

Protecting Children from TV, Movies and too much Technology Part 1

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:21.4] CW: Hello, this is Dr. Char Wrighton from Zoo-phonics, our Pneumonic and Multisensory Language Arts Program and Company and Safari Learning Academy. I'm going to bring to you another radio show so that — you know, each time I speak with something that I'm really passionate about, something that really matters to me, something really where I live. Today's going to be one of those. It's going to be mostly on technology, a little bit of TV. I really like hearing people's opinions so I'm hoping that maybe you'd reach out and let me know what your thoughts are because I think this is something that we all seriously need to look at as parents, grandparents, and certainly educators. So I've got a lot in here as usual, so there we go.

I thought that I would start with television because that really was the number one distraction in life for kids and has been ever since, you know, my childhood when you know, I would wake up early in the morning so I could watch Beany and Cecil on television et cetera, and then all the different favorite shows that we had and all the fun cartoons and I was really analyzing it because today's world off of television is definitely different, so different from yesterday's world.

I'm looking at my own childhood and again, I'm at the 70-year-old mark and that area. That really sets my demographic apart with what we did in our childhood. For example, I lived in Los Angeles and so we definitely had TV, it was one of those teeny tiny things with the green screen but it was still big enough to enjoy watching Bugs Bunny and like I said Beany and Cecil and later, Mr. Rogers and different things like that as I grew.

We moved to the dessert where we were absolutely and literally in the middle of nowhere. So television for many years did not come our way. There was no television and what I did is I spent my life outdoors basically and then when we were — at night time, we read books together and played games.

So it's kind of that Abe Lincoln story where you hear about candle light, well, that was, it was romantic in the sense that it was the good old days and how great they were and what we did. Before the advent of something called TV or close to the invention of television, a lot less programming. When we finally did get TV, I was probably 10 or 11 and we probably got two, three channels and so it was very limited. So again, if you don't have it, you find ways of living without it. Again, my childhood when I looked back and I've heard so many people my age say the exact same thing. People spent their lives outdoors and in summer time was everyone's favorite because we had daylight savings time, we would stay out until 9:00 at night time and we'd come home, we eat dinner and head out again.

So we'd get up early in the morning and maybe we'd watch a few cartoons as we ate our cereal or our eggs and then we'd head outdoors and play with our friends all day long. We'd come in for lunch, we'd come when the ice cream man played his tune and came into the neighborhood and then we were out again and so I remember that as my childhood both in Los Angeles and in the desert.

Times really change little by little or actually, it was pretty fast because as TV programming became just prolific. So many things to watch, so many cartoons, so many different programs. TV became more and more important to children as is just plain fun. It's entertainment. The other thing that happened at this time is that television became a babysitter for children. You could put the child in front of the TV for a good hour or two and you can get your housework done or you get family chores done or you could even sit and read a book or you can get the bills paid or whatever one does. It became a babysitter pretty much leading the way to where we are today with technology.

My concern over television, and this includes movies that we watch in theaters and on TV, we have so many possibilities because with dish or DIRECTV and then we have all the technological things on our computer. I mean, there's just – there's so much that you can't even possibly obviously not watch everything but there's just too much – there are so much – it's amazing to me. The point being is that with a movie, we have a choice whether to take a child to a movie or not and we have a choice with television to allow a child to watch something or not because it's pretty visible in the home if the television is in the living room.

Where we get into trouble is when we have TV in children's bedrooms and DVD players or CD players or whatever the technology over the years. Now, those are in the child's room because now the child can go on there and parents can again have that peace and quiet that we all crave so much. When I look back to my childhood, we just didn't have that and generations that where I raise my children, again, we just didn't have that.

TV was something that you watch together at the very end of the evening when homework is done and lunches were packed and you could snuggle in for an hour or two and then it was bedtime and stories and prayers and sleep and then start the day all over again. We definitely are viewing has changed and the amount of viewing has changed and so have the concerns. One thing that I look back on and analyzed in my own childhood is that I grew up with all adults in my family. My youngest brother, to me, was 12 years older than I. As I was growing up, was 19 years old and my sister was 19, my other brother was 18 years older.

Therefore, mom and dad, they're all adults. I'm a child and when – we didn't do babysitters in the 50s, we all went to movies together and I cannot believe the movies that my parents allowed me to watch while I was there. They just figured I'd hide my eyes if they were nervous or maybe they hid my eyes as well. The problem is, if an adult is engrossed, they don't have that always reaction time and I saw things I never should have seen. Because they are burned and etched into my memory bank and it may be why my childhood, I was definitely more of a fearful child. I saw *Suddenly Last Summer*. No child should see *Suddenly Last Summer*. I'm not even going to go into it. It was terrifying.

