



Episode 424: Navigating Virtual School, Homework
and an Unpredictable School Year Without Stress
With Amy McCready

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama" podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's Wellnesse with an E on the end. And today's guest is a much-requested second round with Amy McCreedy, who is the founder of Positive Parenting Solutions and the creator of The 7-Step Parenting Success System. She is the author of two best-selling books, "If I Have to Tell You One More Time" and "The Me, Me, Me Epidemic." She has been featured as a parenting expert on everything from "The Today Show" to CNN, MSNBC, Rachael Ray, etc. And her course is one of the more impactful courses I've ever taken. It's been very helpful to me with my kids.

And in this episode, we go deeper on parenting topics we covered a lot in our first episode, which will be linked in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. But this one really touches on the school side. I have heard from a lot of people who are struggling with virtual schooling, homeschooling, or all the alternative methods of schooling that are happening right now. And so, in this, we go into tangible ways to navigate that with the least amount of stress for you, for your kids, and how to give your kids confidence, and clarity, and help them navigate these times as well. As always, it's a complete joy to talk to Amy and I know that you will get a lot from this episode. So without further ado, let's jump in.

Amy, welcome back.

Amy: Katie, thanks so much for having me again.

Katie: I am excited to chat with you. Your first interview was so well-received, people loved you and had a few follow-up questions. But I realized as this intensity of this last year has seemed to continue now into this year, so many parents are still struggling with the stress of new types of models of school and all the various things that come with that for their kids. And I know I've heard from so many of my listeners and readers who are new to homeschooling, whether by choice or not just through virtual school this year, and with schools closed, the last statistic I saw said that nearly three-quarters of parents said that managing distance, virtual, and online schooling for their kids is a significant source of stress. So this is definitely top of mind for a lot of parents. And I know that you have a resource specific to this, and I'm excited to have you on and really start to give parents some practical, tangible solutions today.

Amy: Yes, probably with the parents that I work with, I think it's the number one stressor right now as if parenting isn't already stressful enough. And I think, you know, some parents are doing beautifully with it and have, you know, really set into a groove, and others, even though we've been at this for quite a while, are still really struggling. So, my hope today is that we can give parents some really tangible strategies that they can use to just feel better about everything and be able to have their kids do their work without a lot of power struggles. And so, everybody's just feeling a lot more at peace with the situation that we have found ourselves in.

Katie: Absolutely. Okay. So I think there's gonna be a variety of different kinds of situations and approaches we'll need to delve into since there seem to be a lot of different various ways that families are handling school right now. Our family's homeschooled for years. So there wasn't a tremendous adjustment for us due to this past year. But I've heard from so many of my friends and readers, like I said, who are navigating this for the first time, and it seems like there's almost a spectrum, people who have jumped full into homeschooling for the first time, which brings its own different dynamic to introduce to parenting. But the more common one seems to be some type of hybrid of virtual learning and part-time in school at least or virtual learning but being taught by the teachers at school. And it seems like a lot of the stress in this comes from things like trying to still keep kids on a schedule and get them to get their homework done when they're just home all the time. And you are still, kind of...you're the parent but you're also, kind of, halfway the teacher as well. So just starting broad, any tips for navigating the overall dynamic of that, since it's so new for many people?

Amy: Yes. So, whether you are full-on homeschooling or doing that virtual model, one of the first things that I always like to talk with parents about is just mindset, in general. And, you know, kids pick up so much from our cues. And if we're visibly stressed about the situation, if we talk about it and, you know, we complain about it or, you know, we send the message that this whole virtual schooling thing is a joke, they totally pick up on that. So, the first thing that I always want parents to do is, like, really get your mindset right about this whole process, whatever your situation is, and not feel like it's being done to you. You know, this is just something

that we're all dealing with and our family handles this with grace and resilience. And we are gonna roll in just the most positive way.

