Episode 425: Helping Kids & Teens Build a Healthy Relationship With Technology
With Katey McPherson

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This episode is sponsored by Paleovalley - my go to source for grass fed probiotic rich beef sticks and now some of my favorite supplements as well. I always keep their beef sticks on hand for myself or my kids, but I also keep their Vitamin C complex on hand as well. They have a vitamin C complex made with three of the most concentrated natural sources of vitamin C: amla berry, camu camu berry, and unripe acerola cherry. Each nutrient-packed serving delivers 750% of your daily recommended intake of vitamin C – an amount meant to help you thrive, not just survive. Most other vitamin C supplements are derived from GMO corn and only contain one fraction of the vitamin – ascorbic acid. Their Essential C Complex contains the entire spectrum with absolutely no synthetic vitamin C... just food-based organic superfoods! Check this and all of their products out and save 15% at paleovalley.com/mama for 15% off

This episode is brought to you by Wellnesse. We make personal care products that go above and beyond just non-toxic to actually be beneficial for you from the outside in. I realized years ago that even some of my most naturally minded friends and family members who made an effort to eat organic food and be really cognizant of what they brought into their homes were still using certain personal care products, mainly hair care and oral care. And the reason was, they weren't willing to sacrifice how they looked and felt just to use natural products. And none of the natural products they were finding really lived up to the conventional products as far as how effective they were. So, I resolved to change this and realized I had things that I've been making in my kitchen for years that worked just as well and that I could share with other families, and thus Wellnesse was born. You've probably heard that what goes on our body gets into our body and that many of the chemicals we encounter end up in our bloodstream. To me, this means non-toxic and safe should be the absolute bare minimum baseline for any products that are in our lives. But I wanted to take it a step further. I wanted it to use this to our advantage to actually put beneficial ingredients in our hair care, toothpaste, personal care products so that we could benefit our body from the outside in. Why not use that wonderful skin barrier to our advantage?

Our hair care is packed with ingredients like nettle, which helps hair get thicker over time. Our dry shampoo has scalp promoting products that really help follicles stay strong. And our toothpaste, for instance, has a naturally occurring mineral called hydroxyapatite, which is the exact formulation or exact mineral that's on our teeth that's present in strong enamel. So they're all designed to work with the body, not against it to help you have stronger, healthier hair and teeth. We now have a hand sanitizer that doesn't dry out your hands like many hand sanitizers do. I would be honored if you would check it out and I would love to hear your feedback. You can find all of our products at wellnesse.com.

Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama" podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's my new personal care line. That's Wellnesse with an E on the end.

This episode is all about instilling healthy tech habits in our children from an early age, and especially during the teenage years. I am here with Katey McPherson, who has a lot of experience in this area, both in the school educational leadership side, in organizational change, and as a parent of four teenage daughters, a preteen and teen daughters. She is the regional sales manager and works for Bark for schools and is a national public speaker on Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

We go deep on topics like how to, from an early age, create healthy tech habits with our children, and then, especially how to navigate the waters of teenage years, giving them independence while also still keeping an eye on things and making sure that they are safe. It's no secret that technology is a big part of our lives and it's not likely to go away anytime soon. I think this is a really timely and important topic to tackle as parents, and especially with so much being virtual after this past year, a lot of new things that many families have to navigate. So, with that, let's jump in and join Katey. Katey, welcome to the podcast.

Katey: Hi, how are you today?

Katie: I'm wonderful. I'm excited to chat with you.

Katey: I am excited to chat with you too. Thanks so much for having me here today.

Katie: I am excited to chat because you are an expert on what I think are some really increasingly important topics right now and ones that will only continue to become more important I think over the next few years. We're gonna go deep on several topics, hopefully, today, especially things like mental health for teenagers and also how we as parents and some of the people listening as educators, how we can help kids build a really healthy relationship with technology. So, to start broad, obviously, it's no secret that technology seems to be somewhat here to stay. And parents and teachers these days are navigating a virtual world that didn't even exist when I was that age. So there's a lot more nuance and a lot of other factors to take into account that previous generations haven't really had to take into account. So, to start off broad, can you, kind of, walk us through maybe some of the mental health implications in general of how children and teenagers, especially ours, kind of, exhibiting the differences of that new environment?