I saw *The Blob* and *The Blob* to me now you look at the blob now and you think, "Good grief, how could any of that be frightened of that?" But that's the technology we had at the time and that thing was scary, I remember the elevator scene. I don't want to think about that, I remember the cactus scene, I don't want to think about that. It was terrifying for me. In those days, we didn't really analyze children's needs too much, we just loved them, took care of them and we all kind of coincided wonderfully together. But again, it was that, children go do their thing, adults do their thing and then we all come back together and do family things. That was the wonderful part of it.

Like I said earlier, little by little, we started using TV and then with the advent of VCR's and VHS and CD Rom, et cetera, we now had vehicles where a child could literally watch movies by the

hours and it would just – they would love it and it gave parents a break and quiet time that they desperately needed. I know that that's really what happens when we start talking about our technology, our handhelds, tablets and iPhones and iPads et cetera, computers. We're going to talk about that later but I just wanted to just first I'll start with television because obviously we still watch television and then, you add on to that screen time with a handheld or a laptop or computer, you have so much screen time that there's hardly a time without it.

I am analyzing my own life, I spend my life literally on a screen all day. It can't be great and especially when you read about the frontal cortex and what it could do. We'll go into that a little bit later, a little scary for me because I'm in that age group but we'll talk about that later. Just tuck that aside and don't think about it for right now. Don't let it scare you so you can't hear the rest of this. We have ways of protecting our children but we really need to actually do it. So when I was first analyzing what I wanted to say in the next radio, I was looking back into raising my own children, which was a whole different era than mine because now we have technology that children are just instantly hooked up to and they were fun.

I watched it with my children, that was a time where we could actually enjoy them together and laugh and talk about them and if there were musicals, we could sing the songs et cetera. We really enjoyed that, it was a good Saturday thing to do together or in the evenings. But one time, I made a mistake that stuck in my mind forever and I want to share that with you because it came as a large surprise and I'll tell you quickly, I have my two daughters were raised, born seven years apart.

As we're using the VHS, when my oldest daughter was older and here's my little daughter put it in there and Lindsey came up to me and said mom, "I don't think she should be watching that," and I said, "Why? It's the mouse detective, it's a Disney movie," and she goes, "No, mom, really, you need to see this." Well I had never – I didn't sit down and watch it with her, I trusted Disney that would have the best interest of our children. When I watched this one segment, everything else was fine but this one section is that the little mouse is a fan dancer and she's at the bowry and everybody's drinking big schooners of beer and she says the words, "I'll take all of my clothes for you."

I was so stunned and so shocked, first of all that my daughter, you know, would be the one to catch this and number two, that Disney would allow this. That would think that it would be a

good idea to put in a movie for children, that I immediately took it out, mailed it to the CEO of Disney, wrote him a scathing letter about irresponsibility and never heard back. However, it taught me a huge lesson that I am responsible for my child's viewing. That's a lot of what I want to talk about today because we have a lot of topics within this radio show but that definitely is going to be the crux of it because what we allow our children to do is within our control. Either we're permissive, we're balanced or restrictive.

So we're going to take a look at this. First of all, as I said, when we watch movies on television or, you know, through our TV's with like I said, VHS, CD's, whatever, the screen was in our living room most likely. Therefore, we had a lot more control of what our children watched. It's not the same now with technology. Children are now watching either a very small screen, a little bit larger screen on a tablet or an iPad or a laptop away from you while you're doing what you think you need to be doing.

Way too often, parents are putting TV's, CD players in their children's bedrooms because it just adds that much more quiet to the household and now we have obviously, we have downloads, we don't even need to have a CD player there. The point being is that we have removed ourselves as the guardian and the protector of our children, we have absolutely no idea what pops up in our children's whatever they're watching. We're going to first of all, I want to just start out immediately by saying that they have nanny protection, which I feel like every phone, anything a child touches, even adults. I think adults need to be protected.

I always talk about child innocence lost or I think about it a lot is just we live in a world where gosh, you cannot turn on television without watching horrors all over the world where that's just absolutely terrifying children and causing them great anxiety as well as causing adults anxiety. That's just walking through the room. I think that we need to guard our homes from this nonstop onslaught of bad news and anything that would cause anxiety, a lot of times, children don't express their fears but they'll act out or they'll cry unexpectedly and often or show signs of depression and the can't name it, they can't – a lot of it is just based on anxiety or fear of something that they've seen and completely misunderstood or something that they think is right and they're real close to their home when in fact, it might be thousands and thousands of miles away in a foreign land.

The point is that children don't always understand things and either you're going to have to be there to talk about it and explain it and to console them and to make sure that they know that they're safe and protected. Also growing up strong to be able to cope and handle these things but we have to guard our own selves. We have to guard our own minds and our own hearts. We have to guard the family. I picture that home that nest needs to have protection and you can put nanny protectors like Nanny Net, et cetera on your devices but a lot of times, we can't always put them on our hearts and minds and I just feel like we allow way too much. When we see something it sticks with us forever and so our visual acuity is just like an instant recorder that stays in the brain. So I just think that we have to learn how to protect and filter ourselves even as adults.

