

Protecting Children from TV, Movies and too much Technology Part 2

[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 and I'm from Zoo-phonics, our Pneumonic and Multisensory Language Arts Program and Company and Safari Learning Academy, as well. Today I'm going to do a part two, extended from last week's part one. The subject is Protecting Children from TV, Movies and too much Technology.

Basically, the overarching theme on this one is protecting children from things that are just not age appropriate to see. Protecting their innocence, as well as, protecting them from sitting too much, not moving, not participating, not socializing. No matter what we're looking at, we're going to talk about how technology needs to have a parental guide and also that teacher guide as you know, technology is also being used in the classroom.

I had mentioned last week and I always like to do a quick recap just so you're kind of caught up on things that were mentioned, is to make sure that you have nanny protectors on all your gadgets that children touch. They filter the internet, websites, they block pornography, you get alerts on any kind of online activity that your child may be doing. It limits screen time, you can put a curfew, can put a schedule on it.

What is important is to protect your child and I just think that's imperative. I find that even when I'm looking up the most innocent things like something fun on YouTube or funny on YouTube or something instructive on YouTube. Right in that right hand corner, all sorts of things pop up that are not necessarily age appropriate and so you really have to watch out for that and be protective.

[0:01:58.8] CW: The other thing that I talked about is that when we were growing up with television and then with the advent of VHS and CD players, et cetera. Then we, most likely, it was connected to the television and the living room or the play room or the rumpus room or

whatever where, you know, parents spent a lot of their time. Now, more and more, children are on a small device that you can't see, you know?

If it's a cellphone, it's very tiny. A tablet isn't much bigger. You're in the kitchen, the child's with their technological device, you have absolutely no idea what's popping up. You really don't know what they're watching. Even a laptop or when we have laptops in the home, in the bedroom, sorry, in the child's bedroom, again, you have no adult supervision and we know that teenagers have gotten into so much trouble this way.

Therefore, it's something that we need to talk about, it is part of the parent's job is to watch over this. Technology has become such a fantastic babysitter because we get that moment — or moments of quiet or I can get things done, I can get the bills paid, I can get lunches packed, I can get the car cleaned, all sorts of things while our child is happily watching technology.

On the other hand, you cannot see what they're watching, you can't see the influences. I think it's interesting how technology, fascinating, not necessarily terrific and we're talking about it a lot, is that I can go online and I can look at something that I might want to order, a product and it's like no, I'll wait. Well, within minutes, it's popping back up on whatever I've got open.

[0:03:37.6] CW: It pops up and it pops up for the next several days because I didn't order it so it's just going to keep reminding me, it's built into the system, it's a lot smarter than we are. Protection of our children and our own selves are important. I did mention that I felt like we needed to protect our homes by taking control of it.

I think right now, there are too much control is being placed in the hands of children to make decisions but it's also – we have a technology taking control of us. It's taking control of our lives. Physically, mentally, spiritually. Bringing to things to children which is robbing them of their innocence.

Even the news on TV, there's barely, you know, much goes by whether it's just some horrible thing on TV that literally terrifies children. I felt like we need to monitor the security and the safety, not of in a locking doors but locking our minds. Locking our hearts, to things that are not good for little children to see and quite honestly, they're not all of that great for us.

It makes us frightened. It makes us depressed. It causes us anxiety and depression as adults because we're trying to cope with so much, as well as, little children who don't always tell you why they're frightened over something. I just say, guard yourselves. We talked about how it used to be, when I was growing up, we were outside and we were outside from early in the morning to late at nighttime, especially in the summer.

[0:05:02.6] CW: We monitored our own behavior, we monitored our own safety, we monitored what we had to do. If we didn't have a baseball bat, we picked up some kind of a stick or a piece of wood and we figured something to bat and play baseball. We played all sorts of games out there that we created, but we provide everything to our children now because so much is made, so much is available so therefore, we're not leaving children up to their own creative devices as much and especially with technology.

It is literally pervading hours and hours of their day. I'm really going to get into the weeds on this one because this is very near and dear to my heart because, Zoo-phonics is just the opposite of this. I stated clearly that I personally, as an adult, I love technology. As an educator, I love technology. I love to share it with children and I write it into the curriculum. I see teachers using technology too much instead of them doing their own teaching.

That is a cautionary tale. I feel like that interaction between teacher and students are so important. Therefore, I want to make sure that we are only using it for a tool for a very small portion of that educational school time. We have technology in so many different forms and children certainly, they know exactly – they know how to control it and they learn so early, how to turn it on, how to find their most important and their favorites.