And so, I know parents feel a lot of anxiety and sometimes grievance and big frustration about the whole, you know, schooling situation, whether they're hybrid or completely virtual. But we don't wanna send those messages to our kids. Save those conversations for your partner, your friend, but never when your kids are within earshot. So, I think that whole mindset thing is really important. And then the other thing that I really like to focus in on is just the whole routine thing, just what you said. I think the parents that I've seen who are really managing this successfully are the ones that have the really good routines in place. And you know that, Katie, from homeschooling all these years, you have to...If we're just, kind of, winging it day by day, we're gonna really stumble. So just having those routines in place is really important. And we can obviously talk more specifically about that.

Katie: Absolutely. Definitely wanna go deeper on routines. And I think also may be part of that dynamic that makes it so difficult for parents to figure out how to navigate is when kids are in school, obviously, the teachers are driving forward the schedule of the school and the lesson plan, and at home, parents then become fully responsible for making sure kids are accountable in school as well. So I think you're right. Routine is probably a tremendous part of that. But when it comes to navigating that dynamic, I would guess it vary somewhat by age. But I wonder how much of that responsibility should be on the child versus on the parent. It seems like at least some of the dynamics I've seen, parents are taking on a lot of ownership of that when perhaps maybe, especially with older kids, that's something that the kids could take more ownership for, without the parent having to take on and drive that. And I know this is something you and I touched on in our first episode together of that natural balance of when kids can...like, letting them be more independent and letting them take more ownership for their contributions to the family. Is there an element of that as well?

Amy: Absolutely. And you exactly went down the path that I was thinking. You said parents are not fully responsible. And that's part of the problem. Parents should not be fully responsible. Little kids are gonna need a little bit more oversight. But, you know, as kids get a little bit older, they need to be responsible for that. So, I think a big part of this is...and again, this comes with a routine and the expectation is establishing that you are responsible for your schoolwork. I'm here to be the guide, I'm here to set up the routine so that it functions in a helpful and positive way. I'm here to assist when you need it but I'm not the reminder, I'm not the one who's gonna be, you know, sort of, taking you through your schedule, you know, hour by hour. That's your responsibility. And I think that's, kind of, the first thing that we have to talk about. And I think parents feel a lot of pressure because they don't wanna look bad. They don't want the teacher to think they're a total slacker. So we end up doing a lot of reminding and coaxing, and it becomes our problem versus the child's problem.

So, one of the questions that I often get is, you know, my child just refuses to do the work or my child refuses to show up for the Zoom class. All right, so how are we gonna handle that? We can threaten, and coax, and remind, and do all of those things or we can put the responsibility where it belongs on the child's shoulders and say something like, "Okay, if you've made the decision to not turn in this assignment or you've made the decision to not show up for your 10:00 class, what is your plan for letting the teacher know your decision?"

And stop right there. So, the almost natural consequence that plays out is that that child needs to get in touch with a teacher and have that conversation about why they're not turning in the assignments or why they're not showing up for class. Now, you as a proactive parent would wanna get in touch with the teacher ahead of time and let he or she know that we're working on some training and some independence work.

And so, if obviously, if he or she could support you in that, that would be great. But that what is your plan for a tool is absolutely key. That puts the responsibility where it belongs and gets you out of the bad guy situation. And I am telling you, Katie, 9 times out of 10, when the child faces the thought of having to call the teacher or, you know, get on a Zoom call with the teacher offline and explain why they're not doing their assignment totally changes the dynamic.

Katie: That's a great point. And I think that's applicable to any school dynamic, truly, even if kids are back in school and this is just a homework dynamic. It seems like there's been a really tangible shift in who feels like they're responsible for this dynamic in the last few decades. Or maybe I'm aging myself, but certainly for me, when I was in high school, that was something that I was very clear on was 100% my responsibility and my parents were not going to remind me to do my homework or swoop in and save me if I forgot to do my homework. And I hear from teachers as well that parents seem to be much more involved than they used to be in homework. And I know we talked in our first episode about parents being more involved in a lot of areas than we used to be, potentially not letting kids have as much independence as they psychologically need at different stages. But are you seeing this play out as well? And any tips for parents, even if it's just in homework, for learning to let that go and let kids be responsible?

