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Todd: Here we go. My name is Todd. This is Cathy. Welcome back to another episode of Zen Parenting Radio. This is podcast number 727. Why listen to Zen Parenting Radio? Because you'll feel outstanding and always remember our motto, which is the best predictor of a child's well being is in fact a parent's self understanding.

Todd: On today's show, we have Dr. Devorah Heitner. Do you say, doctor? You have a PhD?

Devorah: I can call you doctor. I mean, I don't you, you can call me Devorah, but I don't usually use

Todd: doctor. If I got a PhD I would've, I would just say doctor

Devorah: first. That's just every once in a while my husband will be like, yes, we'd like a table for doctor and Mr.

Devorah: So and so. Yeah.

Todd: Love it. That's what I would do. But I'm not you, so you could be Devorah and I'll pretend I took a PhD Right. Thing You can pretend. What was your dissertation

Devorah: on? It was on, I turned it into a book called Black Power TV. It was on a movement of black news programs from the 1970s that were really revolutionary.

Devorah: Oh my gosh.

Cathy: what, give me, tell me some of the titles.

Devorah: Say Brother, Black Journal.

Cathy: Oh, that's so interesting. So it's a book that's out there in the world. Oh, great.

Todd: So in case you don't know who Devorah is, she has spoken and written widely about parenting and growing up in the digital age.

Todd: Her work has appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and CNN. Her previous book, which we interviewed Devorah on, and she spoke about at our conference. What year is that behind you, sweetie? I think it was 2018. Oh yeah, the old days. 2018. Four times. she had a book called Screenwise, helping kids thrive.

Todd: And survive in their digital world. It was an Amazon bestseller and widely praised. Dr. Heitner earned a PhD in media technology and society from Northwestern University and has taught at DePaul University in Northwestern. She lives with her family in Chicagoland. She wrote a new book called Growing Up in Public, which I'm holding in my hands.

Todd: The subtitle is Coming of Age in a Digital World. full transparency, I did not read this book, but my sweetheart over there did, so she's gonna lead, so I'm gonna pretend that, I'm not gonna pretend, I'm gonna be the audience member in case they haven't, because this podcast is being released on September 12th.

Todd: Is that right?

Cathy: So this podcast and this book. Yes. and this book. Yes. So this is the day.

Devorah: Party.

Todd: I'll give you some applause for that. So congratulations on writing the book. Before we invite you into the conversation about this amazing book we're going to talk a little bit about our Zen Parenteen 2024. Did I say that right, sweetie? You did. Okay. What is this and how would people want to attend this live in person event?

Cathy: Well, it's very exciting because Devorah is one of our speakers at Connect Teen. I mean, we obviously, when we decided to do another conference and then we decided to do a conference about teens, Devorah is top of that list because she talks about media.

Cathy: She talks about social media. She talks about screens and everything that is probably the most common question we get, Devorah. It somehow involves social media or somehow involves screen time or arguments about it. So she was an absolute must. And if you are already coming to the conference, wonderful.

Cathy: If you have your ticket, if you haven't bought it yet, go to zenparentingradio.com. And it will take you to the website where you can get

your ticket and we have limited spaces here. So make sure don't wait around for this one, go get your ticket so you can get in. Because basically Todd and I made a list of all the things that seem to be affecting teens right now and the issues that don't seem to be addressed enough.

Cathy: What I mean by that is for families who are seeking therapy for their child or seeking some kind of, you know, family work where everybody can get more information. It's not available. There's, you know, there's waiting lists for therapists, there's waiting lists for inpatient units, partial hospitalization programs, group work, and we wanted to bring together the experts in this field to talk about these things and give people access to not only all this information, but a community who are dealing with the same issues. We're all dealing with it. We, all three of us have teens.

Todd: Yes, we do. And it's not being recorded. So the only way to appreciate it is to show up in Oak Brook Hills, Illinois, in January, 26th and 27th of 2024. A few of the other speakers we have are Dr. Shafali, Dr. Alexander Solomon, Michelle Akar, Dr. John Duffy. Cassandra Townsend, Kendra DeFrank, Lisa Carroll, and many others. So, hope you consider joining us on that special two day event.

Cathy: So, Devorah, your book, okay, I want to start with this. Like you probably get a lot of books, you know, that get sent because we're all kind of in the same world and we're all supporting each other.

Cathy: I sat down and started reading your book two days ago. It's so good. Thank you. It's so good. And your writing, I don't know if I said this to Todd this morning or not, maybe I did, but the reason I like your writing style is it's like talking to you. Your points, that you do a few things, you offer pop culture points, you know, which I love, you know, here's really what's going on, then you share your own life. And then you share the experiences you've had with kids, the things you've heard, the parents you've worked with, and then all your research. It has all the things I love in a book. So I just want to say kudos. And I'm really, I know it sounds like I'm just saying that, but Todd will tell you, it's not that I dislike books, but I don't usually say, Hey, this is a really good book.

Todd: And that's what you said. So you just walked into the office that we share about an hour ago and you said, this is really good, really good book. She doesn't say that about all the books she reads.

Cathy: So kudos because this is a needed book. And so I want to start there because you wrote Screenwise, you know, several years ago. So how did you know where you wanted to pick up? Like how did you know?

Devorah: So many parents would say to me, Devorah,

Devorah: Screenwise is really reassuring. I'm a little less stressed about screen time. I feel like I can understand how to be a mentor versus monitoring. I can think about helping my kid navigate some of what they see online.

Devorah: But what do I do with what they post. And what do I do with the fact that I'm just grateful as heck that what I thought and said in middle school, high school, and even college isn't just like out there to be searched and found and to be potentially used against me. I know I would be really troubled if there was that much information about me out there.

Devorah: So how is my kid supposed to deal with that? And so hearing that from parents over and over again, made me realize this is a different conversation that kids are really surveilled. And then as I started to dive into the ways kids are surveilled on social media and the ways they share with one another and can be kind of surveilled by their peers, frankly, and by parents, I realized there's also ways that parents might be contributing to the stresses that kids are experiencing when we put Life 360 on them and we're tracking them around or we're checking their grades on our own phones all the time.

Devorah: So I realized that It's not just social media that's stressing kids out. There's, there's more to the story. I know. So then I was like, Oh, I have to write another book.

Cathy: So that was going to be my first question for you, because I really think this tracking of our children is become so commonplace and so expected.

Cathy: And I would say, even in your book, the amount of quotes from kids who are like, yeah, I'm used to it. Like the amount of, it was different chapters where a kid would be like, well, yeah, I expect that to expect, expect what to be followed on their device, like to have their parents be following them. And I'm not saying the kids, I mean, Devorah is the one who talked to them, but I'm not saying they were like, I like it.

Cathy: They just don't know any different. So talk to us about these, **sir**, we would call, and they are their surveillance devices, what they are, how people are using them now. And..

Devorah: I think it's a lot. I reread Little Brother recently, the Cory Doctorow book that's like now 20 years old and it's sort of an anti surveillance, you know, kind of classic work of speculative fiction.

Devorah: And I realized we really are living in this kind of big brother world where everybody knows where you are. Kids are very tracked by school. My kid's ID has a QR code. He has to scan into lunch. They know if you went to lunch. I mean, it's like a little bit much, like so what if he wants to skip lunch? I don't know.

Devorah: Totally. You know, but I think that that's just what kids expect. They expect to be sort of scanned in and out of places and for their parents to track their locations using Find My Phone or Life 360 or some of these other devices and apps. And I think they are used to us knowing more about school through PowerSchool and some of these other applications as well. So I agree that they're used to it, but I don't know if they should be. And I do think we want to find at least little ways to push back on some of what this is doing to our relationships, especially where it undermines kids independence or the trust that we're forming in our families.

Todd: I feel like we need to, I need to qualify because it'd be so easy for me to say, well, here's what I do. And this is what you should do. Whoever happens to be listening to this, I think for, for Cathy and I, what we do is we do the Find Friends thing, so we know where they are.

Cathy: Right. Well, I would even qualify that we have find friends, but it's not all, it wasn't Oh, we usually, it wasn't there to find out where they were. Meaning that's what it does. Right. But that's not how I, well, go ahead. You go ahead and then I'll explain why.

Cathy: We

Todd: use it usually when our kids' I'll be home at 1130 and it's 1130, and we're like, where are they? I don't know if we use it any other time other than that, right?