You know, they are in so much control of their own watching and again, that's a huge issue. I'm noticing more and more that I'm hearing children say, I'm bored. If they are not allowed to use their technology as if there's nothing else to do, if I don't have that thing in my hand. Using items, anything, like children – building blocks and cars or people, you know, toy people or whatever to build bridges, to drive cars through things or you know, talking –

[0:07:12.3] CW: Using it as vehicles for imagination, that is being done less and less and when I watched children in that wonderful interaction with each other, when they are building blocks and they are working together and they are making – say for instance, bridges and they're

taking their cars or their people on top of the bridges or under them or whatever, they're talking through their imaginations but they're talking to each other and they're responding back and forth.

You don't see that a lot with technology. Again, whether they're sitting and watching in front of a screen or they've got a small handheld, they're not having that interaction. Now, that doesn't mean that parents cannot enjoy that with their children, we can, there are all sorts of things within technology. Games or things to watch that we certainly can enjoy with our children and I would highly recommend that because then you can talk.

You could also instruct. You want to make sure that you talk to your children about the good things about technology but you can also protect them by verbalizing the things that children have to watch out for and that they must protect themselves and that is really imperative.

Vocabulary is built with technology. I had talked about the big studies that were done. I read quite a few neurological studies that had been done with large samples of students, young children. They really didn't come to much conclusion. They did say there was some thinning of the cortex that usually happens in older age. That was interesting but they didn't really relate it to anything so they really couldn't tell, was there any damage.

[0:08:45.3] CW: They are seeing definitely more insomnia but is that because kids are just staying up later or even adults staying up later? They're talking about the light that the computers or handhelds emit cellphones et cetera. There can be that – they feel like you are not going to be able to determine that from the next 10 or 20 years, who knows.

On the other hand, we want to be able to make sure that we're aware of that and that our children are aware of that. But if a child's not going to stop themselves from this then obviously, parents have to step in. This is always the thrust of my conversations, is that parents are the ones that have got to have that control.

It's enjoy it with a child, limit their time together, but make sure that you're all going outside or having an indoor project where technology is absolutely not a part of that moment so that children learn bounce. Remember, children learn from their parents and because we are constantly connected, we are, that self – I admit it, I am one of those.

I shared one time about – I was driving with my daughter right on her property in the forest and here, a bear pops out and it's kind of the resident bear and the first thing I thought of is, I've got to get my phone out, I got to take a picture.

Well, I missed the bear. I missed seeing something because I was trying to utilize my phone and technology to take a picture so I could put it on Facebook or show other people. The problem is that I literally missed it completely and never did see the bear. There is a problem and that's a good cautionary tale as well.

[0:10:23.1] CW: We spend so much time on technology with our heads always down. I know that we'll be driving and maybe it's a long, long drive and it's like okay, I want to read something or I want to play a game or I want to do something so I've got my hand here while Bill's driving.

I've got my technology stuff. My head is down and Bill will say it, look at the beautiful lake, it's like – I should be looking out the window. I find it with myself. Therefore, I don't have things in proper balance. I have to talk to myself and it's us teaching ourselves as adults how to have balance because I don't think we do.

I do not think people have good balance on their own lives and I think that we truly need to analyze ourselves and ask ourselves, "Do we have balance in our own lives?" When we go into a restaurant. People are on their phones. People really don't use them as much for talking as we used to hear cellphones for talking. Now everything is texting or we're emailing or we're checking something out or we're ordering something.

It's nonstop. I thought it was hilarious. I walked into a really large Starbucks the other day and it was filled with people and everybody's head was down and every single one of them were on their cellphones and the thing is, they might be sitting at a table with two and three people and they weren't talking with each other. They had their heads down and they were all on their cellphones.

[0:11:47.1] CW: I stood there at the door and I watched with absolutely utter amazement and realized, I do the same thing. Again, we need to self-analyze. I'm going to be the last person to

criticize someone else without really checking out myself. Some of the things that we want to really look at in today's broadcast is to really analyze the lack of movement.

Now, if you think about the way things used to be, you are outside and you were playing, versus with the advent of television and television than they were you know, then we have technology over the years and more and more things where – that we can turn to, we are never without finding a place to watch something or do something with.

That we are moving our bodies less and less. An orthopaedic therapist made a really interesting comment that I had not read before. She said that she would get referrals for children when children had disabilities and they had no muscle strength in their hands or their upper body which sustains the arms and the hands for handwriting or shoe tying or scissor cutting.

She said, it used to be that those were the children that they would work with and she said, not so anymore. She is getting referrals constantly just from preschoolers and kindergarteners who just do not have any hand or arm strength because all they need to do is push a button or you know, move the spring with a finger movement.

[0:13:30.2] CW: The body is not strong enough to sustain. We have to have a strong core and lower body strength in order to have strong upper body strength. You might not think about it but I just wrote an entire teacher's guide and book for our handwriting program based on making the entire body, the whole body strong, from the toes up to the top of the head, the fingers, the arms, the legs, the stomach, the back, the shoulders — strong.