Amy: Absolutely, yes. We're seeing it in so many aspects of parenting. And we may have talked about this before. But again, we have to remember our job. We are playing the long game of parenting. So, our job is taking these people who are completely dependent on us and moving them to a point where they are completely independent, right? They're completely self-sufficient functioning young adults. And that's never gonna happen if we continue assuming responsibility. So, let's talk about the homework example. And I'd like to give parents a tool that they can use whether their kids are homeschooled, hybrid, or going to school. And that's the homework help policy or the schoolwork help policy because some kids want you to sit beside them, you know, while they're in their Zoom class and, you know, sit beside them at the kitchen table, but we're not gonna do that.

So the homework help policy says that I have complete faith and confidence that you can complete your assignments on your own. Now, if you do need help, what I want you to do is go ahead and complete everything that you know how to do on your own. All right. Then, for the questions that you can't figure out on your own, explain to me your thought process. So, tell me how you've tried to figure it out, where you stumbled, and then I can help you with those specific things. And by the way, my homework help hours are these specific times. So, if you're home working while your kids are schooling at home, you might have several blocks of time throughout the day. Maybe it's, you know, mid-morning or after lunch or right before the end of the day where they can come to you...basically, it's office hours where they can come to you and get help for those specific things. But the important thing is they've completed everything they can on their own and they can explain their thought process for those things that they couldn't figure out.

So, again, that takes the responsibility off of your shoulders and puts it on theirs. And that can be used, again, whether you're homeschooling or your kids are going to school. And that is so liberating for parents because they're like, "Oh, I don't have to sit beside this kid and, you know, work through this math worksheet because very often, that helplessness is very attention-seeking," right, or, "I want mom to be at my beck and call anytime I want her." So it might be power seeking. So, when we use the homework help policy, it takes it out of that attention and power seeking realm. And then we just get to the issue of, okay, where is this child really struggling? And, of course, I'm happy to assist with anything that they're having a hard time figuring out once they've put the effort in first.

Katie: And I love your focus of, you know, playing the long game of parenting and keeping that in mind because I think that helps really reframe that we're trying to raise adults and we are not always going to be there to be their safety net. And so, in the ways...and your positive parenting course, as well, all the ways that you tangibly hand that off, but making sure that they have the tools they need to be able to accomplish these things. And also, I think a big key here is also letting them have the opportunity to fail and take ownership for their failure sometimes. I also love your line about explain to me your thought process. Just I'm very big on mental models. And that's how I think through a lot of things in my own life. And I have systems for that. And one of my favorite people to read and research is Richard Feynman, who was a physicist. And one of his quotes was that, "If you can teach something to someone, you understand it much better."

And so I love that you have them explain it because that then also lets them get the benefit of having to talk it through and, sort of, almost teach it to you. And also then, to your point, let's them have...to have put the effort in to try first and then probably really shortens the amount of time that both of you are spending trying to solve that problem because they've already done a lot of that legwork themselves. And it does seem like kids also have a lot more homework and schoolwork that they're responsible for at home than they used to. I had a decent amount when I was younger but it seems like even at young ages, kids are coming home with a whole lot of homework, which is its own, I think, thing that probably should be addressed. But I think that...like, are we seeing the amount of homework go up, do you think, in what you're seeing?

Amy: I do. Yes. You know, when I hear that, you know, kindergarteners are coming home with worksheets, and first and second graders have an hour of homework, that feels excessive to me. But yeah, I do think that it is getting a little bit too much. And, of course, you know that time that they're spending on homework at home is time that they're not out playing or reading or, you know, doing other things that are enriching.

I also wanted to touch on something that you said that I don't wanna lose track of. I can't remember how you set up it about contributing at home. And that is a big part of this whole schooling at home success model. Because when everybody is at home, whether it's, you know, five days a week or some hybrid model, what tends to happen is that the parent is saddled with more of the, like, home responsibilities because the kids are home for lunch and we're cleaning up all the time. And it just feels like there's so much on mom and dad. So a really important piece of the moving from dependence to independence and having a successful school at home model is shifting some of the responsibility for the home-based jobs to your kids.