Cathy: The times that I really have appreciated, because this is the thing too, like Devorah and I were just having a brief conversation upstairs about nuance, you know, there's, it's been really helpful.

Cathy: Like when my children are traveling and I'm like, okay, they're almost there. Okay. I know where they are. it's been really helpful. Like you said, Todd,

when a kid says they're gonna be home at a certain time and they're not, and you're like, oh, they're on, oh, look, oh, they're on their way home. Okay. No big deal.

Cathy: Go to bed. The but that I have, and I don't know if a lot of parents would agree with this, it would stress me out to constantly check on where my kid is. And I'm talking about it's not about, it's a, you know, we'll get into, you know, how healthy that is in the parent child relationship. But for me personally, there is a.. Okay, for me to look and know where they are at all times would probably drive me crazy.

Cathy: And the truth is Skylar and I were talking about this yesterday. If you say you're tracking your kid and they're like at the library and maybe this is from your book, Devorah, and if it is, then I'm sorry, I'm totally paraphrasing it, but it was something like your kid could be in the library studying, outside of the library, skipping something, or in the back of the library, vaping. Was that from your book?

Devorah: Exactly, that was from the book. Okay, good. And so the idea that, knowing where your kid is, is what you need as a parent versus knowing how they're doing and what kind of support they need, I think the latter is more important.

Devorah: And so, I do, and I agree with you, too much data is anxiety provoking. I am an anxious mom, I am not a Zen parent, so I hope it's okay that I'm on Zen parenting, but I'm not a very Zen parent, I'm a, I'm a not Zen parent. And I, but I'm, but I'm an aspirational Zen parent. So that's why I love what you do.

Devorah: And for me, more data feeds more anxiety. If I have five ways to check on my kid, then I might do it. And then that might be five times the stress. And I might be better off just being like, Hey bud, what's up?

Cathy: Yeah. And you know, what I find is it's just a bunch of storytelling because I was actually I'm thinking of a time being with a friend like a year ago when we were sitting in a booth and her daughter was like in her second year in college. In college, and she was tracking her and making up a story like, Oh, I bet they're going to the fraternity party now. Oh, look, they're going there. I wonder if they're getting something to eat. I'm like, you're making up a story about what your kid is doing. And I think for her, It was soothing some kind of, my kid is out and about, my kid is happy, but that's all made up.

Cathy: There is this sense of, we have to take ownership of the fact that we're doing it to soothe ourselves, not to necessarily protect our kid. Do you know what I mean? There's such a differentiation.

Devorah: I think that's right. But we often reach for something, just like we go to scroll social media thinking we'll feel better and often we end up feeling worse.

Devorah: I think looking at that tracking data, like I can keep checking the grade data at school or check the location data, but the more I check, the more it's going to raise questions that might make me feel more anxious and like I need to check more. So it can be a little bit of a vicious cycle.

Todd: Well, and I'm glad you brought up the school thing because, and like I said, just cause this is what I do, doesn't like in another family, the opposite of what we do might be the best thing because the kid's off track.

Todd: But I've never looked at power school, I don't think, or maybe a few times in my life. And, one thing, Cathy and I do plenty of things wrong as parents, but one thing I think we've done really right is invite them to own their own school experience. Like if you get a D, you get a D. If you get an A, you get an A.

Todd: And I hear some parents out there that are like checking how a kid did on a quiz. Before the kid even comes home from school, and there's so much judgment in me for that. I'm like, dude, you gotta let your kid figure out how they're gonna navigate school. And the reason I'm so careful in the qualifications is, it just so happens that our kids don't fail classes. But if my kid failed a class, I think I might behave differently. So I don't know.

Devorah: Well, I think some kids may need more support than others, but it's not clear that those kids even benefit from the close tracking. Because I've talked to a [00:13:20] lot of families where kids are struggling in school, but that kind of close tracking, at least from a parent, might not be good.

Devorah: It might be that your kid would do well. I mean, not every family can do this, but if they have a coach or someone else that they're working with, and that person is helping them, like if your kid really struggles with executive function or struggles with a specific learning disability, but ideally, it's not a parent, especially for a teenager, because that's so undermining in the relationship and kids really need their parents not to turn into these nagging machines.

Devorah: And it really can take away from the quality of the time that you spend together. So I think that's really important. I mean, I don't love PowerSchool even for the kids or all of these things, like my kids on Canvas and, you know, I really prefer a written syllabus actually, like I think it's really hard to understand and it's, there's these breadcrumbs and you have to follow them and it would be nice to sort of get the bigger picture and, yeah.

Devorah: That's not how they do, but your kids have to adapt to whatever their school is using and figuring out little hacks. And they do, they do adapt to it and they do figure it out. And the kids also can overcheck. So I see a lot of kids who are overchecking their grades and it's on their phone. I've, I've advised some kids to take it off their phone.

Devorah: Yes.

Cathy: Yeah. I mean, I think there's two things I'm thinking of from what both of you said. Like Todd, you're saying, you know, because you're right. We did, I power school is where you go to like it, you know, sign up for parent teacher conference, but otherwise it's not our thing. The, the kids though, the pressure they feel from peers to check it is just as much as what, maybe not the same, but there is so much conversation around what did you get or is that test in and that their phone dings, you know, when something comes in so they know it's, it's a, it's a different kind of dopamine hit Oh, I have to check this right away And I think that it also doesn't tell a full story because there have been times when the girls, you know, like two things are turned in and so it'll say they have a C.

Cathy: But really there's a paper that's out or there's, they're going to retake a test. And I think for parents to constantly check and monitor, it's just a moment in time. I, that's why I think it's a waste of time for parents to be too hyper aware because you're not getting the full picture of the kid's experience.

Devorah: I think the schools really push parents to do it though. So there's a lot of feeling like, oh, this is what parents being a good parent is. Got it. And for students as well. And since the assignments are in there, it's hard for them not to go in. Like at least my son has to go in for his assignments and you know, he's in there all the time.

Devorah: But I agree, like having it on your phone, certainly any notifications I would turn off because if you're sitting there in one class and your grade for another class comes in and dings, you're getting derailed from the learning you're doing in the other class. It's not appropriate. And I mean, I would say,

you know, let's go full Alfie Kohn and say that grades themselves are an extrinsic motivator and not the most helpful way to measure learning.

Devorah: So for sure, having a minute by minute update on them isn't helpful. And, you know, some of the boys I interviewed for the book who were in a new high school where they'd had these apps in middle school, but the high school didn't use them were saying, Oh, well, we have no idea how we're doing. And I was like, well, that means your internal gauge got turned off.

Devorah: You have no meter for how it's going. And that. Tells me you, you, you are relying too much on these apps. Yeah.

Cathy: You almost want to be like, how do you not know? Right. Not just based on that grade at the top of the paper, but like how

Devorah: you're feeling. if you walk in, you have no idea what's going on.

Devorah: Obviously you need to do some studying.

Cathy: Exactly. There was a class that our daughter had a few years ago where even the teacher would, and again, I, I'm a teacher too. So it's not about she did something wrong, but she wouldn't input grades a lot. You know, like it would, she'd do a big dump, like every couple of weeks.

Cathy: And so it never. It stressed my daughter out because she would be like, I have no idea, like when that grade dump comes in, what it's going to say. And that was the same conversation I had with her. I was like, but you, you know, you took these things and you kind of always feel like you're here. So it's probably not going to be that, it's not going to be that much different or new news, but just the lack of inputting it stressed her out because she wanted like up to date, which is so.

Cathy: You know, Devorah, what you just said is so true. Todd and I can say whatever we want, but there is a cultural experience of I'm a good parent if I check PowerSchool all the time.

Devorah: Absolutely. Or if I know my kid's location or if I read all their texts.

Todd: Yes. Oh, let's talk about reading texts. Have we ever, I'm sorry, I feel like I'm gonna, yeah, I'm gonna kick us out of the equation.

Todd: I, but I can only share my experience, sweetie. Yeah. Okay. I get it. I get it. I don't know if I've ever checked any texts of my kids and there could be a kid who's in significant trouble, and it's absolutely necessary for a parent to read the text, whatever, drugs, alcohol, insert, whatever. So there is.

Todd: I think that there are times when it's important to check your kids texts, but for the most part, what are you doing? They're not yours.

Cathy: I would say this is the thing, and this is kind of what we talk about on the show all the time, and it's, it's too big for a parent to go, Oh, well then I'll just do that.