Katey: I mean, that's kind of...you know, there's some goodness to it and then there's some things that we need to worry about. And I really think the sweet spot is time and balance. And so, I really drill down technology into two types of technology, digital candy versus digital vegetables. So digital candy would be your social media, your gaming, all of those types of things that we tend to worry about and there's some, you know, moral panic around. And then your digital vegetables are your academic subjects, your cognitive thinking skills, things that are being assigned from school, but also research and fun things that kids are doing that actually, you know, have redeeming qualities to them. So, I think the metric of "screen time" has parents, kind of, in a panic when they don't necessarily need to be because we are on our screens as adults doing all sorts of digital vegetables. And we are okay and have mature life experience. What we worry about with kiddos and with teenagers is really that balance between how much digital candy are you getting and how

much digital vegetables are you getting? And certainly, the vegetables are where we want them to grow their skills, while also having a little bit of candy here and there.

Katie: That's a great analogy and a good way to look at it because that's something that's been very top of mind for me as my kids, kind of, start to hit the teenage years is realizing we have to have, kind of, an integrative approach with technology. It's almost impossible, it would be extremely difficult to have an all or nothing mentality when it comes to technology. And every indicator points toward technology continuing to be a very big part of all of our lives as time goes on. And so, I kind of equate it to the nutritional side, which is my background is you can't forbid any food entirely, short of an allergy. You have to teach kids how to have a healthy relationship with that food. So I love that you brought in the food analogy, as well. I think that's a really apt one. Are there any guidelines from what you've seen and from your research on specifics at, like, what age, what amount of technology use and technology independence seems to make the most sense?

Katey: You know, they kind of fluctuate. The American Academy of Pediatrics said for 2 and under, no more than 30 minutes of screen time. But, you know, for me, as somebody who works in this space, it depends on what kind of screen time that is. If you're face-timing with grandma for 35 minutes, you know, that's a really good face-to-face mirroring for psychological reasons, right? So, I hesitate to, like, give time limits for kids. But, you know, I would say on the front of older kids and teenagers, Dr. Jean Twenge, who wrote "iGen," I-G-E-N, is the book, and she did a ton of research on, kind of, the sweet spot. And she came up with no more than two hours of screen time. But again, I'd go back to that analogy of, like, "Okay, no more than two hours of academics, that's not gonna work." So, no more than two hours of digital candy. So, you know, the two-hour sweet spot I think is, you know, in her research where she saw the decline in moving your body, the decline in mental health, rumination, anxiety, and depression, suicidal ideation, not getting enough sleep.

So, for me, I really try to balance it and ask my four daughters, like, "What are you spending your time on?" Let's look at where the digital candy and digital vegetable line is, and then go from there because the metric of screen time, we have no correlational data that says six hours of fortnite ruins your life or makes you anxious or makes you depressed. We don't have any causal data that says if a kid spends four years and has too much screen time, he will end up like XYZ. We have a ton of people making assumptions but we still are about 10 to 15 years out of solid science and research saying, "X causes Z." You know, like, we just don't have that metric yet.

So I think if you're a general lay parent looking for a happy medium, for little kids, no more than 30 minutes of digital candy, for bigger kids, no more than 2 hours. And that's difficult because, for older kids, they have teachers asking them to use their phones to do research in class. And then they go home and they have their phones out. And, you know, the social media is dinging while they're trying to do the academics. So, it is a very, very difficult subject to, you know, give hard limits to but my general rule is little kids no more than 30 minutes, bigger kids, no more than 2 hours. No devices in bathrooms or bedrooms overnight and no laptops behind closed doors.