And so, one of the big tools that I really encourage parents to take on right now is a tool called Take Time for Training. And that is basically identifying those tasks where your kids could contribute at home. So, little kids can do simple things like folding washcloths or matching up socks or, you know, just really, really simple things. They can help in the kitchen by tearing lettuce and chopping up cucumbers with a plastic knife. Obviously, older kids can contribute in more meaningful ways. They can vacuum. They can do laundry. They can help prepare simple meals. But at every age, we want our kids to be contributing. And I think that's an area where we really have to push this now that everybody is at home, but like for all of our listeners, to really just make a list of, you know, almost like columns for each of your kids and then write down what are some specific tasks that your kids can do that with a little bit of training, they could contribute to your family, and then take time for training so your kids can master those tasks and then turn over the responsibility to them.

And that just becomes part of their daily routine, just like showing up for, you know, 8:00 Zoom class, part of their responsibility is doing their family contributions. And you know, Katie, we call them family contributions, not chores because chores denotes drudgery and family contributions reinforces the message that we are a team, everybody contributes. And without everybody doing their part, there's no way we can keep this family functioning. So, including that piece, the whole family contribution piece in your hybrid schooling model, or homeschooling model, it's super important now and moving forward.

Katie: Yeah. I love the family contributions versus chores. We've made that switch in our house. And I will say the Positive Parenting course is one of the few that I've ever made it through, like, the entire way because it's so easy to get through and so practical. And I was taking notes the whole way. But I think also a shift that we've seen...and we've talked about this a little bit in our first episode, but I wanna go a little bit deeper in relation to the school aspect here is that moms today seem to feel a lot more responsibility for handling everything in the home and for entertaining their children than previous generations of moms seem to have. Like, I know from the conversations I remember with my grandmother, like, it would have been a foreign concept to her that she was responsible for scheduling every hour of her kids day and making sure that they were always entertained and happy because, to her, play was the work of children and children should play. And if they needed something, she was, of course, there but she wasn't going to be their source of entertainment for the whole day.

And it seems like moms have taken on a lot more in the last couple of generations. And we talked about this in our first episode, which I encourage you guys to listen to. But this has also bled over into the school aspect a lot. So now with kids home, some kids home all of the time, I think some moms are feeling an increased pressure and guilt that they should be entertaining their kids or always focused on their kids. So let's recap a little bit how you talked about in the first episode of the importance of, of course, quality time with our kids, but what that actually looks like and why it doesn't need to be 10 hours a day uninterrupted.

Amy: Yes, absolutely. So, let's talk about, you know, kind of, what kids need from us, right? They need emotional connection. They need attention from us. They need love and nurturing and all of those things. But to your point, we cannot be their entertainment all day long because if we are their entertainment all day

long, they are not becoming independent and entertaining themselves. And I think what's happening right now, Katie, you're absolutely right, parents feel guilty because their kids are bored, right? They don't have as many extracurricular activities like we did before. And kids are bored. And so, either mom or dad turns to being the source of entertainment and playing with them all day or what's happening more commonly is kids are on technology so much more than they were previously because they think, "Well, the kids are bored, what else are they gonna do? They need to play their games or, you know, playing the tablet or whatever." And, you know, that creates a whole host of problems, which we can talk about separately.

But let's get back to that time that we spend with our kids. So they do need our time and attention. But as you said, it doesn't have to be 10 hours a day. The tool that we advocate for this is called Mind, Body, & Soul Time. This is something that parents in our 7-step Parenting Success System learn right out of the chute because it's the most important tool and it's gonna make the biggest difference in terms of your child's behavior and the way you feel about your relationship with your child. And Mind, Body, & Soul Time is basically 10 to 15 minutes, let's just say 10 minutes to keep it simple, 10 minutes of one-on-one time, one parent and one child when you are fully present in mind, body, and soul and doing what the child wants to do. And so, think about it from the child's perspective. So much of their day is parent-directed. We're telling them what to do. In this 10 minutes, they have you 100% of themselves, no competition from siblings or from your partner or your phone or your work. You are fully focused in mind, body, and soul, and they get to pick what the activity is. So if it's playing Legos or shooting hoops in the driveway or working on a puzzle or doing a craft, they call the shots. And it is so empowering for kids.