Cathy: But the goal, the hope is the connection you have with your kids is that you have conversations a lot and you're hearing about their experiences when they're struggling with a peer, they're like, I'm struggling with, you know, this person or this happened, or I got a text and it made me upset where you're hearing about it.

Cathy: So you don't have to like in your book to where you had the language. Mentoring, not monitoring. Is that right? So it's like the hope is, and I think this is what Todd's alluding to with our girls, is that I don't really feel the need to check their texts because we have so many conversations about, Oh my gosh, I just said something and someone thought I was being a jerk and they wrote this back.

Cathy: What should I write? You know, we're talking about it. We're so I like explain that mentoring.

Devorah: I mean mentoring is a lot more work than monitoring and I think for an early phone user and some people are now getting their kids phones at 10 or 11 it might be about sitting down with them once a week and like looking at that group text with them especially if they want you to look at it because sometimes they're like oh my gosh this group text I don't know what true but it also might be just talking about it and you'll never see their friends in the same way if you read the group text so I mean I would say stay out of it if you possibly can because you may not look at their friends with the same sort of rose colored glasses. It might be more pleasant for you not to see everything that gets said, especially in middle school.

Devorah: And I think that's, that's an important piece of it is preserving not just their privacy, but their friends privacy. I mean, that said, I think if kids are

struggling, you know, having them show you their phone or show you some of the conversations can be helpful.

Devorah: But as they get older, you really do want them to handle things more independently. And you don't want to be learning about things this way because it's not a good way to know what's going on and the context is missing. So a lot of times you can see something that might really concern you as a parent, but you're not going to really understand where it's coming from or to have the context.

Devorah: So it's really is better to talk to kids about their social experiences and give them strategies. If the group text is really toxic, you have some options. You can leave. You can go directly to the person who's not being nice and talk to them privately without calling them out in front of everyone.

Devorah: You can talk to the person who's being targeted and find some solidarity with them. You can take a break from the group text. So I think it's important to give kids some options for dealing with things that are tough. Yeah.

Cathy: go ahead. Well, I just feel like it's this vicious cycle, right? Where it's at some point, you know, if our, if we're, I mean, use the word monitoring their texts, and I'm thinking of a woman that I know. A friend of mine, who she, I think, had a, there was a group of boys, they were in seventh grade, and she had a son, and another mom was monitoring the kids' text exchange. And so it was a group of seventh grade boys. So you can imagine it's not about their jerks or anything. It's just, there was some language thrown around where they're kind of, you know, ribbing each other. And so this mom then called all the other moms and says, you need to start reading these texts.

Cathy: They're inappropriate. They're saying these certain things. So all these moms got involved. And to your point, then there was all this, who's starting this, where are they learning this from? There was, it became a thing that the moms started to feel like they needed to, the kids were getting in trouble instead of with each other having experiences of, you know, I'm going to walk away because you're being a jerk to me.

Cathy: Or maybe because I'm getting these texts all the time, I'm going to choose friendships elsewhere. There's this inability to allow our kids to have an experience of failure with peers or, you know, experiences with peers. Sometimes they get power from it. You know, and then learning it that way, if we're, if we are engaging with them, if we are over involved in that experience,

they don't, you know, it's Michelle Eichert's book that just came out about failure, and if we're too involved, they're not going to have successes.

Devorah: And I think also to see the language experimentation from seventh grade boys as part of typical adolescent development. And to kind of bud out and just remember what language you used on the school bus to try to impress your friends. And that's not language you would maybe use like at dinner at grandma's.

Devorah: And if the kids know that, then they're already like 90 percent of the way there. And yeah, I mean, there's a difference, like if they're using misogynist or homophobic or racist slurs that's different to me than just like bad words or like talking about body parts. Like to me, like one, like one thing is just like sort of the typical kind of adolescent stuff.

Devorah: And another is more of a sort of toxic masculinity that's more problematic. But I would still maybe not try to hit it over the head in the group text, but instead like use opportunities where you're watching media with your kids. Say, like we watched Friday Night Lights with our son early in the pandemic, we watched all of it with, and he was then in like fifth and sixth grade.

Devorah: And it was like a really good opportunity to talk about relationships and consent and drinking, but also kind of gender and the culture. And, you know, are there different ways to be a boy? What does it look like if you're, you know, trying to be a boy in one way, what can it look like in a different way?

Devorah: And I think that makes more sense than trying to be like. Has your friend ever used a misogynist slur? You know, let's find it in the group text and call them out. But instead think about what are all the pressures on these young kids to figure out their own place by kind of calling in these larger cultural, you know, memes and other things?

Devorah: And obviously we don't want our kids to do harm. So that is, I mean, broadly one of the instructions I would give kids, you know, in a texting situation, in social medias, if you think this could harm a person or a group of people, then don't do it. But I think we need to also understand the bigger forces at play and not just look at individual kids as like these lone actors, like this kid didn't get that language from no place, you know, it's coming at them from everywhere at that age.

Devorah: And so I think we really need to understand our kids as trying to make their way through the wider culture.

Todd: Well, and then getting back to the text is a vehicle of communication. I think it's really handy when everybody's getting along, but there's times when feelings are hurt and they try to repair on text or maybe they're trying to hurt on text.

Todd: I think text is such a horrific vehicle of communication in so many ways.

Devorah: Like in a disagreement with a friend or a misunderstanding or with my husband, if it gets bad on text, then we pick up the phone. And that's one of the things we need to teach our kids. And one of the things that kids, I think, aren't getting mentored on by their parents by osmosis in the same way that we were is we heard our parents on the phone.

Devorah: So I could tell if my mom wanted to get off the phone with someone because I could hear her voice change, but our kids are watching us thumb out our lives. And we're not, they're not seeing us make the calculation. Oh, this is big news. Instead of texting grandma, I'm going to tell her when we see her so we can be there when she responds or whatever.

Devorah: And so we need to actually spell some of that out for kids. Like, oh, that's big news. Or, you know, one of the things I had to teach my kid is how do you turn down plans? And I still see him sometimes, cause we'll talk about texts and I don't just read his text without permission, but there have been times where he's struggled to make plans.

Devorah: And I've been like, can I see? Okay, nobody's mentioned a time here. How about you suggest a time? I think that's gonna get you to a plan faster if you try a time and a date instead of just let's get together. But another thing I've said is when someone says you want to hang out, instead of saying Nope, if it's someone you actually do want to hang out with but you can't right now because you're busy, you can say I have other plans right now, but can we hang out another time?

Devorah: just Little things. Totally. Which you may not have needed to teach your kids, but some kids may need a more explicit you know, but if you simply just say nope, when someone wants to hang out with you, they might, that's hard to pick the tone apart. that might be like, nope, and I hate you. Or it might be like, nope, cause I'm having dinner, but another time.

Devorah: And those are very different

Todd: nopes. So I think I don't know how many of our, I think we as old people, I'll call us all old. Comparatively speaking.

Cathy: Gen Xers.

Todd: So much cooler. Okay. I think we're better at picking up the phone. For sure. Do our kids use the phone to call people that often? I mean, honestly.

Todd: FaceTime. FaceTime. FaceTime.

Cathy: That's what I watch my girls do.

Devorah: I have to teach my kid to do it, but he's not into the phone. And most of the other 8th and 9th and 10th grade boys that I know through my kid are not into the phone. And most kids I interviewed for the book don't have a lot of phone experience.

Devorah: So one thing we need to do is teach our kids to even make like just pragmatic calls, like calling a store to see if they have what you want before you go there, making sure they're open. And accepting that some kids get really shy on the phone because they have no experience. And so it may, but they will need to take calls even from their physician.

Devorah: Like at some point they'll do a doctor call, you know, they'll have to call in like from college and talk to someone about their symptoms to try to get meds or something. And if they can't come to the phone or they, you know, they're, they're literally like, oh, it's vibrating. What do I do? I think I swipe right.

Devorah: And then do I say hello? So, I mean, another instance of failure and I, you know, I don't talk about my kid that much because he likes his privacy. So hopefully he'll be okay with this. One story is like the first time I called him when he got his first phone in middle school, he answered the phone and said, what?

Devorah: [00:26:40] And I was like, Okay. Hey kid, I'm going to call you back and you're going to pick up the phone and say, hi mom, what's up? So we're just going to add three words. Like it's, we're just going to add like a hi mom. We're going to modify the what to what's up. Hi mom, what's up? Okay. Ready, set. I'm calling you back.

