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Father of two sons ages 4 and 8

INTERVIEWER:

For the record, let me repeat. You have two kids. You have a boy who's eight, and is the four year old a boy or a girl?

Interviewee: A boy.

INTERVIEWER: Two boys. That's nice. Do they get along okay?

Interviewee: No.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, they don't?

Interviewee: They fight over everything.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's see, so our questions are primarily dealing with children ages five to 11, so think about your older son. We're interested in device use. Everything from TVs, to smart phones, to game consoles, to tablets, the list goes on. eReaders. Anything that has a screen and that kids interact with. Can you tell me about some of the devices your family owns, and how the kids use them, if at all?

Interviewee: Yeah, so we have a TV, phones, and tablets.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of tablets are they?

Interviewee: An iPad.

INTERVIEWER: Ah. Do the boys use them?

Interviewee:

They, on occasion. So, depending on ... right now, when a good place, we do like one hour of screen time a week. If we're not watching ... we don't have actually a TV here right now, so the TV sort of ends. So on Sundays they can watch or play for an hour.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you decide that that's what you were gonna go with, Sundays, watch or play for an hour?

Interviewee:

We were beaten down. We got two months with no screen time, which was glorious. Completely glorious. So we're slowly bringing it back on like a ... seems to be a good motivator to clean up their room.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Let's see, so thinking about the TV, how do you set rules about what TV-

Interviewee: The TV, we do all that the same.

INTERVIEWER: You just consider all screens one-

Interviewee:

Yeah, so all screens the same. So they almost never touch our iPhones. There's just not a

lot going on there. I guess they'll do it to speak to grandparents. And the other one ... to things we ... would be considered screen time by you, but not for us would be anytime they're using Skype or FaceTime, talking with family or if we're watching like a sports game. So like the Eagles games. So my son watched two hours of the Eagles game on Sunday, which didn't come out of the hour of his own personal screen time.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that considered separate? Why is sports separate?

Interviewee:

There is no rhyme or reason to it. 'Cause my wife won that argument, so that's why. She thinks the Eagles is like a religion. [crosstalk]

Interviewee:

At this library they don't. So we also live in upstate New York when we're not here. My wife teaches in the SUNY system. And there, the library, like it's ... the screens are very prominent. First of all, the games are like 15 years old. But it's amazing, he's like a magnet. I actually appreciate it here that they aren't screens.

INTERVIEWER: There used to be, right here, a couple there. Game computers.

Interviewee:

Yeah, I see like no point. It became a struggle going to the other library where there were screens, where like I said, we'll go, but not if you're gonna be on the screen, we're just gonna leave because I know when I was growing up, the library was the only place you could see a screen, like in the 1980s. But now I see no reason why a kid needs to have ... yeah, definitely, like to look up a book, I think that's an important skill. But games and everything like that.

Interviewee: I really have no clue if they have screens at the school. It's a public school here. I know they're not allowed to have any of their own personal ones. And there is a way to do homework on a screen, but we have even signed up for that. Like, he was doing it long hand.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's see. Oh, can you walk me through a child's typical day? Maybe yesterday, and say what kind of screens he uses, or information during the day? Although in your case, it sounds like it's pretty much nothing.

Interviewee:

Yeah, it's really not a lot. Wake up, get dressed, go to school, come back. It's really only on the weekends that they'll ... other than FaceTime, which some days ... it's not every day. What's amazing is that, even as soon as we turn on FaceTime, they can be playing totally fine in the corner, they hear FaceTime, they're like ... like go right to it in a way that a phone ... in a way a phone doesn't. Then also they'll even start fighting over who's gonna talk.

INTERVIEWER:

Interesting. What do you think the appeal is? Do you think the appeal is the relatives on the other side of the screen, or do you think it's the machine itself?

Interviewee:

I think it's something like ... I think the screen. 'Cause it's not around the phone. Yeah, I'm a firm believer in the addictive qualities of the screens. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

That's interesting. That is wonderful though, that they get to talk to relatives who are far away.

Interviewee: For sure. Yeah, there's definitely good.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, let's see. We're also interested in how devices fit into family routines, and how they change as kids grow older. Do you have the same rules and regulations for both of the boys? Or have they varied as the older son has grown?

Interviewee:

We are definitely not consistent. We used to, in the ... with our older one, the four year old is only in the past like half year become at all interested. In fact, we had an issue with him. We needed to get him ... I've never seen a kid who didn't wanna look at a screen. So when he was sick, we just needed to like park a kid ... he would not watch Elmo. He never watched any of that stuff. Finally, we got Daniel Tiger, which he's really into.