So anyway, I am just going to leave it there. Definitely nanny-protect all of your devices that your children are on. It is really interesting as an educator I love technology and I am going to talk a little bit about that later. But I love technology and as a person, I love technology. I love the fact that I can actually instantly get whatever I need for the home and within a day or two days, it is sitting on my doorstep. I love that concept, it has just made life so much easier. I love in education that if we want to study something that we cannot see in our small town or wherever we live that we can go into the ocean. We can go into the universe and see the stars and the planets and beyond.

We can discover black holes, we can go to different parts of the world that we would never have a chance to see, see species that we have never seen before, even heard of. See lands and cultures, all of these technology brings to us and brings to us in an instant and so I have a tendency to really, really love it because of that. I think it is a wonderful educator. Again, everything has to be done within the boundaries of what we as either educators or parents allow and choose and choose for our children.

So as I am, say for instance, planning lesson plans or thinking about I create curriculum. So I will include wonderful technology in there. So suggestion for teachers but I have learned quickly that you'd better check and we don't even know how static it is but you better check when you open that what else might be lurking on that page because there is always some kind of a pop up somewhere and I have gone into YouTube's that I want to suggest for children.

Like for instance, shoe tying. I went in and I wanted to get a shoe tying YouTube for children so that they can see it and they could work on it and I wanted to be able to quickly suggest it to teachers so they could go there quickly and what pops up right next to us is “hot babes.” Well I really don’t think a child needs to see that. Whether they realize it or not or whether it comes into their view or not or whether they can read it or not, here is a button. All they have to do is press and that’s what they get to see. And so I just think again, parents need and educators need to be very, very cautious.

I think one time I mention this and so forgive if I repeat and you have heard it but it was hilarious but it wasn’t funny at all. So I couldn’t help myself. I laughed and rolled my eyes and slap my forehead all at the same time because a teacher was using the Zoo-phonics lesson plans that would play guitar music for the children so that they can hear the strings and different types of guitar music etcetera. So the teacher went on and found something. Well this guy was singing a song that was the most depressing song while he’s strumming on the guitar and I had to go in there. I mean this was for three and four year old children and say, “This is not appropriate. This is a terrible song,” and so remember, not all things are good and you need to preview them as parents and as educators very, very carefully.

Grandparents too, especially grandparents because so often you don’t have that parental control. You do whatever the family does and so when the grandchild comes to the house and you’re there then you follow along with the family way of doing things and you might not be there to guard over and so I just think that we have to be incredibly, incredibly careful. That is why I like those Nanny Nets on children’s devices. I think that we have so many — just there is just so much out there that we have to be careful with. Technology I think as we have said is both wonderful for adults and for children. So then what it becomes is then how much? How much screen time should we use? And so this kind of information you can go online yourself and read and I am sure you have already have.

I am going to reiterate it as well. I love that out of curiosity because I love watching human behavior. But that one year old literally who will hold a phone and knows exactly what to do with his or her finger to scroll or to choose something else. They know. They have watched parents and they have it down and I am telling you, one year old, one and a half year old before two it’s amazing to me. So what we do as adults, our children are learning to mimic and do themselves. You are without thinking about it without saying anything, you are drawing them into this world

of technology where we are absolutely, whether you want to use the word addiction or you want to use the word tool or usage or however you want to do it, we literally live with our technology through our technology. It is so important to me.

For instance, if I am writer there is no way in the world that I am going to go back to writing everything with paper and a pen or old typewriter. I am going to use my computer because it is the very fastest thing that I can use and it's handy and it's fast. There is no way, I don't even know how people wrote on typewriters or papyrus and ink by the way. It's amazing to me. The other things that we need to consider is again, if a child is between one to two years old, three years old then the experts are saying one to two hours of screen time only. For a one to two year old, I think that is just way too much and again, I am an educator who loves technology.

In Zoo-phonics, we have quite a few pieces of technology and some things that are funny and hilarious and wonderful for kids with music and the Zoo-phonics animals and body signals and so we absolutely love them. But it's supposed to be one tiny, tiny part of the Zoo-phonics instruction not the basis and so again, it needs to be limited and it needs to be included but not to the extent. I am observing because there's so many cute and clever things now that you can find, everything is downloadable. So all you have to go in and plug in what you want and you've got it right there in front of you.

