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Weston Kieschnick

"We're lacking some really, really basic courtesies and really basic understandings around things like moderation and around what having a phone in your pocket looks like."

The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.

VICKI: Happy Thought Leader Thursday. Today we're talking to Weston Kieschnick about digital parenting. So Weston, how can we help the parents of our students understand what it's like to parent in this digital age?

WESTON: Hey Vicki, thanks so much. It's a super important question and it's a hard question with a hard answer. And I think we're not alone in recognizing that parents out there are having a really difficult time. So one of the things that I think we can do is we can talk to parents about kind of avoiding that pendulum swing that exists not just in schools but in parenting as it relates to technology which is – you know, we do things like we buy our kids cell phones and tablets and although that stuff is really great and then all of a sudden we have a big problem with it and we shut it down completely. And that pendulum kind of continues to swing back and forth in our houses where either kids have access or kids have no access.

It's one of those things where either in schools in our work as teachers or in our homes in our work as parents there's this super odd phenomenon out there where on the one hand we're upset about how our kids engage with technology but on the other hand we don't necessarily take the time to teach what really responsible digital behaviors look like, sound like, feel like. That's one of the places that we need to start, we need to start with digital courtesy and digital etiquette even look like before we can get into kind of those 21st century skills.

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VICKI: Yeah, but you know, there's also the whole wellness of moderation.

They don't have to sit on their iPad for 8 hours to play a game!

WESTON: Agreed. And they shouldn't be. So, one of the things that we have to work on is this whole idea of balance. And so again, like what you just alluded to is that pendulum swing that I talked about earlier. You've got some kids out there and they walk through your classroom, I'm sure every day – like you've got kids out there who spend 8, 9, 10 hours on a device and that's not healthy. Nor is it healthy

for kids to live in digital deserts where they don't have access to technology. The space where success lives is the space in between those two things where they engage responsibility in over moderate amounts of time, right?

VICKI: Absolutely. The best decisions are usually made in the middle ground where the reasonable minds meet, you know?

WESTON: Yeah. It's super funny because I think as a collective, we're emerging and looking at this space where we're lacking some really basic courtesies and really basic understandings around things like moderation and around what having a phone in your pocket looks like and should feel like every day.

So, quick story here, I was in Denmark and I was doing an event there and I was out to dinner with some other teachers and at one point I took my phone out and did what a lot of Americans do and I set it on the table, right? And one of the teachers there looks at me and goes, "And that's how I know you're from America."

And I was like what, then we had this conversation about how Danes don't put their phone on the table because the message it send to people is, "Hey, I'm here with you unless something better comes up." It struck me both as a teacher but more so as a parent, like, okay, everything I do, everything I say, all my behaviors are sending a message to the people around me and especially my kids about what having a device should look like. So we're all in this space of being a learner, tech is the great equalizer in that sense and nowhere is [that more true] than in parenting.

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VICKI: You know, it is so much about self-control also, I had a story, actually for Edutopia <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/put-away-phone-be-there-vicki-davis> about when I went to Ireland and the only place that people are running into each other in McDonalds. I mean, there was like a kid eating a fry off the floor while the mom was on a cellphone. And everywhere else people were actually talking to each other and it was just striking me that there does have to be a balance. I think sometimes kids can play on their iPad for 8 hours because the family is not talking to each other, right?

WESTON: Right. Which is so sad and it used to be those times where families took those opportunities to connect were in the evenings and at night. And what we're seeing now – and I think you saw that in that blog post that the overwhelming majority of the time spent, the kids spend on their device is during that prime talking time. What used to be prime talking time for the family which was dinner time, after dinner time and leading up to and including bedtime now, which is just crazy.

And like you said, I think one of the best things that parents can do to speak more specifically about moderation is to kind of set aside those times where it's like,

hey, this is devoted family time, this is devoted conversation time where we're going to look each other in the eye and we're going to talk. Remember? Like normal people used to do. Like we used to do all the time. Because there's so much value in that, so much value.

VICKI: Well, technology has a place but not every place. So how do I as a teacher help kids and parents have these conversations because, you know, another issue is the sleep deprivation that the kids who actually sleep with their cellphones under their pillow and they're woken up all night and they're exhausted and we're dealing with a sleep-deprived generation. *(Editor's note: Teens who take their cell phones to bed are twice as likely to be sleep deprived - <http://www.sleepreviewmag.com/2014/11/cell-phone-addicts-sleep-deprived/>)* And even losing an extra hour of sleep at night has been shown to drop student's grades significantly. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/sleep-problems-effects-students-grades-drug-abuse-new-study-finds/> So how can we promote these conversations without being a know-it-all because I can't stand here and tell other parents the perfect answers because I'm a parent who struggles too?