Katie: Those are great guidelines. And we're big fans of having, like, a family charging area that's not in anybody's bedroom, which also from the, like, EMF perspective is great not to have Wi-Fi or cell phones in your kid's head while they're sleeping because there's some evidence that can disrupt proper sleep patterns. But like I said, this is an interesting area of parenting because my default as a parent, certainly in pretty much every other area, is to default towards the kids having independence and autonomy as much as possible. Like, I want them playing outside barefoot, climbing trees, building forts. That's very much my default parenting style.

But it is different when it comes to technology. And I feel like we have to have more oversight, in some ways, because I've had previous podcast guests who said, you know, statistically, the chances of your child being abducted in your front yard are so low that on a number scale, they'd have to stand there for essentially 750,000 years to get abducted. It's just a very low risk, whereas the chances of them being targeted online are actually much higher, whereas most parents feel safer with their kids on a phone versus their kids outside. And so I'm curious, are there any good guidelines or resources or starting points for how can we oversee in a way that we need to with our kids on technology, while also still, over time, making sure that they're gaining the independence and good judgment they're gonna need to navigate technology their whole lives?

Katey: I think there's three roles that we as parents serve. You know, I always outline them for people to be a restrictor, to be an enabler, to be a mentor. So some things you're going to have to restrict, some things you're going to have to, kind of, enable and let go. And most of all, where I would love most parents to fall is how are you being a mentor to your child? How are you mentoring, and guiding, and training them through the process? We've given them access to 4 billion strangers, largely with no training, and then we wonder why they're crashing and burning. So, you know, for all of my audiences, I talk about how are you mentoring any child, whatever age they are, through this process? And I really think if you can hone in on those three roles that you play, and play the mentor most often, you're going to get much more mileage out of your relationship with your child than if you're constantly restricting and fighting about it.

Katie: That makes sense. And are there any, like, programs or apps that can make some of that overseeing easier without feeling as restrictive? Like, I know that there are probably filters and things for different devices. Do you use any of those?

Katey: I actually work for BARC for Schools. And we have a Bark for Families products that I love that I use myself. So, each child has its own portal. You set settings about what you want to restrict and what you want to give as part of screen time. And then we also monitor for distress, drugs and alcohol, predation, violence, hate speech, cyberbullying, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, violence against school and others. So there are many different categories. And we use our artificial intelligence to pick up on the messages that kids are sending within their social media, within their gaming platforms, as well as text messages, email docs, Google chats, etc. So anytime a kid, let's say, a child says, "Tonight's the night, I'm gonna kill myself," Bark would pick up on that contextual clue through the language and send them an alert to the parents. And then the parent could then have a conversation with the child. If it's an imminent threat, our human data annotation team is flagging that and making sure that parents are aware of that alert so that somebody can intervene.

And so, it's always, you know, preferable. And even if...You know, there are so many different apps out there. I happen to work for Bark so I'm a huge fan. But there are many others out there, Qustodio, GoGuardian, MMGuardian. There are so many. And all of them are listed on smartsocial.com if you wanna check those out. But for me, everything you want to know about your child is on their device. And so, if you're not using anything, I would really encourage you to look into using something. You mentioned a central charging station, also a very important part of the plan, family data contract, sitting down with your kiddos and saying, "What do you think is fair? You know, this is your device, it's our device in our name, we're responsible for what happens on it. Let's have a plan." So I think, you know, between the apps, being a good parent, and supervising with your own eyes, and heart, and gut, and looking at behavior that seems to be changing, those are all parts and pieces of the role we play as a good digital parent.

Katie: Can you explain more about the digital contract and how families can use those?

Katey: Yeah, like, I just see America fighting about devices, whether it's husbands and wives or kids and their parents. You know, we give it to them, they hit their brother, we take their device away. We're really tired after dinner, we give it back. They don't do well on their math homework, we take the device away. And it's like this constant dance that we're doing. And then in the middle of the dance are our kids and our relationship with our kids. And the trust starts to really just deplete and get eaten away. And so, it's no wonder that kids aren't coming to us to tell us about big, high stakes stuff that's going on with them, their friendship group, with inside their hearts because they've lost trust in us. What we've said is, "You know, if you don't do XYZ, we're taking this special thing away from you." What we should be doing is taking the device out of the middle of our relationship, sitting down at a table and saying, "Okay. You have the privilege to use technology on this device, what do you think are the reasonable rules and consequences of this device?" And as a family coming up with that and having your child have a voice in the use of their own device because our goal, our ultimate desired outcome is between the age of 10 and 18, we are incrementally building trust, allowing them to make mistakes, and then allowing them to take flight.