So that the child can literally do handwriting. We think that it's such a simple task, it indeed is not. Technology plays an interesting — and side trip on that one, is the fact is, is that as technology has become so important to our lives, it's so much faster, there is no reason to use handwriting very often because we can word process, we can use a computer, a laptop, a phone, iPad, you name it to do our word processing. Teachers have forgotten to teach handwriting and if they do, they're not teaching handwriting to be legible. They are not working on legibility and in order to have legibility, you have to have fine muscle control and because we are not either teaching it in the schools or we're teaching it as a cursory like a few minutes here and a few minutes there.

Because we are saying with technology, why bother with handwriting? Just give them a keyboard. Well it is like saying, “Don’t teach Math just give them a calculator.” We have to realize that we got to have the skills built into our brains before that we use technology in any form because the power does go out, the grid does go down. Internet does go down and then what are we left with? I think it is hilarious, we also always feel so lost if we can’t use our precious technology.

We want to make sure that our children have not just – and we actually need to be out of balance with technology. We don’t want to say we need a balanced life with technology. We actually need to be out of balance with it for our children. Adults have a tendency — more and more, we are utilizing it for work and so a lot of times we literally can’t escape it. If that is a part of our job or our job, like me, I write on a computer constantly.

I research on a computer. If that — it’s fabulous, magic as far as I’m concerned. Even sitting around and socializing with friends, some topic will come up and everybody get out their cellphone to quickly look it up, see who can find the topic the fastest and talk about it. Well that’s great, that’s fun, that’s okay but the out of balance for children is just to make sure that they’re up and moving and away from technology for the greater part of their day.

[0:16:27.1] And I think that that’s an imperative that we have to really watch for. We want to make sure that children are using their imaginations. That they’re building, that they are tearing down, that they’re rebuilding. So that they can come up with a different way of doing something. That they can use their imaginations to create, that they can verbalize with their friends within the fantasy that they love so much that they can do plays or they can as they’re caring for their babies. That they have this interaction verbally going on and they’ve got concepts in their head of nurturing and care.

Or they’re doctors, they’re ambulance drivers, they’re firefighters or police officers and they are using their bodies as they are tearing around the playgrounds on their pretend ambulances or motorcycles or police cars or whatever and so they’re again running and physically within this realm of imagination that is so critical to their creativity and talk about brain growth and neuron connections.

This is pivotal to a child's development. One of the research studies, I don't want to say I am going to question it. I am going to throw it out to you just so you can hear it because it was stated in several different reports but they said that when they tested children who were on the computer for three to eight hours a day and they tested them on cognitive tests and vocabulary tests, that they did not perform as high and I really challenged that because I feel –

All I am saying is we have a tendency in the media to circulate other people's opinions and if you say it long enough, it becomes fact when really it is not fact. And so what I saw, as soon as I start seeing words that are used in the exact same pattern over and over again, I think "Hmm..." they must have read that somewhere else and now they're spouting it. So whether it really is in their hard data or not, we really don't know. They just might include it as a part of their research or their article might not even be a researched article.

[0:18:40.8] It might be a report on a research article, which means it is way abbreviated and you're not getting necessarily the serious science behind it but they're just saying that the global cognitive abilities are lower and I have trouble with that. I really do. I can believe that muscle tone isn't as strong. I know for a fact that when we move it is directly connected to our cognitive thinking processes. So based on that, I could say yes I lean towards that.

But I have trouble believing that it affects vocabulary because I think that the internet, regardless of what it is, whether it's a cartoon or whether it's a game, whether it's a child watching play dough activities with YouTube or those little tiny dolls that they pull out and there is just a zillion different dolls inside. The person is talking non-stop and describing, talking about colors when little children get on these and I watched them.

I've watched my granddaughter watching YouTube on them and their vocabulary is very appropriate and so children are learning vocabulary. So I really have a struggle with that. So I am just going to say cautionary tale, don't believe everything that you read and just kind of take things and don't believe it verbatim. On the other hand, I am a believer that if the body is not moving during the learning time and before and after the learning time like curriculum time, then the brain's neurons are not solidifying and connecting.

Because we know that there is something called brain derived neurotropic factor, and I read about it all the time because it just pops up in the world that I spend, which is in neuroscience.

They talk about it often and they talk about with various topics but the one that intrigues me the most is movement and memory. There are just research study after research study showing that this brain derive neurotropic factor or BDNF.

[0:20:37.7] You can look that up and I would highly recommend that you do, actually is directly related to movement and physicality and how that physicality is imperative for neuron connections and solidification and by that, I mean, it literally grows. Neurons, when the child is moving is a part of just a child's natural experience, children love to move especially those little wiggly boys. They have to move and they have to climb, but I find that I watch our little girls out there.