Interviewee: The older one, from the time he was like ... the older one has RSV when he was one.

INTERVIEWER: RSV?

Interviewee:

It's like a ... somehow related to the flu. We need to nebulize him for like five minutes twice a day, try to get a one year old to sit still, and that's when we discovered Elmo, and we call it baby crack. 'Cause he just like stared at it. So he's always, the second there's a screen, he's there, with the older one. We assume ... with the older one, he's never ever gotten to the point he's like, "Okay, I'm done." The younger one, after five minutes will be like, "Okay, I'm done." So the older one, when he would be sick in pre-school, we could ... call it anesthetizing him with the iPad. We could put the iPad in the crib, and he would just watch for like five, six hours straight. And the younger one, truly, cannot sit there for more than like half an hour, until we've downloaded this Daniel Tiger [inaudible 00:08:35], and now it's like ...

INTERVIEWER:

So, you've kind of answered this, but which of the devices do your kids use independently, and which do you use with them? You said you watch football together.

Interviewee:

Yeah, so that ... on a TV. It's really, I say device, I think it's all somewhere with services. So like, YouTube ... not YouTube. Like YouTube and Netflix, they can watch whether it's on the iPad or ... 'cause I'm not saying TV. I haven't watched broadcast TV. I haven't paid for cable ever in my life. I don't really have broadcast TV. So when I say TV, I'm really talking about either Netflix or YouTube. The other thing, we haven't done now, but when it gets really ... when you just can't be outside, so when the weather's nice after school we try to be outside and do something. By March, when it's like, you know, the 27th day of rain, we sometimes will put on ... on YouTube there are a bunch of read to me stories. So it's not animated. It's literally just somebody who is sitting there with a book, reading.

INTERVIEWER: And turning pages, and ...

Interviewee:

Turning pages. And it's not like the movement. So they can listen to it. Which also, I guess

s we haven't done so much with them, but done a few audio books on ... they're using the iPad, but they're just listening. So there's no pictures, like through Audible.com. Like those sorts of things. Again, we really haven't done that since, I don't know, April or May. But if it ever gets cold again, which I hope it won't, but if it does then we'll sometimes do that. Which is exclusive, that one hour. That one hour is just garbage time when I said this.

INTERVIEWER:

So how do you make decisions about your children's use of devices? Do you have any idea about which one of you sets the rules, or do you discuss them, or just on the fly?

Interviewee: I would say there is a constant nagging by our kids to watch ... I want this. So-and-so gets ... they get to watch an hour a day, they get to watch four hours a day. So-and-so has an iPhone, so I need an iPhone.

INTERVIEWER: At age eight?

Interviewee:

Yeah, just constant. I would say, rarely does a day go by when we don't hear about a poorly done by ... he said he doesn't have an iPhone or his own iPad.

INTERVIEWER: Really, at eight.

Interviewee:

Yeah, well it started like a year or two ago. How do we make decisions? Not with any sort of coordinated ... anything other than we both are firm believers that screens at every age are addictive. I have to ... when I come home I have to put my phone down. I don't keep it in my pocket for that ... 'cause I know the constant beeping ... I know all that. I've done a fair amount of reading about all the addictive qualities, and the dopamine and how that affects you.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Let's see. So what kinds of concerns do you have? You've talked about a lot of this, of kids and screen time. You're worried about the addictive nature. Are there any other concerns, or?

Interviewee:

Yeah, I have a huge ... I have a lot of concerns, but one is kids losing the ability just to socialize without ... it's the ... wow, I'm filthy. It's the rule of three. That as long as three people ... have you heard about this in colleges? If you look at college campuses, as long as three people ... if you're at a table, let's say, if you're at a table with six people. As long as three people are engaged in a conversation, you have permission to check your screen. We see it all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting.

Interviewee:

David Brooks wrote about this in the New York Times about two years ago, and we are losing the ability just to sit and be with another human being without thinking about what we're missing. So that's something I'm like very, very aware of, and I think kids in particular ... I see when my son will go over to ... we have a friend who, he has one of the original Pac-Man games.

INTERVIEWER: Terminals? Really.

Interviewee: Yeah, one of the giant stand up arcade-

INTERVIEWER: An adult, this is? Or the kid?

Interviewee: Well, it's the kid. It was the adult's that [inaudible 00:13:55] kid. So my son, will wanna go over to that person's house and play, and they'll play for like three, four hours, this one, stupid game. But there's no interaction, there's no ability to empathize. To me, what I really wanna make sure is that my kids have learned the basic way to interact in an appropriate way with another human being. And that's something that takes time, and I think that interacting only through screens and social media is ... I have a Facebook account, I have nothing else. I don't check Facebook all the time, ever day. But I think that you just look at kids, how lonely ... or you look at all the graphs on them, teenage depression and suicide and everything else, and it was really when smart phones came into really prominence. Basically 2011 to 2013 that these numbers just went skyrocket.