So, it gives them that heaping dose of attention in their attention bucket. It gives them a huge dose of power and significance because they're getting to call the shots for a change. And I promise you that when you implement Mind, Body, & Soul Time into your routine, every single day, you will see a measurable improvement in cooperation and attitude, and it's gonna make a huge difference in the whole schooling thing because everything isn't a battle. When their hardwired emotional needs for attention and power are met proactively in positive ways, it makes everything else so much easier. So, to your point, Katie, we don't have to be the entertainment managers, making sure they're happy and busy and entertained all day long, we just need to give them those focused intentional doses of Mind, Body, & Soul Time, once or twice throughout the day, and it will make a world of difference.

Katie: It really does. And I'll encourage anybody if you haven't tried that, it really is profound how quickly you notice a difference in your kids. And it also, I think is very...It helps a lot of moms work through that mom guilt aspect because you see those tangible results. You see your kids feeling happier, and feeling content, and feeling secure in their home environment. So you don't feel as much of a need to be their entertainment because you know that they're getting their needs met. And I think, like, that's another thing that just it's so helpful to keep top of mind. And I know that's the first thing that you guys teach. I also think...we talked a lot about the early years in our first podcast. I'd love to talk about since it's top of mind for me also a little bit about the teenage years right now, as I've got a couple of teenagers now. And I feel like I've done a lot of the things in your course as far as making sure that, like, they have regular family contributions. They are getting their schoolwork done on their own. We have a really great relationship.

But of course, this is also a time psychologically when they are transitioning to friends being important and to those social connections being really important. And certainly, that's hard for a lot of families right now, depending on the limitations in different areas. But do you have any specifics for parents in navigating when kids get to the teenage years and with that long-term goal in mind of kids, I shouldn't be calling them kids, but letting them be, you know, independent adults, that handoff of power and how much independence when and how to navigate that?

Amy: Yes, and it's so traumatic for parents. You know, my kids are a little bit older. They're a couple of years out of college now. But I just remember so clearly how traumatic that is. You just wanna hold them tight and micromanage but you know that's not in their best interest. And so I always like to think about, you know, whatever age your kids are right now, how many more years do you have until they are finished with high school? That's, kind of, the delineation point. And then after high school, something is gonna happen. Maybe they're gonna go to college and maybe they're gonna go into the military or start at an adult job. But basically, at that point, they need to be fully functioning adults in all aspects of life. So, financial matters, taking care of the home, you know, self-care, like, taking care of a vehicle, like, all of those things that we have to do as adults, they need to learn how to do. And so, it helps you, sort of, map out, okay, if I have a freshman right now, what do I need to be doing over the next four years to get this child to be completely independent so at the end of high school, he could function as an adult on his own if he needs to? So, I like to, sort of, step back and take a look at that big picture.

Now, at the same time, as you said, they want their friends more. They want more independence. And that's supposed to happen. It's hard for us, but we know it's supposed to happen. And so we have to really, sort of, take a leap of faith that we have done the right things and we can loosen up those reins. But one of the tools that I love for that is a tool called Convince Me. And Convince Me is great for kids, younger kids too, but especially for teenagers when they want you to loosen up the ropes a bit. And let's say they want to, you know, go to another town to see a concert, and again, this is assuming when everybody can travel safely and gather in groups and things like that. But they wanna do something that's outside, take the car out. They wanna do something outside the comfort zone that you have. You use the tool of Convince Me, which is basically they convince you that they are prepared to do this.

And so, you explain to them your concerns, your reservations about this thing, taking the car to go to the outlet mall. "These are the concerns that I have. But you tell me your plan for how you're gonna execute on that." And so, it requires them to think about the things that you're concerned about and then come up with a plan that addresses your concerns, and then what their backup plan would be if something goes wrong. And so, basically, they convince you or not. And so, if they convince you, and you say, "Okay. I feel like you've really thought that through. I think you'd have a good contingency plan in place. I feel comfortable with that. You know, have a great time." And then they drive the car to the outlet mall and everything goes beautifully. Well, they've earned some trust. They've earned some goodwill, and you know that they are moving along that continuum from dependence to independence. If it doesn't go well, then, of course, you regroup and you do problem-solving and that type of thing. So that is one tool that I love for teenagers.