So, as opposed to dancing back and forth, and yanking a phone or a game, thinking that the behavior overnight is gonna change is kind of silly. It's not gonna change. I always tell parents, "If you take away the phone, replace it with you. Replace it with the skill you're after." If they didn't clean their bedroom, then they lose the loss, you know of privilege to use technology, but they still need to learn how to clean their bedroom. So just yanking the phone doesn't serve a purpose. So if you're looking to change behavior and you're using their device as a carrot or leverage, I would encourage you not to do that. Now, on that front, through your family data contracts, you're gonna outline natural consequences. If you do XYZ, the natural consequence is XYZ. And so, there's no surprises. It's not arbitrary. You're not at 9:00 p.m. saying, "I'm taking your phone for seven days, and two days later, handing it back." You're being a consistent parent that is really looking out for the best interest and wellness of your kid.

Katie: So many good points there. And especially I 100% agree with you that the goal is to let them take flight, especially by 18. And I think I've also read, you know, when they're little, they're trying to figure out, kind of,

what the rules and boundaries of their environment are. And if we as parents are always changing those rules of, like, "Well, now you can't have technology and now you can because I'm tired," and they can't figure out what the rules actually are, much less follow them. And so, I love that, not using it as a tool like that.

And I also loved you mentioning letting them make mistakes, especially between the ages of 10 and 18. And I would add to that also framing the mistakes as a lesson and a good thing because certainly, all of us those ages, you will make mistakes. There will be mistakes. But rather than framing those as a failure, I think if we can frame them as a lesson, we also can teach a really valuable mindset and psychology lesson to them at that point. And then lastly, you mentioned don't just use it as a punishment or a reward but build it into the contract. And in our house, we have the, kind of, idea of if-then statements. And they know these things ahead of time, like if these things have happened, then you can do these other things. And it's not like they have to come ask me or the technology is a reward. It's that they know there's an order of how things happen in the day.

But I think also at the end of all that, I think what your point really hammers home is we have to be the model of this. If we're just giving the rules, we're gonna hit some pushback. But if we are models of good technology use, they're much more likely to follow it. Just like if I sit down and start drawing, all of my kids come and sit with me and start drawing, whereas if I just told them, like, "Go draw," they probably wouldn't necessarily do it. I think it's very powerful when we as parents model that. So whether it's, we put our devices on a central charging station or we put our devices in airplane mode and turn them off at 9:00 at night, or 8:00 at night, or whatever the time is, and spend time with real people, and get ready for bed, and stop looking at screens. I think that's a really, really good point that you made.

What about… Because obviously, from the statistics I've seen, in the last year, kids are, across the board, all of us are, using devices and screens much, much more than we have in the past. And a lot of that with school being virtual in many places, kids can't really get away from that. And many are using computers and phones much more than two hours a day. Do you have any, kind of, specialized advice for times like this where kids are virtual? And how is that psychologically impacting kids right now?

Katey: Well, like I said, we won't know. Like, we won't know for a while, right? So, all I can say is, you know your kids best. And so if you see lethargy, unmotivated, eyes glazed over, drastic changes in behavior, then you know that you have to chunk the day into different pieces. Now, we don't have control over what the school gives. If you're homeschooling, you have a little more autonomy over that. But, you know, school is school, and so they have to be online doing these different things. But I would say in between classes, moving bodies for 30 minutes to an hour a day is absolutely essential. And blue light glasses from Amazon for $9.99, protecting their eyes. No overnight, you know, devices, so protecting sleep. Sleep is one of the most important things that we can encourage. And we have the time now that, you know, things have slowed down, where kids can get the actual sleep that they need. And so, I think there are some things, like, you know, strategies like the glasses, and the moving bodies, and tech-free zones in your home and cards that you can put in place to mitigate some of the over-usage of technology that we have right now during COVID-19.