Devorah: And then he picked up again. Hi mom, what's up? Perfect.

Cathy: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. It, I, one of our daughters, I remember we had to be like, you have to say bye. Cause we would be like, okay then. And they'd be like, click. And I'd be like, no, the way that we end is everybody says bye. So then we all know.

Todd: And I forget that our kids haven't been taught that.

Todd: I figured that they would have picked it up by listening to us talk on the phone. But

Devorah: they don't hear us as much. And you know, we probably learned, I mean, I don't know if you had a super formal, if you were like Kasani residents. Sometimes. But my family definitely taught me some stuff about the phone.

Devorah: And then I actually had friends who did answer in these very formal ways. And I thought, that's kind of cool. Yes,

Cathy: absolutely. We, everybody had a different way that we answered the phone, but I have, when we've had these conversations with the girls, you know, just kind of, so we're not teaching anything.

Cathy: We're just talking about how we were raised. I'm like, We would answer the phone for everybody. So it'd be hello. You know, is your, is your dad there? Sure. I'll get him. Oh, I'm sorry. He's actually not here right now. It was almost like we were receptionists for each other. Like we had such a way of communicating and oftentimes that person would say, well, how are you?

Cathy: There was, and to our kids, it's kind of like people knocking on the door where people like, Oh my gosh, someone's knocking on the door. Who would knock on the door? But. At the same time, and again, I don't know if this is true with all kids, if this is a teenage girl thing, but my daughters will use FaceTime and sometimes walk around with someone.

Todd: Oh yeah, it's insane. I'll be like, you're still on with them and They won't even be talking. They're like studying.

Devorah: I do see kids doing that and I talk to kids who do that. And then there are kids who are always on Discord as well. Which is like more associated with gaming and...

Cathy: Yes. So it's like there's these ways that we're more connected than ever.

Cathy: Ways that we're, you know, disconnected. So it's a really, and you know, sometimes like you were just here, Devorah, when our daughter, Jaycee, called and she's always on FaceTime. So I have to be thoughtful. Like you can't answer the phone in a towel. You can't, you know, there's people around who see you. So you have to be thoughtful about how you answer the phone.

Devorah: It was so different than how we traveled abroad. I just want to say I mean, She's like literally calling from the, what was that? The Coliseum. I mean, how cool is that? On the other hand, you know, going abroad used to be like, you, I don't know, like scrape together some money for a quick international call every few weeks.

Devorah: And in some ways maybe there was something really good about the independence with that. But I also think like it's probably empowering more families that wouldn't be comfortable with that level of separation to do study abroad.

Todd: Yeah. Makes it a lot easier on us. If I want to see my kid in Italy right now, all I have to do is press a button.

Todd: Whereas 30 years ago, to your point, like every two weeks, maybe we have a 20 minute call,

Devorah: But that's, my dad said I only called when I needed money. And I was like, that's not true. And then I thought about when I called, when I was like in Jerusalem as a kid or in Germany, I was like, Oh yeah, I guess that is I need more money,

Cathy: but I also loved you.

Cathy: Well, I was asking, yeah, we did that every Sunday, but.

Cathy: Yeah, like I feel like I actually wanted to read something from your book. Wait, Todd, will you hand it to me? Because, you know, and again, I'm going general here, but I just really appreciated that, you know, I just love hearing you talk about this, Devorah, because you, I can just tell how much you've thought about it and study it like you have every angle.

Cathy: But this is on page six of her book. Growing up in Public makes the case that parents should shift their focus from consequences to building

character, helping their kids figure out who they really are and teaching them to respect their own privacy and reputation by modeling that respect for them. You know, I know you're just talking about you're not, you know, a Zen parent, which is funny because nobody really is.

Cathy: If that's the secret to this podcast is we're all just, we're doing our best. Oh, right. Exactly. Like. All of us are reactive. All of us have challenges. But that quote and why I circled it is that's what we're trying to do too is let's, let's take responsibility. Let's not be hypocritical. Let's model things.

Cathy: Let's understand. There was another quote a few pages before that were about let's be more empathetic with our kids experiences. Can you imagine if we had grown up this way? Like I remember I used to go to this park in DeKalb where I grew up and it was where we did everything. That's where we looked at our first magazine that was a playboy.

Cathy: That's where we smoked our first cigarette. That's where we did all these things. It was like this place we could go where, you know, experimentation whatever way. And I remember one time my parents were taking a walk. And now when I think about that story, I'm like, of course they probably were walking through to like bus, not to get me in trouble, but they knew I was there.

Cathy: And I remember them walking through and me being like, Oh my God, I can't believe my parents were here. And it was so like overwhelming and scary, but that was one moment. The rest of the time I had all this freedom, but I think that Freedom that I'm talking about scares parents. I think, don't you think parents are more frightened today about what their kids are doing?

Devorah: I think they are. I mean, there's so much worry about mental health and more information. And the flip side is there's much more support available. So many of us, you know, when I was in high school in the early nineties, so many of my friends were smoking cigarettes, but also self medicating with other drugs.

Devorah: And you know, some of them would have benefited probably from therapy or other supports that weren't as widely accessible. So I think we can think about in some ways the world is better. I think in some ways the world is more challenging and stressful to you.

Cathy: Yeah. I think the things confronting teens that teens are dealing with today, you know, I just wrote something the other day where, you know, parents

will always say to me, are our children having more mental health challenges or are they more willing to talk about it now?

Cathy: And I, and the answer is yes and yes. I think they are more willing to talk about it. So it's more in the ethers. And I also think there's more that they're dealing with that we don't even really understand. And that's where the communication comes in is the whole idea of when I was your age just does not fly.

Devorah: It doesn't, but I do think parents should also not discount their own experience completely in that just because you didn't grow up with Tik Tok or discord doesn't mean you don't get what it's like to be left out or have conflict like you do have social skills that you can impart to your kid. You do have an understanding of public versus private that you can impart to your kid.

Devorah: So I think yeah, you don't want to when I was your age with them, but in terms of your own confidence, in terms of supporting them and mentoring them on growing up in the digital age, I think you do have relevant experiences. Even if you are on social media, maybe using a different app than they do, like maybe you're on Facebook and they're on Instagram or Snapchat, you can still know how it feels like when nobody likes your post.

Cathy: For sure. You know, one of the things you said in your book was you found that the kids that were unbothered by social media, saw it as a performance. That they understood that social media was not necessarily the truth about people's lives, but a performance. Will you talk more about that?

Devorah: Absolutely. It's really important that kids get that everybody's kind of posting their dream moments or they're sort of living their best life. And that 99 percent of life is kind of the boring and the mundane. And, you know, I'm, I'm doing my chores, I'm getting dinner ready, I'm doing my homework. And most people don't post at those moments.

Devorah: They post at the beach or they post on vacation, or, you know, they post at a party, but in that one moment where the light is really good and their hair looks really cute. And it's important to recognize that if you look at that, it's easy to feel like my life isn't in these highlight, you know, extreme moments.

Devorah: It's, you know, what, what am I doing? I'm home on the weekend or whatever. And so it's really painful to compare yourself to what people post on social media. And it can make you feel like, you know, I even find looking at what other parents post can make me feel competitive with other parents. I'm

like, wow, well, I'm not like the scout leader or I'm not, you know, whatever taking my kid to have these amazing experiences in the summertime.

Devorah: Am I not doing enough for him? Is there not, you know, am I not engaged enough? I've never been on the PTA. My kid actually really doesn't want me to so that when I'm doing him a favor, he really wants me like out of school. So that's actually by agreement. But I think it's really important to not compare ourselves and recognize again that whatever people are posting for, they may be posting for their own reasons.

Devorah: Maybe they're feeling really isolated. Maybe they need some response and support. And people are posting to, to get that. And I think when kids see those posts, it's really easy to forget that it's a performance. So if you get that and you can have a sense of humor about it, Oh, I got some new followers, I roll, you know, and not be so hung up on it.

Devorah: And not tie it to your worth and really not be confused about the difference between actual friendships and followers. I think that's really important to understand, like a friend shows up for you, a follower just hit a button.

Cathy: You know, what's really helped with the performance aspect is, and my girls pointed this out to me, now that you can take live pictures, you know, where a picture is like moving and so you can get the perfect picture.