I watch all of them and they all have a tendency to want to climb the rocks at our Safari Learning and I love the climbing equipment up and down, sliding, running. It is important to all of them. This constant movement, you really don't see children standing still too much on a playground. Their natural propensity is when moving from one place to the other is to run. In fact, I cannot tell you how many times in my lifetime I have said either "no running inside" or "be careful where you run."

Because children just run naturally and might run into things or slip and so we are always protecting them but that running is so important to them and so we really, really want to encourage it. When a child moves with physicality — running, jumping, hopping, skipping, slithering, weight lifting, anything the child does that literally grows neurons. They have seen this demonstrated in a petri dish when they have taken a neuron and they have deposited BDNF onto the neurons.

And they've watched it sprout, fingers that reach out to other fingers and made connections and that is what our brain is all about. You'll notice when a baby is born they are moving constantly. And so this movement is so integral to memory and to learning because if we don't remember what we are taught, we have to relearn it and if we don't remember it then we have to — it is one of those vicious cycles. Children have to master so that they can move onto the next thing.

[0:22:38.2] That they can transfer that information that they just learned to something else, to a higher learning. So memory and mastery are linked hand in hand. So then with that said, you have to analyze what is happening to our children and I would just implore you whether you're a

teacher or whether you are a parent or whether you are a grandparent or whether you are an aunt or an uncle or just observationally looking at human nature.

Just watch the amount of time that children and your children I think that you do need to analyze it and I think that rules need to be set down because I feel like you need to look at the whole picture of this. Number one, we really don't know how it's affecting our brains. We do know that the brain hardwires and re-hardwires itself to adapt and it does it constantly. So we might not know the effects. It may be fabulous effects, it may not be quite as positive as perhaps we think.

We know that technology makes our world go so much faster. It can bring us so much enjoyment and pleasure but it can also take us down a path that we don't want our children to go on. We really don't even want ourselves to go down that path. We need to watch and make sure that our children and our selves are getting enough physical activity. Boy, talk about children not getting enough activity. Adults are moving less and less.

Because we spend more of our time in the computer at work or you know whatever we do, it has a tendency to be sitting down and then once we leave work, we have grocery shopping or we got chores or we've got – there is always something to do that again, takes us away from actually getting outside in the sunshine running around with our kids and our families. So some rules that it would be good to sit down for children and selves is that technology is turned off absolutely at dinner time.

[0:24:35.6] No TV, it's hard to do but it is important because this is your social time. This is where you look at each other in the eye. This is where hearts mend and relationships strengthen when we are interested in each other and we ask each other questions and we laugh and we make plans together. When there is nothing that is distracting us from each other. So during the dinner time, there should be just rules where children understand that they don't wake up at crack of dawn.

And get on the internet because if you think about it, they should be sleeping. Children should be sleeping until it is time to get up to get ready for school or in the summertime, they should be sleeping, getting enough sleep so that they can wake up and do whatever they get to do that day and so, some children that is what the first thing they do. They either turn on the TV, they turn on some kind of piece of technology. So let's make some rules for the family.

And let's abide by them as hard as it is, let's get everyone's buy in. Frankly, I would rather have more fun with somebody than I would be able to sit by myself and they are certainly talking a lot about that children they're not really learning how to socialize and verbalize with other people quite as well just because we're spending more and more time in isolation where your interaction is towards a screen. You are certainly not moving as much and that is certainly not a positive.

So set down some rules for the home and make sure that on weekends, everyone is outdoors if possible or indoors if it's rainy or snowy or cold. That we are playing games or we're reading aloud. That was my number one most favorite thing to do and quite honestly, I was really grateful that TV wasn't a huge issue in our family because it was brand new. When we moved, we didn't have TV for quite a while and so we have read around the fireplace.

[0:26:31.3] We were outside all the time hiking, playing catch, I just feel like we live in such a fast and busy world and a lot of it takes us away from that eye to eye, knee to knee, mouth to ear where we're talking and we are watching each other and this wonderful bond and interaction and I think we're losing that. That human to human is so imperative. There's so much more to say on this topic, I have barely scratched the surface.

I think it is really important that we really analyze ourselves and analyze our family and our interaction or lack thereof and start some new rules and start some new traditions with each other and truly enjoy it because you can't get that time back.

[END OF DISCUSSION]

[0:27:17.6] CW: As we always say, email me at char@safarilearning.com, char@zoo-phonics.com. Call 800-622-8104 or 209-536-4926. I love to hear your thoughts, your suggestions and comments, concerns. Thank you so much. Bye-bye.

[OUTRO]

[0:27:41.5] 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.

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