Katie: Got it. Yeah, I think that you're right. That is an important point that we don't know. Actually, with technology, we're all part of a grand experiment at this point. And we're gonna have to, kind of, like, learn these things as we go but we still have to navigate them in real-time right now, which makes it much more, like I said, tricky and nuanced for parents these days. I'm curious...Let's go a little bit deeper on the mental health side as well because you and I talked about this off-air a little bit before we jumped into the podcast. And I've seen reports of this as well that one of the unintended consequences of schools being more virtual, especially in the teenage years when kids have such an intense need for community and social interaction, is that we're seeing an increased rate in mental health issues in kids, and it's happening younger and younger. And from what I've read, just like technology and Zoom don't serve as a replacement for that. But can you speak to that at all and what kind of consequences we are seeing right now?

Katey: Yeah. I mean, there's the whole, you know, psychological term called mirroring. And especially during the teenage years, kids need to see each other face-to-face. And I think Zoom, and Google Meets, and all of that, you know, they have to be strategies right now. But certainly, if you're open to having a small bubble, one or two families, children, that your kids can have some contact with, I think that's a really important thing to think about. And some people are comfortable with that and some are not. But what we know to be true is human beings need to be seen, and heard, and loved, and we need to be in-person. And the four principles of early childhood development are nature, physical touch, you know, human movements of the body and, you know, that connection with each other. So if we know the four principles have to do with being touched, and moving, and connecting, and nature, try to infuse those into the day to mitigate some of the technology issue.

And, you know, I'd love to say that, you know, it's safe to interact in-person in large groups but what we know to be true right now, it isn't. And so I can't encourage families to get together in groups to get that mirroring that your kiddos need. But any sort of FaceTime, any sort of Zoom, any sort of interaction where they can actually, you know, feel at least connected to each other, that's what's gonna drive the dopamine and the oxytocin in the brain, is gonna regulate the serotonin as far as mood regulation goes, and at least they will feel a little bit better.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great point. We had to, kind of, make that adjustment in our own lives. We've always homeschooled but we've always had pretty diverse social groups for our kids through local sports, and community groups, and even in our neighborhood. And that's all slightly changed in this past year. But we had to be really intentional about keeping those small groups and making sure that they had that interaction. And certainly, my heart goes out to all the parents who are navigating this, especially parents who are navigating homeschooling or virtual schooling for the first time and all that comes along with that.

I'm curious if you have any favorite resources that you can point parents to. I love that you mentioned Bark, and I'll make sure that's linked in the show notes. But I think we've touched on a lot of the potential pitfalls of technology and how to watch out for those. But certainly, technology also brings with it an incredible amount of resources. And we literally have the entirety of human knowledge at our fingertips at all times, which is absolutely incredible. I'm curious if you have any favorite resources, either yourself as a parent or as an educator, that you would mention for kids to use. And I'll share some of my favorites as well. But any favorites that you think are great starting places for responsible use of technology?

Katey: I love the Center for Humane Technology as a great resource for families, kids. I like digitalnatives.com, has some great resources, smartsocial.com. And I would also say Common Sense Media has some pretty fantastic resources on it both for kids and for adults. So those are, off the top of my head, my favorites.

Katie: And back to your initial point too, about the different types of technology use and how some can be really beneficial and others, you might wanna limit a little bit more. I realized with homeschooling that technology was going to be an incredible tool and that it should be used responsibly, but that we had so many amazing resources available. And so, still trying to minimize the amount of time kids are just staring at a screen, but still really work in some of those things. So, our kids do some classes online, but I try to minimize the amount of time they're just watching a video online. But we do a few things like...I've mentioned before, we start every day with TED Talks, usually two or three unrelated TED Talks. And this was an advice from another previous podcast guest who said, "You know, kids are natural pattern recognizers." And we have all these TED Talks that are 14-minute summaries of someone's entire career, someone who's incredible at what they do, summarizing their knowledge in 14 to 18 minutes. And so when you give kids a few of those every day, they're natural pattern recognizers, and they start to try to put pieces together. Even if those pieces don't necessarily exist, that helps really develop an innovator's mindset. So, we're a big fan of TED Talks. And there's also, of course, like, free curriculums like Khan Academy available now with all kinds of educational resources.

