from me. And the reason being is, I know, because he's like, oh but I'm tired and I've got too much on and blah blah blah. Well, the other thing is, he doesn't have to go twice a week to his other one.

His one after school has already been picked for a play. It's really important that he, has committed that he follows that through and also, and the biggest reason is because I know he'll want to come home and play on the PlayStation and actually other consoles are available. Don't know why I've said that.

It's not the BBC. But I don't want that. I want him to be playing, you know, to be interacting with other adults, interacting with teammates, developing his craft, if that's what he wants to do. Okay, so yeah, he's gonna sulk, but it's a hard no from me. He's already made that commitment, that's how it is.

Okay, so during the week limit that time or at least times when they can have access to it. I hear lots of parents say it's their downtime. It's how I get them ready for school. It keeps them occupied in the car. It keeps them occupied at the restaurant. And I get all that. And you're absolutely right.

It does. It absolutely does. But what we are doing is setting them up for later, where they can't socialize, where they are in high school and they can't just get ready on their own without having that tech kind of plugin before they go to school. And what I would say to you is, ask yourself this.

If you've got a choice, between work or doing jobs around the house, doing something you don't want to do or spending all day scrolling on your phone or watching Netflix, what are you going to do?

What if you have a real choice about that? Now, most of us would probably pick Netflix or scroll on the phone. But we know that to earn the money, to keep the house clean, to get through that hard thing, we have to put those down. Because we are responsible. That is the responsibility of being an adult. Our kids, if we don't teach it, is not going to have that.

And that brings on to my next one. So set clear limits. But, before I move on, get your kids to be involved in it. Get your kids to be involved in the conversation. Talk to them about how do they feel. When they've been on it too long, how do they feel if they stayed up late, how, look at the consequence of too much screen time, maybe it's fighting with the mates on, on fortnight, maybe it's, you know, not getting homework done and then having to stay up late, things like that, involve them in the conversation, set limits

together. But you need to take the lead. Of course, involve them. It's really important that you do. They are better buy in if they are involved, but you need to lead the conversation. Lead by example. Because children learn by observing us. Right. Model healthy screen rack limits and whether that is during family activities, whether that's meals, you know, and it's hard one.

It is a hard one because a, I think, as adults, we feel like we have to respond to everything. B, like, like me, if you work for yourself and you've got stuff coming through, it is a real conscious decision. And, and I have to be really mindful of putting that away when we're watching a movie. Oh, it won't take me two minutes.

But actually, what are you saying to the kids? For me, I feel like it's become the new smoking. You know that when people smoke at work and they get five minutes out, it's like that. I'll just check my phone. It's just five minutes out of the day. Whether it means that, you know, you're getting a little rest break from work or the kids.

You know, but set limits for yourself as well, not to use your phone at grandparents, not to use it at a restaurant, not during family movie time, things like that. So lead by example. And this is a really hard one for me. I've had to break this myself quite hard because I grew up with a Nana who listened to Radio 4 at night to go to sleep.

My mom listened to Radio 4 at night to go to sleep. I have done it for years to go to sleep. And I have realized I've had to break, I am having to break this habit because I don't want my kids, my kids, my eldest has just had her phone at night in her room, the youngest we get in to leave it outside. But it's difficult.

And actually, I need to model that. And so I'm having to wean myself off from putting a, putting a iPod in and listening to Radio 4. So now I've had to go cold turkey because I just, I can't do it any other way. And it's hard. It's damn hard because I, you know, for all the years I've been doing it. To break it is difficult.

The other thing that I want to really encourage as well is activities outside, outside of the home, outside of tech. So whether that is outdoor play, reading, creative arts, whatever it is, playing games, you know, as humans, we adapt very well. Our coordination with kids is not as good as it used to be because we're not out there climbing trees or climbing frames in the park.

Like we were so our kids Getting outside is essential for their physical growth, their overall development. And I think we forget this, you know, we think, oh, it's raining, we'll take the car to school and, and things like that. And I'm not knocking any of that. But when we look at the bigger picture, when we look at the kind of issues we're getting, we're getting 15-year-olds with bad backs.

Why is that? Because they're hunched over. They are not stretching out the muscles in the shoulder and the neck and their arms like they used to. There's lots of stuff around kids playing tennis really stretches those arms that we don't do in a different way. There is lots of activities that we can do that will really help our kids develop properly and that's without the mental health benefits.

So it is really important that we do that. One of the reasons that we've got a puppy and do you know what? It's worked. But one of the reasons was to get us out as a family more often because, you know, I work for myself, my hubby works from home. It's very easy for us to hanker down and just bed in the house.

And actually, yes, we do lots of physical stuff around the house as we build the house, but, but actually getting out. Going for a walk, going for a run, things like that. It's one of the reasons why we bought a dog. And actually what we found, not suggesting you go out and get puppy, but what we found is the kids spend more time downstairs.