Interviewee:

So I'm like aware all this kind of stuff, and I know I'm sort of holding back the flood waters. But I think the more that we can do to kind of encourage a regular human interaction, the better off our kids are gonna be.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's see. So are there any web sites that you turn to? Web sites, magazines, TV shows, blogs, other people, to help you get information on parenting in relation to kids and information technology? That's just for us because we're trying to collect a bank of resources.

Interviewee: Nothing. I read way too much media, like CNN, New York Times, the Atlantic.

The New Yorker. They've all run these sort of genre of articles. Yeah, I don't have any like specific thing, and any one, specific go-to place.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's see. Oh, is there any ... are there any person sources that you've gotten advice from, such as pediatrician, librarians, teachers, police?

Interviewee: No. Really just being like socially aware of stuff.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's see. As far as guiding your kids through technology, so neither of them ... they're pretty young. They're not really doing anything on computers like searching, or building, or playing Minecraft, or anything?

Interviewee: They're not.

INTERVIEWER: They're just too little.

Interviewee: Yeah, and it's sort of ... [inaudible

00:17:09] my son, my dad worked for a computer company growing up. So we were like the only family that had a computer at home that I could remember.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you must've been popular.

Interviewee: Yeah, starting in 1980, probably 1982. We had a computer ... I don't know. [inaudible 00:17:28] by the early '80s, like well before. So I sort of grew up with knowing the basics of computer, and it's probably one of the reasons my handwriting's still ... I look like a ki

ndergarten, 'cause I was typing on a computer before anybody else. But I also know that ... so there's part of me that says, "Oh, I want my child to be the next like, coder or what ever, and we should start young." And then the other part of me, which is the part that's winning out, is like, "He's gonna figure it out, right?" My grandmother at age 85 figured out how to use a Mac.

INTERVIEWER: That's fantastic.

Interviewee: Yeah, so if you can figure now ... she didn't become a world-class programmer, but they'll figure it out. I think these other basic skills are more important for right now.

INTERVIEWER:

Sounds good. Let's see. Some basic demographic information. How about, how'd you describe your ethnic background?

Interviewee: Caucasian.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and education?

Interviewee: Advanced degrees.

INTERVIEWER: And let's see. I think that's it. And the same for your wife.

Interviewee: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us on this topic? Or, there is one more question. Can you think of any way that libraries could help you as parents to have advice on mentoring your kids' use of screen media?

Interviewee:

I don't know about advice. I'll tell you, like this thing here. We just stumbled in here yesterday. We're coming for books and I think something like this is awesome. I think providing places ... to me, the place of a library in a civic society is exactly this. Being sort of the third space. The Starbucks for younger kids. It's a place for them to hang out after school. I don't think it's about giving advice so much as providing opportunities.

Interviewee:

I think about that, again, like when I walked out of here yesterday, I was smiling because growing up ... I grew up in the 1980s in the Boston area, and the public recreation department ran for five months [inaudible 00:19:34]. Which is, we would like go down to the ... it wasn't a library, but it was like, we call it the hut in the park, where they'd just have actually like high school and actually college students who just like ran games. It was just like drop-in, drop-out. But that's what we did to hang out. And I think that's what's missing right now. I look at my son, where we go to the park, we live in like ... there's nobody there on a school day. I'm like, "Where is everybody?" [inaudible 00:19:59] at this practice, or at that practice, or the other.

Interviewee:

So have a place where you just like hanging out, being, that you can come, you can not come. It's not anything like super formal. And the other thing is this, I think computer ... if there was gonna be screens, I think teaching kids around coding and around ... not gam

es. I think games are ... I'm not even talking like ... but I think teaching kids computer language is definitely a skill there is no way that they're gonna pick up at home. That is a skill that you're either gonna learn at school, perhaps in a library. I'm sure there are games that teach.

INTERVIEWER:

We used to have scratch here. It was once a week, or once a month they had scratch programming. That was really popular.

Interviewee: I don't know what that is, but.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, it's just a simple, introductory programming language.

Interviewee:

Yeah, but other than that, I think ... again, I might not be the typical person using a library, because we are ... we read so much media on journals. I don't wanna say journals ... I do sometimes read like educational ... I'd say pop-educational journals. Not like probably what you're reading. Pop-educational articles like ... that's where I get a lot of the ... my wife reads ... I think she reads more parenting blogs that I do.