I'm also a big fan of giving kids an educational outlet that lets them be hands-on and build. So, as our kids get older, we started helping them create their own website, and learn to code, and really encouraged them into the entrepreneurship and business side, which is a way that I can, kind of, side by side, hand in hand, teach them technology and also, kind of, oversee it but also teach them how it can be a force for good because, like I said, there's so many implications of this. And like you pointed out so well, we don't know the long-term consequences but those are some of the ways I feel like we can give our kids the advantages of this incredible resource of knowledge at our fingertips, while also hopefully trying to guard against some of those pitfalls.

Katey: Yeah. And I mean, you know, for me, I think using this time to really point out to your kiddos, like, what is the responsible digital footprint would also be like a fun lesson plan. And, you know, any kids fifth grade and up, I suggest looking at LinkedIn and getting them familiar with, like, how to build an e-resume, so to speak. And by seventh grade, having their own that's private, turned to private on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a social media network but it's very safe and responsible. And you can have a private LinkedIn. And then by, like, mid-10th grade, I really encourage kids to be turning that on to public so that colleges, and internships, and employers can start getting to know them. And the first place that any, you know, person giving a job or college admissions to is going to Google your child and anything that comes up, they have about 15 to 30 seconds to make a good impression if that, probably 10 seconds to make a good impression. So, I think it's really crucial that we use this time that we now have that's maybe a little slower for your family to encourage kids to, you know, have their own platforms that are responsible and futuristic.

Katie: I'm so glad you brought that up. That's something I haven't really talked about on this podcast, but I think is a really important point as well is, kind of, curating your digital footprint and what people are gonna

find when they Google you or Google your kids. We've bought all of our kids their names as domains when they were born, and also letting them, kind of, build out their own website as they get older, also set to private, until they're old enough to, kind of, manage that themselves. But I think also for a lot of kids, their digital footprint and their website might be their social media page or their, like, profile. Do you have any good guidelines for parents navigating that? Because I certainly hear from parents who it seems like there's a lot of tension with all the different social media platforms and all the, like, different ways kids interact. And I've heard from quite a few parents who have had struggles with their kids posting things that maybe were not quite appropriate and things like that. Any good guidelines for helping parents navigate that?

Katey: Think just like 100 different conversations. Like, if they post something that's inappropriate, or silly or, goofy, or doesn't align with your moral compass, you know, like you said, turning the mistake into a lesson. We live in cancel culture. So pulling up celebrities that have been "canceled," and looking at, like, what did they post that got them canceled? Why were they canceled? What do you think we could do to restore this person? I think those are really important lessons that we can be teaching, even before mistakes happen from our own children. I would also say looking at kids that have gotten in trouble for typical kid things that disqualify them from college scholarships, and college baseball, you know, contracts, and, you know, all sorts of things you see out there. And we like to post about it and like, "Oh, my gosh, look at what this kid did," but we rarely speak to kids about how do we restore you after you've made the mistake? So I think those are some proactive things.

I also tell kids, when I speak to kids, "If grandma wouldn't like it, don't post it. And you need to be looking at your platforms weekly, and going through and saying, 'What do I want the world to know about me? Do I really want this picture up there? Is that really who I am and what I stand for?'" Because everyone is really literally watching your platform. And if you want these future opportunities, you have to make sure that you're constantly, kind of, being your own accountability partner and/or designating your older sister, or brother, or parents, or grandparents. So it's like, "Hey, you know, every so often will you look at my platform and make sure that I'm living up to our family's standards?"

Katie: Great points.