They play more with the dog. They can't wait for it to be able to go out and take it for a walk. Next one, prioritise sleep, screen time free, screen free bedtime. Routine helps us wind down as well as our kids. We all know that we need to avoid blue light, but do you know why? So darkness triggers the release of our natural sleep hormone, melatonin.

It's nature's way of helping our nervous system wind down and prepare for bed. The body starts releasing it a couple of hours before bedtime. Blue light delays that release, therefore we have issues. with sleep. Have you found that your sleep is not as good quality as it used to be? Are your kids struggling to go to sleep?

What I will say to you, if they are teens, they are more sensitive to the effects of blue light than we are as adults.

There is a few other kind of things that I want us to discuss.

So we've talked about limits, set clear limits and boundaries. We've talked about leading by example, encouraging balance of activities, get outside as much as you can, physical activities. They are the most important thing for me, but what I will say to you is, watch what they're playing. Watch what they're watching.

Whether that's you play with them, you view it with them. You know, you wouldn't let them just pick anything off Netflix, would you? You'd have an eye on what they're watching. Do the same with games. Do the same with the phone. Stay informed. About the latest research, stay informed. There's a really good app website called common sense media.

I check out if my kids want to watch a series, if my kids want to play a game, I check out and on there, it's really good because what it does is it rates them. It gives you an age rating. It says what parents say. What kids say and it comes to an average so kids might go, Oh, it's absolutely nothing. And parents might go, oh, my God, there's loads of swearing, but it comes to an average and it gives you a really good indication of whether it is appropriate for your kids or not, you can then make an informed decision.

You might go, actually, he's not scared about that. You know, or it might be a 12, but you know there's some content, because it will list it, that you don't want your kids to see, because it will give them nightmares. So, keep yourself informed. And be selective. Just because they are bugging you about it, doesn't mean, say, you have to say yes.

It again, comes down to you. To those boundaries and how important it is. Parents of younger ones often feel like a hostage to tech. That's what they say to me all the time. But the hard fact is, and pin your ears back, is that we are in control. We often say yes when we want to say no because we don't want a meltdown, we don't want to cause an argument, we've had a hard day at work, we've got all the excuses in our bag.

All right, this is not a judgment, this is just fact. What I'm going to ask you to do is why is there a meltdown? Why do they push back so much when we restrict tech? And that's because tech has done its job and it has a hold on our kids. We need to limit their tech time and we need to keep to it because every time we don't, we're showing our kids boundaries can be pushed.

And this isn't just hard for us as parents. The next time they ask, you need to keep to it. Because when they're older and they're in a peer group, they're a teen hanging around with their mates and they're asked to do something they're not comfortable with. They might initially say no, but the pattern they follow is built in their brains is the pattern we give them.

So is that a no, no, yes? Or is that a hard, no? We need to teach our kids to be responsible. We need to have regular conversations around how long they've been on the phone. Discuss the pros and cons. I often show mine their on-screen time. And it shows what apps they've been on. And it's a discussion.

It's not an argument. We talk about the other things. So you've got to learn the language in that, you know, I'm not often that's arcade, but they could sometimes when it's the holidays and they get a bit more of a free reign, I go, you could have done your homework in that time. You could have done this, or you could have met with a mate.

You could have been out in town. You could have seen a movie at the cinema. You know, they'd get it, they'd get it. So it's a discussion. We talk about what they're going to do to bring that screen time down. The biggest rules I have with my kids is I can check their phone anytime. When I call you, you pick up or you text back straight away.

And there are screen time limits. I'm paying the bill. That phone is technically mine until you start paying.

By implementing some of the tips that I've given you today, and you become more mindful of your kid, no matter the age, screen habits, they can have a healthy relationship with technology. Promote that digital wellness in the family. Because it's not about eliminating screen time, it's not about punishing them, but finding a balance that supports their development and their mental well-being.

Drop me a message. So we've got a Facebook group a parent's guide to raising a resilient kid. Please come in, join our Facebook group if you haven't already and post your issues that you have with tech and we'll all answer them. It's not about judging. I told you I love tech. It's not about judging.

It's hard work, but there's only you can do it. Nobody is coming to do this for you and I say this with all the love and respect. It is down to you. It is down to you.

And I remember once having a conversation with a client of mine who was having real difficulty with their kid. And I gave them some advice in a really diplomatic way.

I hope I'm always quite diplomatic. And they said to me, Ashley, what you're saying is I have to get off my ass and parent. And I was like, Ooh, I said, I never said that you did. And you know she reminded me of that only this week. And she said it was the best thing I ever did because my relationship with them changed.

I don't feel like I'm nagging anymore. If there's an issue or an incident, we can manage it together. So I'm not saying that to you, but I'm saying please take responsibility because we've got to teach them responsibility. Technology is here to stay, so we need them to be responsible and have a healthy relationship with it.

And if that means you have to say no, they will eventually get it. And when they're older, they'll thank you for it.

Thanks for listening today. Come and join us in the Facebook group. Check out us on Instagram. And you can always go back to the Fortnite debate if that's a thing in your house. But sending you all lots and lots of love. Speak to you soon. Bye for now.