The other thing that I think we have to think about is, you know, our role is very different. Our role is, you know, being the sounding board, sort of coaching them a bit, helping them solve problems, but we really have to get out of that micromanager, kind of, role that we did when they were younger. Otherwise, we are gonna have a world of power struggles that are gonna be really hard to get out of. The other thing with teenagers is the Mind, Body, & Soul Time thing still applies. It looks different but they still need and want that emotional connection time with you. So, you can do Mind, Body, & Soul Time with a teenager but maybe it's, you know, watching a Netflix series that you both are really into or, you know, reading a chapter book and, you know, you read to your teenager. They'll still think that's really cool and it's fun. But it looks different but you still wanna be doing that so that you're maintaining those emotional connections. And that keeps the lines for communication open. And it will just make the path in those teenage years go a lot more smoothly, Katie.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. That Convince Me one that has been a game-changer with my older kids. And I loved that from your course. And I love how it gives them that...It makes them responsible for thinking through the consequences of their action, like you said, which is what we want them to do in the first place. But there have certainly been times where my older kids, I thought something might be a little beyond their maturity level, and they were able to convince me, and then they were perfectly fine. And they were grateful that I actually listened to them and that they felt seen and heard. And then they took that responsibility very seriously because they knew that they had earned it. And I think it makes them actually more likely to follow through and really highlights all those traits we want them to have through the process and respects that natural phase, like you said, of them becoming more independent. And as hard as that might be for us as moms, it's so important for them at those ages and I think really important for our relationship with them as they get older. I don't have any in college yet. But do how's your relationship, if you don't mind sharing, with your kids now that they're grown?

Amy: It's so wonderful. And I think I might have shared this with you before. I remember when I first started out in my whole, kind of, parenting journey, I had so many power struggles and so much difficulty. And I used to, like, look ahead and think, "Oh my goodness, what is my life gonna be like when my kids are teenagers if I, kind of, continue down this path of, you know, ordering, correcting, and directing, and being the yelling mom and, kind of, the way I was early on? But I'm so thankful that I learned these tools. And we had a great relationship through all of their teenage years. But I think it's because of just what you said. You know, we were doing the Mind, Body & Soul Time. We had the open communication. I tried to listen more than I talked. And that's really hard for me because I'm very much a controller type A personality. And so, really, you know, being intentional about listening more and problem-solving more, and now our relationship is great.

I think the one thing that parents really, kind of, freak out about in the teenage years is just, kind of, the attitude stuff, the snarkiness, the backtalk. So I just like to share a couple of nuggets on that for our listeners.

First, you know, recognize that it's normal and you are the safe place. So, for all the other stress in their life, you are the safe place and the outlet where they can just, you know, let all the ugly stuff out but it still hurts. But a couple of things that I always like for parents of teenagers to think about when you start to get that attitude stuff is, first and foremost, we always look first at our Mind, Body, & Soul Time. Are we giving that intentional connection time? If not, I promise you, you're going to have more attitude. You're gonna have less

cooperation and everything is gonna feel more difficult. So getting that back on track if it hasn't been consistent is the first and most important thing.

The other thing that I like for you to think about is how much technology time they're getting. For kids of all age, I find that the more technology time they have, the worse their attitude becomes. It's like technology sucks them into this black hole that just seems to make everything more difficult in terms of their attitude and their demeanor. So, I always look at that. And then I also like to look at our attitude and our energy around our kids. So, how is it for them to be around us? Are we the type A controlling mom constantly ordering, directing, and correcting, or is our energy light, and easy, and fun? Not that you have to be the playground mom all the time or the entertainment director, as we talked about before, but are you light and easy to be with or are you all about bossing about the chores, or family contributions, excuse me, bossing about that, or the schoolwork or, you know, what they didn't remember to do? We really just, kind of, have to take a look at our communication style, and our attitude, and our energy to assess whether that's affecting the relationship with our kids.