Cathy: If someone sends you a picture and you keep watching the live, you sometimes like people will be smiling and then. then they'll like, they'll drop the smile and they'll go back to what they're doing. The girls now, do you know what I mean, Todd, about a live picture?

Todd: Yeah, it's like a two second picture.

Cathy: Yes. And so sometimes you see the whole experience of taking that picture.

Todd: Yeah, you see the performance and then before or after the performance.

Cathy: Exactly. And so I found that to be for, for kids that they, that's another thing you have to think about. But I found that to be kind of an interesting, it's revealing, it's revealing.

Todd: So chapter two is called growing up in the public eye. And I wrote this down at somewhere in chapter two, third of girls and women won't post unaltered images of themselves. Let me read that again. A third of girls and women will not post unaltered images of themselves. And as a 51 year old man, I just think that that's.

Todd: I have a hard time empathizing, And I get it, but I don't get it. So I first...

Cathy: When you say a hard time empathizing, what do you mean?

Todd: Just show pictures of yourself and don't filter.

Cathy: Oh man. I know. It's such a man thing to say.

Devorah: I know. There's tremendous pressure on women and girls to look cute all the time.

Devorah: I totally get it. And you look cute within a very set of narrow confines. Totally.

Todd: And I blame... And whether it's right or wrong, like Kim Kardashian or whatever other pop culture figure carries this idea of perfection.

Cathy: Well, and I'll even back up like I, Gen X, we grew up in the age of 17 magazine and I have told my girls this story a million times.

Cathy: It's why I, you know. I remember like looking at the back of Seventeen and there was a Neutrogena commercial or like advertisement and the girl's skin was perfect. And I was like, how does she get it that way? A stridex pad, Neutrogena. I would buy the products to have that. And it was I was much older when I realized this is airbrushed.

Cathy: This isn't real. This isn't. And so like from the time our girls were little when magazines were, you know, in the aisle at the grocery store, I'd be like, you know, that's not really what this person looks like. This is airbrushed. And this is. And so my point, Todd, is that this is it's part Kardashian and reality TV, but it's been around forever.

Cathy: I get it. We just, there's so much pressure. And I know what you mean. I, you have.

Todd: Because if everybody, if everybody's doing that, I just wish there'd be enough people that weren't doing that so that we can normalize not doing that and it doesn't work. But real quick question, because one thing that I was naive about, was, you know, obviously body image for women and girls is such a interesting topic, but I think I learned that boys also struggle with that too. And in your interviews or research, are boys doing the same thing as girls regarding filters and all that?

Devorah: Boys are not, and boys will get teased by their friends if they appear to care too much. I mean, girls also sometimes, you know, if they, if they are very obviously filtered, their friends will, but it's more normative behavior for girls.

Devorah: In some social circles. I mean, every kid is different. You know, it really depends, if your kid is hanging out with a bunch of very keep it real girls, they very well may not be filtering. And they would probably, you know, if they filtered, it would be like a funny weird thing. Boys, if they obviously filtered, will definitely get teased for doing that.

Devorah: Got it. So, like one boy I talked to said, his friend had, photoshopped in some, abs, you know, and that. But he did it in a way that he was making fun of the idea, like he was like, oh, look at, and he was like open that it was filtered and that was sort of okay. But if he, if it seemed like he was doing that in a serious way to try to make it look like his body was very different than it actually looks, and that would by the way, be actually safe and okay for a teenage boy's body to look, because that's not like the way superheroes look on TV is not a safe way for your 15 year old to try to look by going to the gym.

Devorah: And that's a really important thing that kids need to know. And I think more girls do get those. anti messages. I think more girls, maybe their mothers or somebody says to them, this is airbrushed. I don't think boys hear enough that, by the way, even if you're an athlete as a teenage boy, this is not a safe set of body ideals for you.

Devorah: This is not what a 13, year old boy's body should look like, right? Like you, and you don't want to be, you know, taking steroids or doing these other things to try to make your body conform to these standards just like we don't. want our daughters to do other extreme and unhealthy things, right? So I think there's not enough of that message.

Devorah: And I think all of our kids are growing up seeing more images of themselves. And so there's just more to like fixate on. Whereas typically kids,

when we were young, we didn't see images of ourselves maybe at like winter holidays or birthdays or, you know, yearly wallet size, but we didn't see pictures of our bodies.

Devorah: Like I actually don't have pictures of me in a [00:40:00] bathing suit from when I was a tween or a teen. Because if I was in a bathing suit, we're at the beach. My parents didn't bring a camera to the beach or the pool because you get it wet, right? That wasn't something you didn't carry your camera everywhere.

Devorah: And so there wasn't like a lot of, of, you know, to look at. And so when I talked to Stephanie Zerwas, who's an expert on eating disorders and prevention, she said, maybe lay off the photos of your tweens and teens, especially like a lot of body pictures around that age, because maybe they actually don't need as much information about the micro ways their bodies are changing. Because kids in puberty need to gain a lot of weight and that's healthy and important for them. But it can be a lot, and she said she's seen kids with EDs really focus on like, Oh, I really like this one picture, how I look here, but I don't like this other picture.

Devorah: And that's maybe just too much data. Now for many kids, having those images can be fine. Not every kid is going to be, you know, have disorder eating from you taking pictures of them in their shorts or bathing suits. So I don't want to overstate the risk there, but I just think in general, we're taking and sharing a lot of pictures of our kids.

Devorah: And we should think about, especially in those kinds of sensitive years of the tween and teen body is changing a lot. And that's also a time when kids probably should have more control over what's shared about them. So we want to get permission, but we might want to go with a less is more approach to photography.

Todd: Well, and I just want to like, bless Cathy, because Cathy's really good at this. I don't do social media that much and, but Cathy will like, if there, if like we went to a Taylor Swift concert or whatever, like you'll still ask all our daughters permission on everything, even if it seems really super innocent.

Todd: For everything to post. To post. And I don't know how many parents are posting pictures of their kids without their kids permission. You do a very, I'm like, why are you even, it's such an innocent picture, but you ask anyways.

Devorah: It's such a great way to support trust and to make sure they know that they'll never be shared without their permission and to model behavior that you want them to use with their peers.

Cathy: Yeah, exactly. And I, that's, I like that you say with your peers, because that's kind of how I am. I don't really care if people post pictures of me. I'm not, I don't have a huge issue with it, but it is nice even in your family or your friend group to be like, I'm going to post this. This is all right, because it's not just your image.

Cathy: You know, you're, you're sharing something that somebody else may not want out there or for their own reasons, don't feel comfortable with the, and it's not always about beauty standards. It's about, you know, I don't sometimes there's things about, I said I wasn't going to be out today, and then there's this picture where it shows I'm out today, you know, there's, there's aspects of our lives that we don't have to share everywhere we're going and you know, and I agree, I think it's interesting because I'm just thinking about that I spend most of my time.

Cathy: I've found that, and this is not true for everybody, so I'm very clear about that, but I find that to be in our work, or a space that feels comfortable to me. I feel like comments are kind, the people I follow, I really enjoy their work, that kind of thing. And occasionally, I will get on Facebook for, you know, work reasons, what I put on Instagram goes to Facebook.

Cathy: And, that's harder for me. To your point of all the pictures of family, all the pictures of everything that people are doing, comments, you know, the birthday post to their child, you know, here's a picture of my child. I love you more than the earth. You were one, you know, there's just these things where you're like, right.

Devorah: And again, you're performing the relationship and it's like, wait, if my husband and I have, you know, like our 18th anniversary is coming up and I'm like, if I don't post, does that mean I don't love him as much as like my friends who are posting about their spouses? What if we just prefer to keep it a little more quiet. Right?

Cathy: Todd never posts about my birthday or anything. Never had you. And when I'm saying that, I'm not angry. I'm saying it's nothing I do about you. But usually I write something like Todd turned 52.

Todd: Like it's not my. I think sometimes I do it on Team Zen or whatever, which is our private community.

Todd: But I don't feel the need Facebook. It's more important that I broadcast how much I love you to you. Like I don't understand that that much.

Devorah: But I do think parents feel a lot of pressure to post about their kids. And then what'll happen is I talked to some families where one kid prefers to stay more private and doesn't want to be posted.

Devorah: And the parents respectfully, you know, agreed to that. But then the other kid is no, post me. And then the kid who wants to be more private will look through the parent's feed and be like, well, I can see who your favorite kid is. So it's hard to win that because you're like, well, you just said I can't post you, but your sister wants to be posted.