So teachers are using technology to teach more and more and they are doing less of the teaching and again, that is another concern that I have because there is nothing more important than that human interaction. It is critical. So we've definitely got to limit screen time for all ages. As they get older it gets worse because children get more and more interested in the fastness of technology, the games, the stimulation. Some things like for instance my grandson absolutely adores Minecraft and I was concerned at first until I understood what it was and I watched him and I kept hearing this non-stop talking and we could hear him laugh and then he would really be serious and so as I watched him, I began to really appreciate it because I watched him begin to learn how to design with three dimensions and I thought, "This is incredible."

And so yes, here's a wonderful thing, a wonderful way of utilizing technology. But then when I saw it, it taking place where he was going outside less and less, say for instance it's summer time because schools usually get kids outside hopefully a lot for recess but if it is summer time

or night time or early in the morning then they are literally on the computer night and day and this goes for the vast majority of our kids right now. It is the great entertainer.

Some concerns that research that are looking at neurology are looking at is what it is doing for brains. Now I did a lot of research today on this and in the past also because I am looking to see how is it rewiring brains or wiring brains differently because brains are functioned to wire according to the stimulus and so with the advent of technology, technology wasn't around 20 – I won't say 20 but say 40 years ago like we know it today.

And so look back in time, 1800s, no such thing. So therefore, thinks of thousands of years ago. So our brains, whatever the stimulus is, our brains hardware can become adopted to whatever it happening and so that is where we are right now is that we are researching what happens to brains that are constantly especially young ones that are constantly hooked up to technology. Well, I just read so many studies and interestingly enough, absolutely nobody came to a conclusion. And their comment is, "Well we are probably not going to know the answer to this until 10, 15, 20 years from now whether there is real harm to the brain."

As of this time right now, the only thing conclusively they can say is that it is really affecting sleep patterns. However, is it the brain waves? Is it the blue light that is emitted? I mean we don't know. They are providing glasses even I have glasses that I wear when I remember them that protects me from the constant light that's emitted from screens and televisions.

Definitely we know that it does interrupt sleep patterns with a lot of insomnia that we have not have in the past but then you might look at that, say is it the insomnia from the blue lights or the light emitted or is it the fact that we're absolutely not moving our bodies like we used to, especially children. You know we are engaged with technology. Constantly the body is moving and that is going to be really the topic of next week's radio show.

It is movement and technology or the lack of movement and technology. One thing that was brought up in the study, you know, one study did a study on 11,000 children from the ages of eight to 10 and that is a huge study and again, they were very, very inconclusive and it was the chicken or the egg thing. Are children depressed because they are watching too much TV or are these type of children just naturally drawn to isolating themselves because they don't have strong social skills? Again, which is the chicken or the egg.

The one thing that they did conclusively find was that it literally a thin – this is what I have said earlier, thin the frontal cortex and they said this was a bit alarming to them because they don't usually see this until somebody is much older and it is actually happening with our youth. So again, for lay people even like myself who I look at neuroscience a lot, I don't know how this affects anybody because they didn't draw it to any conclusion.

Like it says, "Well, it causes Alzheimer's, etcetera" they didn't say that. They just said thinning of the cortex usually happens later in life. So I enter my own conclusion, I went geez I am expediting it perhaps but anyway, I didn't find anything that really said much of anything conclusive about technology in children except for the fact that it definitely stops them from moving. I don't think that you have to do a gigantic study to see this.

All you have to do is look around. When you're holding a handheld device or a laptop or you are on a computer or you are sitting in front of a TV, you are not moving and that's the bottom line unless you are doing yoga or some kind of a dance movement or something like that. Yes you can use it for good physical things but too often it becomes a very passive activity and this is where I feel the heed other educators like myself, the huge educators are most worried is that people, children are literally not moving. It is so passive. You are sitting and so it is interesting. I read this in several different places plus I have heard people talk about it, they're saying because people are bending their next over their chest that their developing protrusion on the back of their – I have filled around there, the back of their heads and it's like, "I don't feel anything yet."

But if our children do this from the time they're one and two years old to their whole lives, who knows what's going to be happening? Point being is we are changing the way we sit. You can watch technology pretty much in any position but none of it is great for the spinal cord. We are meant to run, we are meant to really stand and again, we spent the vast majority of our lives sitting in a chair not moving sufficiently.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:26:31.9] CW: So I am going to wrap this up. You know that I love to hear from you. So feel free to email me at char@safarilearning.com or char@zoo-phonics.com. You can call us on our

800 number, 800-622-8104. You can call us at 209-536-4926 that's our local Zoo-phonics telephone number. I'd like to hear from you. I like to hear what things that you see. We are always looking for topics that we're interested in. So definitely give us a call or an email, hype technology, you know how it works it is fast and I am fast at answering because I do sit there glued to my technology. Bye-bye.

[OUTRO]

[0:27:13.3] ANNOUNCER: That was Ed Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio live on 103.5 FM or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please email your question to dr_char@zoo-phonics.com.

Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

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