Katie: I'm glad you brought it back to technology as well because I think...I know we touched on this briefly but that's definitely a tougher thing to navigate right now, especially when school is on technology almost exclusively for so many families. So, any specifics for how to navigate technology time, especially as school is more and more virtual right now?

Amy: Yes. So, the first thing we wanna do is delineate school technology time versus recreational technology time. We can't do much about the school time, right? They have to show up for classes and they have assignments that they have to do online, and we can't really do much about that. But where we can have some influence is on the recreational time. So, for younger kids, and I know it's hard right now because we're all home, and there aren't as many activities to do but really scale that back and have it be specific times of the day and for a certain amount of time. So I wanna talk about younger kids and older kids. So, for, you know, the younger kids, maybe it's 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon, which still feels like a lot of technology time. But, again, we know parents are giving more tech time anyway. Let's just have it be productive.

So, our technology time always needs to be part of a when-then routine. I know we've talked about this, Katie, but just to remind our listeners, a when-then routine requires the yucky stuff be done before the more fun stuff. So, your when-then routine every single day, whether you are homeschooling, virtual, or your kids are going out to school, when your bedroom is cleaned up, your schoolwork is done, your homework is completed and I've checked it, if that makes sense in your family, then you can have your technology time. When your family contributions are done, then you can have your 30 minutes of technology time up until 2:00. So, you know, if they dilly-dally all day, you wanna have an end time on there. But technology always, always, always happens at the end of a when-then routine. So they've completed the not-so-fun stuff and then they can enjoy the more fun parts of their day.

Now, to your point earlier about teenagers, you know, they're more social now. And their primary way of connecting with their friends is online. And so, I think we have to be...you know, we have to understand that. And I think that's where sitting down and having a conversation with them and really doing the problem-solving is important. And you can just say, "You know, I know that connecting with your friends right now is challenging. I know that technology is the best way to do that. I want you to be able to connect with them but let's sit down and work out a technology plan that we both feel good about. I know if you had your druthers, you'd be on all day long. If I had my druthers, it would be, you know, 30 minutes a day. But let's talk about that and figure out a plan that we both feel good about." And working with them rather than just, kind of, laying down the law, I think is gonna be a more productive solution.

Now, you'll still have your family rules in place. Like, I'm hoping that, you know, we have a technology curfew time that all the devices go off at 10:00 pm, or whatever that is, depending on the age of your kids. We charge devices in the public space. We don't charge them in bedrooms. That's a big no-no. And, you know, we have rules like no devices at the table and things like that. So you're gonna have your family rules that they have to live within but within that context, then we can still have that problem-solving, you know, conversation to come to an agreement that everybody feels good about.

Katie: Yeah. And to add on to that, just a tip about having that technology curfew, one thing we've done in our house because there's also some potential research about the risk of EMFs especially at night and it being more impactful for the body to be exposed to a lot of Wi-Fi and cell phone signals while you're sleeping and your body's in a more restful state. So to solve both of those problems, we put a digital timer on the power strip that has our router, and our modem, and all of our technology. So our internet goes entirely down at 10:00 at night. So that also keeps us as adults accountable for turning our devices off because we just simply lose the internet and then we put our phones in airplane mode while we're sleeping, and that way, it's an easy way to make sure that that curfew actually happens. Because I found it's also, even if you have a curfew, it's easy to let it kind of creep up if kids are still working on stuff or if I'm still on social media or whatever it may be. So I'll put a link to my post about that. But you can do it with a \$9 digital timer and then you don't have to remember to enforce that curfew at all.

Amy: That is so brilliant. And if I can just expand on that for a second. That is a perfect example of a tool we call Control the Environment. I know you know this, Katie, it's from step 3. But when we control the environment, we set up systems or routines, so that, basically the environment becomes the boss. So, in Katie's example, the digital timer is the boss, right? You don't have to say, "Okay, everybody off your devices." You don't have to be the reminder and chief. You let the system take care of it. Or maybe it's some other device controls that you've used. But that's an example of controlling the environment. Another example, this doesn't have to do with schooling but, you know, if you don't want your kids to, you know, have sugary snacks, obviously, you control the environment by not having them in the house.