Devorah: But I can see that. I mean, my kid is so super private. You could look at my Instagram, you know, all day, you'll never see him and you'll be like, she has kid. I'm like, yep, I do. And he's, you know, taller than me now and it would be great content. Like I'm totally, he's definitely, you know, adorable, but I'm not allowed to post and that's okay.

Devorah: Yes. And that's his, his right to not be posted. I haven't posted him in years and, you know, but I miss the, likes and adulation we'd get. And I miss like, I'm sending pictures sometimes to grandparents or something, but I'm not sending to, my cousin or, you know, his great aunt or something. So there are people who probably would enjoy seeing a picture or two, but they're not getting them because I'm not, you know, gonna text my great aunt every time I...

Devorah: You know, we go to a cross country meet or something. Yes.

Cathy: Well, and Devorah, you said it beautifully you know, maybe 10 minutes ago that there are different reasons why people post. Not everything is vanity. Not everything is, you know, trying to one up people. There is that out there, but some people are, like, I remember when Facebook first came around, you know, however long ago.

Cathy: And I remember I would post pictures because my aunt was in Florida, my mom was in Galena. There was a very family aspect that was very public. And people still have that. Like you said, it's nice to put one picture and everybody can see it. It could be connecting.

Devorah: And I think it's very, very understandable, especially after the last few years that parents are seeking community with other parents.

Devorah: But I do think there are safer ways to do that that still respect our kids privacy that are not sharing as publicly. And I think that's one of the things we need to think about is like, how do I get that community? Well, what if my kid's going through a hard time? Maybe I don't post about that, but I talked to my best friend, my therapist, my sibling.

Devorah: There may be people to talk to you about it, so I'm not saying be alone, I'm just saying social media doesn't have to be our default place to get that support.

Cathy: Because again, the stories of our kids, okay, there's pictures which our kids may not love that we're posting, and then the stories of our kids lives. That's another, you know, and it's so interesting because we're all in this world of parenting or, and you know, we've 13 years.

Cathy: And we'll often say to people, you know, we don't really talk about our kids. They're like, that's impossible. Of course you do. Well, of course I'll say something like Jaycee's in Italy or something. It's not that I don't speak their names, but they've had, they're, they're almost a, you know, I have two adults and then a daughter who's 15, they've had big full lives with lots of stories and difficulties and challenges. And that's not our story. You know, Todd and I are not going to share their lives. We'll share our lives, but that is for them to do. And those lines are, are not always clear.

Devorah: Yeah. Yeah. And I think parents also get freaked out when kids want to share about themselves.

Devorah: And so, you know, I just wrote a piece about kids coming out online and I use coming out broadly to talk about not just being gay or bi or. Pansexual or transgender, but also to talk about coming out as neurodiverse or coming out with mental health issues. And kids are disclosing these things online.

Devorah: And as Gen Xers, we grew up with stigmas on all of these things. And, you know, I did see a therapist when I was an adolescent because I was lucky I had depression and my parents found a therapist for me to see. And I that way, but most kids I knew didn't have that kind of support. And I didn't even have somebody tell me.

Devorah: Oh, Devorah, this is stigmatized. Don't tell anyone. I just figured it out. You knew. So I didn't tell anybody. none of my friends knew I had a therapist, and I would just be like, I gotta go to work or whatever, because I also had a job, because it was a different era, you know? And now kids could be like, oh, I gotta bounce, I've got therapy.

Devorah: Or kids might post something in their bio about mental health or about neurodiversity or about queerness. And I think as adults, it can make us really nervous. I talked to a lot of parents for the book who were like, I'm all for busting stigma, but does it have to be my kids?

Todd: You can't do it without.

Todd: I love that piece because Cathy and I have been connected somewhat from a distance of NAMI, National Alliance of Mental Illness, and it seems like their biggest push is always we got to get rid of this stigma. We got to get rid of the stigma. And I can appreciate the pair. Like, yeah. Let's, let's eliminate stigma, but not through the lens of my child who happens to be struggling.

Devorah: So, I mean, I feel that, and I certainly, again, feel like my kid's struggles or anyone's kid's struggles aren't the thing to put out there for them. But if your kid wants to come forward and say, I have a me too story, or if they want to come forward and say, I've experienced micro aggressions at school, or if they want to come forward and say, you know, I have ADHD, or I identify as bi, That's okay. And they are changing the world. But I think it makes parents nervous. And that's what one of the biggest findings of the book, I would say is that kids sharing is changing the world and it makes us uncomfortable, but it's one of the ways that I think young people are changing the culture.

Todd: I totally agree.

Todd: And that's our work to deal with our own. judgments about that, right? Right.

Devorah: If it makes you nervous, then fight for a world where it's better. if your kid comes out and you're like, that makes me nervous because they could be discriminated against. Well, what are you doing to fight that discrimination? It shouldn't be about teaching and telling your kid to stay silent. Right.

Cathy: Yeah. Because that is how our kids build community as they go on. Because if you put up a facade or a really vanilla version of yourself, because let's just, let's just, you know, say what I think everybody knows what we're

saying here, but these social media and all of these aspects, aspects of communication for our kids, this is how they connect with each other so we can say we'll meet them first and then say that's not how kids interact. And so when you're choosing a roommate for college, if you do not say, All the things about yourself that this is really who I am.

Cathy: This is what I need. These are, you don't have to, you know, tell every detail, but you do want to build a community that is similar to you, or at least that you'll feel comfortable with. And so to say to a kid, you know, maybe don't share all those things about yourself. You may not find people who are similar to you.

Devorah: And I would much rather see a kid put it out there and then live with a roommate that they're going to be comfortable with. Right. I mean, I think roommate situations especially is that I think that's a high disclosure situation for today's kids. And many of them are connecting on Insta or Snapchat before they, I mean, you've gone through this now with two kids, like they, they are definitely doing that in a pretty open way.

Devorah: And that's much better than getting a, you know, the roommate that's homophobic or the roommate that's, Not going to be comfortable with you sort of politically or whatever it is. Yeah. Or there's neurodiverse and substance free dorms, for example, too. And you know, other things like that.

Todd: So, so we're 50 minutes in and I'm already worried that we're not going to get to, everything I want to talk about. And I'm sure you have a whole bunch of stuff over there, sweetie, but chapter six, sex, sexting, when explicit images of kids circulate, like I didn't read the chapter, but can you, how do you advise?

Todd: I assume it's oh, my kid just sent out a nude and now everybody has it. Like, how do you advise? parents and kids when they do that. I assume that that's what we're talking about here.

Devorah: We're talking about a lot of different things in that chapter. And I have to say, I was really honored that someone from, the Consent for Good organization, I think that's what it's called.

Devorah: I have to double check my Instagram, just said they liked the chapter because the whole conversation is really about consent. And it's not, I mean, in most states and most countries for minors to share images of themselves partially clothed or with no clothes. is against the law. So obviously that's, it's

not a good idea, but I would really lean into the social and the privacy risks more than the legal risk, because most kids will not go to jail for this.

Devorah: And so we don't want to emphasize a risk that's less accurate, or they'll, they kind of discount what we say, because they... Probably all know a kid who sent a picture in their underpants and not gone to jail, which is good. I want to be clear. I don't think anybody should go to jail for self producing child pornography.

Devorah: In the sense of two 15 year olds exchanging images, I don't think either of those kids should be criminalized. I think that's, that's very problematic situation. So the laws are a problem, first of all. But one of the problems with the laws is they keep kids from coming forward. The kids I'm worried about from a mental health perspective are the kids whose images circulate non consensually.

Devorah: So the two kids in a relationship who exchange images and it stays private and it stays between them and they break up and they delete the images. You might not like that as a parent. You might be, it might make you very nervous because of the privacy risks. And I get that. But in terms of their mental health.

Devorah: Those kids are much less likely to be sort of harmed, and I would put this in the category of any other sexual things those two kids could do together, right? So again, you might be like, they're not ready or whatever, but from an emotional perspective, they're, it's the same amount of risk as, you know, making out or doing other sexual things.

Devorah: And I think it's really important to understand that. Now, if an image gets circulated without someone's consent, that is a huge violation. And that's where we see all kinds of problems. We see the double standard where boys versus girls are treated very differently around this. We see kids getting shamed and really isolated.