WESTON: And I think, Vicki, when you said there – that's a best place that we can come from is the place of, "Hey, we've got some experiences that might be valuable and led themselves to some knowledge relative to the experiences you are having."

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But nobody is the expert here, nobody has got it all figured out. And so if we're talking about really concrete things, I mean you alluded to a big one. I am so reluctant to speak in absolutes. I really fear the always or nevers but this one is true for me and you spoke to it like technology is literally disrupting the circadian rhythms that exists in our children, <https://sleep.org/articles/ways-technology-affects-sleep/> like it's disrupting their sleep patterns and that's disruptive to their day which is then disruptive to their learning, <http://abc7ny.com/society/study-reveals-why-teens-should-turn-off-their-cell-phones-at-bedtime/1023733/> which is then disruptive to the progress and it feeds in to disruption the rest of their lives. *(Note: See the article I wrote on how to turn the blue light off on your phone - <http://www.coolcatteacher.com/turn-off-blue-light-iphone-ipad-night/>)*

I'm so not an advocate for kids taking phones and devices into their bedrooms and to bed at night because you are asking a child whose prefrontal cortex is not fully formed, like that decision making part of the brain is not fully developed and you're asking them to go in there, have access to the world and not be distracted from sleep. We're going to lose that battle every time. We can try to fight it and continue to lose or I think we can put some really firm boundaries in place for our kids that we know are there to protect them from things that are just flat-out dangerous for them.

VICKI: You know, Weston. I think the things that I have been thinking about the most lately is that the opportunities I've had to come across some of the really amazing

people in our world. So for example I was with Edutopia out at Skywalker Ranch and I didn't get to meet George Lucas, I got to meet his amazing sister but they were talking about how he doesn't really do email, he writes everything longhand on a legal pad he knows how to use technology but he chooses to disconnect so that he can focus and be more creative. (See *George Lucas Hasn't Been on the Internet in 15 years: not email even* - <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/george-lucas-hasn-t-been-on-the-internet-in-15-years-no-email-even-a6755526.html> - I'm not making this up!)

And even Thomas Friedman, when we were in his book, *The World Is Flat* <http://amzn.to/2oSCCqa> and we were corresponding he's like, "I don't use technology as much, I just use email when I have to." (Editor's Note: To clarify, this was when we offered to write our piece he was including in version 3 of his book via a Google doc – he just preferred us to write it and send it in Microsoft Word. He uses technology, just, I guess not in a geeky way is what he meant.)

And so many very successful people really limit their technology. And I just have to wonder if some of us adults and kids aren't just whittling away our lives with the inane little stuff.

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WESTON: I think we are and I think it would be to everyone's benefit. Not just the kids that we're referring to. I mean, this is a parenting conversation but, I think, the parents that we're talking to I think each of us would benefit from forced moderation. I know that it's one thing – I mean, I love technology, I love technology but in my house that forced moderation is something that we've had to adapt. And so literally I'm having this conversation with you in the evening before we go do dinner time. And what I'll do when I walk downstairs from my office is I'll take my phone and I'll put it in the phone basket that sits on the front of the house on a table in our foyer because that's what we do at night.

Starting at dinner time we put our devices in baskets because that is devoted conversation time, that's devoted family time and we want that time to be devoid of distraction. And believe me, when I tell you, when we first implemented that, super unpopular in our house.

VICKI: Guess so.

WESTON: It was unpopular with me. I mean, I had a really hard time but now that is some of the most valuable time that we spend in our house. And furthermore, that is some of the most valuable time for me just creatively. That's when I find that I am struck with my best ideas and my best lesson plans and my best things that come for me professionally as well is when I have that kind of disconnect to just kind of free up my brain from the mundane and the constant barrage that comes from technology.

VICKI: I'm sitting here thinking, maybe this is a podcast you want to forward to your parents and start that conversation or let your kids listen to at school. Start these conversations about moderation and connecting with others, and putting down technology. You know, can we put down technology for a day? I don't know. But you have to be careful because when you start using things and you can get rid of them, who's using who?

Thank you Bloomz for sponsoring today's show. It is my favorite tool for parent engagement in the classroom. Just go to bloomz.net. Now, they are sponsoring the April free webinar on Thursday April 27th at 6pm Eastern. I'll be sharing five habits you can start now to help your classroom thrive in the fall. There are things you can do now to have a better classroom. So join me by going to cctea.ch/bloomz-spring to register for the webinar. Or just go to the show notes at coolcatteacher.com/podcast for the link.

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