So, anytime we can control the environment, rather than controlling the child, it makes things so much easier and then the parents don't get into that whole power struggle situation. Oh, one other quick thing, a lot of parents will say, "Well, my kids need their phone in the room for their alarm clock so they know when to get up for school." Well, you can go to Target and get an old-school alarm clock, your kids don't have to use their

phone device as an alarm clock. And instead, you charge all of those in the central charging station. And then that's, you know, out of sight, out of mind for everybody.

Katie: Yeah, I love that on the environment. And I think that extends to so many areas of parenting and household life, certainly, technology is a great example. But we do that as well with just, especially in the winter, with kids inside more, realizing they feel happier when they get to move around a lot. And I feel happier when they and I get to move around a lot. We did things like put a gymnastics mat down our hallway, which not the normal decoration, but it keeps everybody...we cartwheel down the hallway. So we've put that in their environment and now they move all day long or we put rock climbing holds across one of the doorways at the top. So they climb the doorframe and hang, and they have gymnastics rings in their room. I'm a big proponent of kids are happier when they're moving. And so as much as we can put those things in their way and their environment, it just gives them opportunities to do that. And then we're not, like, having to always tell them, "Don't jump on the table. Don't climb the wall. Don't do that." It gives them opportunities and natural outlets for that even when it's cold and rainy outside.

Amy: Absolutely. I love that. And it's the whole, you know, you don't wanna be telling them what not to do all the time. If we can give them opportunities to have that need met in some safe and productive way, that's a win for everybody.

Katie: Exactly.

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So, I know that you have specific resources related to this. And I'll, of course, link to all of your resources in the show notes. Your Positive Parenting course I mentioned, I love it. I think it's a valuable tool for any family. And I know that you also have something specific to helping navigate, kind of, the unpredictable school year right now. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Amy: Yes. So our 7-Step Parenting Success System is our, kind of, flagship program that has all of the tools in our toolbox. And that program has lifetime access and, you know, addresses issues from toddlers all the way up to teens. We also have a program, which is just designed for this new school situation. It's called The Ultimate Success Plan for an Unpredictable School Year. So whether you are homeschooling, you're hybrid, or your kids go to school, physically go to school, but you know that can change at any time based on what's happening right now, this just gives you a very step by step plan with all of the tools for the whole school situation that we find ourselves in. And then we also have our free class that we always offer, which is Get Kids to Listen Without Nagging, Reminding, or Yelling.

Katie: I'll make sure both of those are linked as well. But I thought this was gonna be, you know, really important thing to tackle right now since so many families are still navigating this and I'm still somewhat surprised that we're there are so many people still navigating this. I think none of us really were prepared for just how long this might go on. And still, in some areas, it looks like it could keep going for quite a while. So I love that you have created this to give families a tangible tool to help navigate it. Certainly, there is just increased stress that comes with times like this but I think it's also a wonderful opportunity if we are doing things like focusing on that one-on-one time with our kids and not trying to manage everything and take responsibility for everything.

This can be a great opportunity as a time with our kids more at home to really form that relationship, and build that relationship, and spend meaningful time with them because I read a blog post one time about how we spend 97% of the amount of time we ever spend with our kids by the time they leave home. And I always just, kind of, think of that top of mind certainly on days when it gets stressful. You know, the days are long but the years are short and it goes so fast. So I love that you are making it easier for so many families. Really appreciative of the work that you do. And like I said, I'll make sure everything is linked in the show notes. But, Amy, as always, it's a pleasure. And I appreciate your time so much.

Amy: Well, thank you, Katie, so much for having me. It's always a pleasure to chat with you. And I love what you said about that 97% of the time, like, that just like hit me in my heart now that I have grown up kids that just, sort of, hit me in the heart. So thanks for reminding all of us about that.

Katie: Thank you, guys, as always, for listening for sharing your valuable resources, your time, and your energy with us today. We're so grateful that you did and that you were here, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama" podcast.

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