Devorah: We see kids scared to go to school when an image has circulated. So that's where we really need to make sure that. Our kids know that they should never be part of exploiting or sharing someone's image without their consent, including someone they don't know. Say an image just pops up on your kid's phone, like it's getting airdropped in the cafeteria.

Devorah: Sounds like a nightmare situation. It's happened at thousands of schools. Your kids should immediately erase that. They should report it, but they

should not pass it on, even if they don't know the person. And even more so, if they know the [00:53:20] person, they should be concerned about how that person is doing rather than judging the person and thinking, what were they thinking?

Devorah: They should be like, oh my goodness, I hope that person is okay. I think it's really important that we have solidarity where anyone whose rights have been violated to privacy, we treat them as someone who has been violated, not as someone who just made a bad decision. Because that, that whatever that decision was in the moment when it was shared, whether they were coerced or whether they did it in the moment willingly, what's happening right now is not consensual.

Devorah: It's very important to understand that. And we also need to understand that there are different pressures on different kids. So like for kids who identify as LGBTQ there may be other reasons to send images, including experimenting with their identity. One of the studies that I cite in the book talks about how gay boys in particular feel like they don't get, you know, sort of validation at school, like they don't walk into school and have everyone crushing on them. Now, even if you identify as cis and heterosexual, you might not have experienced high school as like constant body validation. Maybe everyone doesn't have a crush on you, but the culture of the sweetheart dance and the Valentine's Day and the prom still might celebrate a relationship that you could be in or imagine being in more than you know, these boys were talking about.

Devorah: And so they were saying that sexting was also a way for them to get body validation. And sexting, honestly, for a lot of kids is about that. It's a way to get, have someone say you're cute. And a lot of teenagers would like someone to say that they're cute. Someone that is not their parents.

Devorah: Someone other than their parents. Someone that is someone they might like to date.

Cathy: You know, I think that I love everything you just said. That was really wonderful. And I think that part of that culture of, you know, making sure somebody's okay and not passing on a picture and recognizing that this is non consensual and this is harming this person.

Cathy: There's this cultural vibe of someone's deserving of something. If they took that picture. They deserve it. It's very reality TV, it's very political, and it's

so, that's the unwinding we need to do with our kids. What does that mean, deserving? do you hear that too, Devorah?

Devorah: Yes, and I think there's especially that double standard gets wielded against girls. And meanwhile, there are plenty of boys sending unbidden, sometimes pictures, to girls and to other boys, but especially to girls. And a lot of girls experience that as harassment. Yes. One of the things that I do, and it's really hard to talk about sexting without talking in these sort of gender constructs and without talking about like, are we talking about, you know, heterosexually identified kids, which is like the big conversation about sexting would be like images of girls that get passed around by boys and then images of boys that often are sent to girls unbidden.

Devorah: And I think it's really important to look at those dynamics. You know, and make sure we're talking to kids of all genders and all sexual orientations and presentations about this stuff, and make sure that they know that we respect them. And if they have circulated an image, we will do everything we can to help them if that image gets out of control, that we hope that they will engage in, you know, a less risky strategy of flirting and communicating, but that we, we respect them.

Devorah: But to, but to come back to these boys, one of the things I said, I was at a school in New Orleans speaking to a group of high school boys. And I said 100 percent of the girls I talked to for my book said that even a boy that they liked and thought was interesting and thought was cute, if they got an unsolicited picture of his genitals would cross him off the list permanently for dating.

Devorah: That would be like a big nope. And that's actually really good for them to know because some of these boys actually might think that this is what girls like. And it turns out, again, I can't speak for all girls, but all the girls I talked to were like, no thank you. Yes. I do not want you to take down your pants and take a picture and send it to me.

Devorah: That is not a good way to, for us to enter into a, let's start talking on Snapchat. Yeah, it's not enticing.

Cathy: No. And it's interesting because I think adults. I have, you know, friends or, and students, who are adults and on apps, you know, on Tinder, on Bumble, on, and they, the same thing occurs. Where you start talking with someone and all of a sudden that's like a stage where, and it, not every person does it, but it's common enough.

Cathy: That, to your point, it's, it, you know, if, if kids are doing this at a young age, they're definitely doing it on apps when they're adults.

Devorah: Oh, yeah. And I think we need to be really clear that if you did this, in the workplace or outside of the context of an app, you could also be arrested. You have to, and I think that's where you could, that's not where I would start with a sixth or seventh grade boy or, or girl, but I think it's, it is something that at some point we also need to be clear. Yes, an unbidden genital pic is, is a real violation of someone's experience.

Devorah: And it is, you know, it's not okay, and you could get in trouble, and you really shouldn't do it. But I would, again, lean into, honestly, also it's not going to work. Because, truly, if that's, if the desired outcome is she'll be so overcome with, you know, eagerness to meet me and go to the movies after she sees this picture, and it turns out, that she'll actually cross me off the list and she would be more interested if I just said hey, can we study together sometime?

Devorah: bingo. Like I'm going to try approach B.

Cathy: Approach A is not effective.

Devorah: It's not effective. And with girls, a lot of the girls told me boys will just say directly, do you send, they'll be talking on Snapchat. And then the next thing is, do you send? And then girls will say, if I say no, Then they just cut off contact.

Devorah: there's no bye. Back to what you were saying before. It's like very abrupt. okay, well, if you're not going to send me a topless photo, then, you know, I'm out. And there's not even any oh, well, let's hang out sometime. There's just like, do you send? No. And then click.

Cathy: And the conversation with our girls and our boys about this, because obviously there's both sides, but I'll just speak to raising girls, is we have to be thoughtful, empathetic about both sides of that coin.

Cathy: One is, oh, yeah, they cut you off. It's probably not a person you want to be with. And it sucks when you maybe were interested in that person, or you thought they were interested in you. And you are and they are considering, you know, do I send do you know, what does that mean? What does that look like?

Cathy: Because I think sometimes we're very cut and dry. We look through an adult lens and we say, why would you ever do that? Why would you ever

consider that? Why would you ever want to be with someone like that? And to, you know, Devorah talks about this a lot in her book. Like we have to be empathetic to their experiences.

Cathy: They are novices when it comes to relationships. They do not, all they know is I have a crush on this person and he's saying, do you send?

Devorah: Absolutely. And if all they've seen is pornography because they don't have good sex education. Oh, there's the other level. Then, you know, they're not going to know sort of what's okay.

Devorah: So the huge thing we can do is just support all of our kids with a strong self esteem so that they know that it's okay. So that they know that they can say no and that there will be someone out there that would like to date them and will not have that expectation. But I think we need to do a lot to proactively teach kids to not have that expectation of others, to not pressure other kids, to not be part of anything coercive like that.

Devorah: And including, unfortunately, even like girls will sort of let shame other girls when an image goes around. there's all of this stuff that needs to change. And so we really need to make sure that We're having a very inclusive conversation that also includes if you've done this or a friend has done this, like there are resources out there for you.

Devorah: There are ways we can help keep you safe. And if a friend is in a jam, like there's things we can do so that we're not, if we only message, don't do it. Then kids have no idea what to do, if it's post facto.

Cathy: Yeah, it's just like everything. Alcohol and drugs, you know, you know, don't ever do it. But if you do, here's how we can support you.

Cathy: And, you know, I'm so glad you brought up sex education, especially when it's around sexting. Because, you know, this still is such an issue in our country. and in many school districts, unfortunately, even in Illinois, even though our state does a pretty good job, relative to others, better than some, better than some, but is these conversations starting early about even things like body image and appearance and, you know, consent.

Cathy: And what makes you feel good versus what other people are expecting from you. These are not things that you start talking about when they're 16 And for those of you that have 16 year olds and you haven't started talking about it,

there's no time like the present, like you, you haven't missed the boat completely.

Cathy: But the goal is, is that they don't have to constantly learn from a negative experience or a failure. There's hope that they have learned things along the way. That they question, you know, one of the things that was really helpful to my girls, and this isn't necessarily about sexting, but is their understanding.

Cathy: They kind of learned it from their friends where people take screenshots of conversations and then send them to friends to say, look at this conversation I just had. And my girls watching their friends do that. And it wasn't always. It's awful. It was, it's sometimes it was about schoolwork, but they're like, Oh, things I type, things I send pictures, other people can screenshot them and send them.

Cathy: This is not as private as you think it is. And so these, just these little things and these conversations and our ability for our kids to tell us these things are happening and us not to quickly go to judgment or fear, but to again, to Devorah's point, understand. Yeah, that was tough for me too. One time I said, you know, I was talking crap about a friend and someone screenshot it. Adults do this too. This is not just kids.

Devorah: Yeah, but don't. Please, everyone listening, don't do that. find another way. And kids should know, like, when they're in a group text, I mean, unless you're talking about a threat and you're bringing it to an adult, don't screenshot. You know, the text where somebody's like, Devorah's shoes aren't cute.

Devorah: I don't, I don't need to see that. Just keep it in the group text. You know, I like my shoes. I don't need to know what you think. Right.

Cathy: Absolutely.

Todd: It's so hard because, the advice I would give, which is really hard advice to take, is only share anything that you have to really trust whoever's on the other side of it.

Todd: And if it's a group text, like what are the odds of everybody being trustworthy?

Devorah: I think it's legit to tell your middle schooler someone's mom or dad is almost certainly on that group text, especially if it's 30 or 40 kids. Like you

talked about those seventh graders. If it's three kids, maybe nobody's mom is on it.

Devorah: But I think it's what we don't want to say to our kids is Princeton can see what you put on your seventh grade group text is not true. And it's, it's misleading as developmentally problematic. And. It really is, I talk to a lot of admissions people. They're not, they're not looking at your middle school posts.

Cathy: That was actually my last question, and I don't know, Todd, if you have something else.

Todd: Yeah, it was Chapter 8. Who's really looking at you?

Devorah: Yeah, so I'm, I'm, I'm kind of going there, but, just to say, but it is legit to say, if you're on a massive group text in seventh grade, almost certainly somebody's mom or dad has seen it at least once.

Devorah: Probably not the place to just like unload every new word you've ever learned. Probably, you know, if you want to get invited to that kid's quinceanera, birthday, bar mitzvah, whatever, like just know that and that I think telling kids when they are surveilled is different than surveilling them.

Devorah: Yes. Letting them know that school can read your Google chat if you do it on your school doc is useful information, like in lockdown school. I reminded my fifth grader every day. I was like, you know, Ms. Young can see that. And then they'd forget. And then, and then, you know, back to like fart jokes or whatever.

Devorah: And I was like, you know, Ms. Young can see that. And like every couple of days I'd be like, did you remember that your teacher can see? Because the school based apps is not the place to.

Cathy: Yeah, I know. And that's, you know, you're kind of alluding to this, you, you're saying that people can see things, but they're not always surveilling us.

Cathy: People say to me all the time when their kid is, you know, in their junior or senior year of college, are the colleges looking at my kids social media? Are colleges looking at kids social media?

Devorah: They are not.

Devorah: Okay, thank you. They are not. I mean, if you have a kid who's a recruited athlete, they may get a little more scrutiny.

Devorah: Okay. But in general, no. And it's much more important for your kid to think about doing no harm in his or her social media and just being a good person than thinking about oh, the University of Michigan is looking at this. They are not.

Cathy: The version of how will this hurt you versus don't hurt other people.

Devorah: Right. It's and what, what telling kids that University of Michigan or whatever will see it, it's, it's kind of like saying don't get caught, which is not actually the message we want. Like you don't, cause you don't want to be saying don't get caught with that racist meme, therefore do it anonymously on 4chan or go on an underground.

Devorah: What you want to say is don't post things that target a group of people. Don't repost, don't amplify. If it causes harm, don't share it. And I think that's. It's really, I mean, I, we, I was just talking with you about Doshka Slater's book about this really harmful Instagram account that happened in Albany, California.

Devorah: And it's, it's like a story that's both incredibly specific to that community. And so I have heard of and talked to so many people of similar stories. And I think it's, it's definitely worth a read, but to see how much harm that caused and it's beyond, you know, the question of will they get into college?

Devorah: Like it really is. So I think we also need to look at when things like that come up. You know, harmful posts. We need to look at the whole community. for example, if a kid says a slur, we need to look at the whole community is probably, there's other people using it if it came to light in one place.

Devorah: I would look at that as a kind of canary in the coal mine of yes, we need to strongly support the kid who made the slur in in improving themselves and understanding the history of why they, you know, they said that and helping them understand how to make repair in that moment. And we need to support the targeted community who had to hear that. And we don't want to amplify it by sharing it around because we're, we're putting that person's reputation who perpetrated it under the bus and they're a minor and we don't want to do that.

And we probably don't want to even do that to adults, but we definitely think don't want to be the people who do that to children.

Devorah: And we want to focus on the, again, educating and lifting up the whole community because we need to see it as a sign. And what happens instead, and I can send a link, I wrote about this in one case, for CNN a little while ago, but what it does is it allows often the community to let itself off the hook.

Devorah: Like, oh, we in this community are so good, and this one kid, I don't know where he learned that, you know, racism, or where that misogyny came from, I, I, we don't know, he, [01:06:40] you know, it's spontaneously generated, it's like, no, no, that kid learned that somewhere, and so the whole community needs to address it. And think about how they can do a better job, how we can do a better job educating our kids and supporting our kids, and see it as our, our job, right?

Devorah: As opposed to let's exile this one kid who shared the meme. Exactly.

Cathy: Or that, that one parent, or this is why this kid did that, or this is the teacher that's to blame. We're always trying to, you know, we're so myopic. We're like, Funneling the blame to one person versus having this be, like you said, like a community.

Todd: What's that line, what's that line in Spotlight, Kathryn, I watched the movie Spotlight over and over again. I love that movie. And there's a line in there that says mark my words, if it takes a community to

Cathy: It takes a village to to raise a kid, it also takes a village to harm one. You know, if

Devorah: A lot of people have to look away for something that big, especially to go on.

Cathy: That's right. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. I mean this, you know what I'll say to Warren and Marty telling you how much I love your book. But I, what I've always loved about your work is how, and I'm going to use the word nuanced, but how you see every angle. And I so appreciate that because you see it from the community perspective, the parent perspective, the kid perspective, and a lot of people would say, well, that's confusing.

Cathy: And actually it's not. To be able to see it from everybody's perspective gives you a whole picture and helps you understand where. We can make a change if we're focusing on a black and white, you know, you know, this polarity where we're like, it's either this or this, we're not doing the right work. So your work is really, it's very broad and I really appreciate that.

Cathy: So just thank you for writing about that and you're so good at explaining it. So I know people are going to love this. Well, and

Todd: we just scraped the surface and we can talk to 12 hours and still not get to it. Sweetie's holding up. I'm holding it up. Is there anything specific? Yeah, that we missed that we missed.

Todd: I mean, I, where do you start, but is there anything?

Devorah: Yeah. I mean, I think, I think talk to kids and ask them what they're seeing out there and ask them to show you like, okay, if you follow this person on YouTube or tick tock, like what, Appeals to you about this person, or if you have a kid who wants to be famous, what would you do if you had 10, 000 followers?

Devorah: Or what would you say to them? We really want to just be listening to our kids more about what it feels like to grow up so public and be empathetic with them about it and make sure that we are ideally not contributing to the stress. That's what I would, I would end with. That's wonderful.

Cathy: Beautiful. Thank you, Devorah.

Todd: So this podcast comes out on September 12th. It's the same day that Devorah's book comes out. By then we will have had a private Team Zen discussion with Devorah because we're actually recording that this upcoming Thursday. So if anybody's interested in Team Zen and listening to Devorah and a whole bunch of other experts and things. Just scroll down in the show notes and you can learn more.

Todd: It's 25 bucks a month. Cancel at any time, but something that we're very proud of and we bring experts like Devorah in to have. More intimate, live Zoom conversations with our community.

Cathy: So, anyways. So Devorah, this book obviously, you can, it's everywhere.

Devorah: It's in all the places. So you can get it at Bookshop, Amazon, Barnes Noble, your local indie.

Cathy: Great. And then how can people find you?

Devorah: I'm at devoraheitner.com and on Instagram I'm at devoraheitnerphd and I'm also substack, devoraheitner substack.

Todd: And we'll include all those links in the show notes so it's easier for people to do it. all right. Well, I guess with that I'll play my closing music.

Todd: Devorah, thank you so much. We're looking forward to having you at the Zen Parenting 2024.

Devorah: Yep. I am so excited about that.

Todd: It's going to be awesome. Keep trucking everybody. See you soon.