This episode is sponsored by Paleovalley - my go to source for grass fed probiotic rich beef sticks and now some of my favorite supplements as well. I always keep their beef sticks on hand for myself or my kids, but I also keep their Vitamin C complex on hand as well. They have a vitamin C complex made with three of the most concentrated natural sources of vitamin C: amla berry, camu camu berry, and unripe acerola cherry. Each nutrient-packed serving delivers 750% of your daily recommended intake of vitamin C – an amount meant to help you thrive, not just survive. Most other vitamin C supplements are derived from GMO corn and only contain one fraction of the vitamin – ascorbic acid. Their Essential C Complex contains the entire spectrum with absolutely no synthetic vitamin C... just food-based organic superfoods! Check this and all of their products out and save 15% at paleovalley.com/mama for 15% off.

This episode is brought to you by Wellnesse. We make personal care products that go above and beyond just non-toxic to actually be beneficial for you from the outside in. I realized years ago that even some of my most naturally minded friends and family members who made an effort to eat organic food and be really cognizant of what they brought into their homes were still using certain personal care products, mainly hair care and oral care. And the reason was, they weren't willing to sacrifice how they looked and felt just to use natural products. And none of the natural products they were finding really lived up to the conventional products as far as how effective they were. So, I resolved to change this and realized I had things that I've been making in my kitchen for years that worked just as well and that I could share with other families, and thus Wellnesse was born. You've probably heard that what goes on our body gets into our body and that many of the chemicals we encounter end up in our bloodstream. To me, this means non-toxic and safe should be the absolute bare minimum baseline for any products that are in our lives. But I wanted to take it a step further. I wanted it to use this to our advantage to actually put beneficial ingredients in our hair care, toothpaste, personal care products so that we could benefit our body from the outside in. Why not use that wonderful skin barrier to our advantage?

Our hair care is packed with ingredients like nettle, which helps hair get thicker over time. Our dry shampoo has scalp promoting products that really help follicles stay strong. And our toothpaste, for instance, has a naturally occurring mineral called hydroxyapatite, which is the exact formulation or exact mineral that's on our teeth that's present in strong enamel. So they're all designed to work with the body, not against it to help you have stronger, healthier hair and teeth. We now have a hand sanitizer that doesn't dry out your hands like many hand sanitizers do. I would be honored if you would check it out and I would love to hear your feedback. You can find all of our products at wellnesse.com.

Deviating from that a little bit, as we get toward the end of the interview, I love to ask about if, and I kinda want to go deeper on this one that I normally do, but if there's a book or a number of books that have had a profound impact on your life or that you often recommend. And if so, what they are and why?

Katey: So, my favorite book right now...well, I have several favorites, I should say. My favorite book is called "The Self-Driven Child" by William Stixrud and Ned Johnson. If you haven't read it, it is, like, a must. You should buy it for anybody that's having a baby. You know, my kids are 12, 12, 13, and 14, I read it 2 years ago. It's, you know, a relatively new release. It is fantastic. I would also say "How to Raise an Adult" is one of my favorites, really talking about Generation Z, some of their lower coping skills, and how to cultivate those. And then, you know, I'm really fascinated by, you know, brains, so I think "The Whole-Brain Child" is also one of my favorites, and just really understanding how your child's brain develops and strategies to help them cope. So I would say those are probably my three favorites on the topic of, like, overall wellness.

If you really wanna dive into, like, the digital wellness piece, I would look at two books, one is called "Glow Kids," G-L-0-W, "Glow Kids" by Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, and then "Parenting in a Tech World," which is actually by two of my colleagues, Titiana Jordan, and Matt McKee. It's got everything...both books have everything you

want to know about, you know, from the psychology behind the dopamine rush to family data contract to strategy. So, those are my favorites.

Katie: Great suggestions. I'll make sure all of those are linked in the show notes for you guys listening at wellnessmama.fm. And I think that's a perfect springboard into another topic that I hear from parents. And I'm hoping you might have some insight on even though it's not directly technology related, which is how can we encourage and inspire our kids to read? Because that also seems like the more we get into the digital world, kids aren't reading physical books as much or even just reading, in general, other than very short-form content on social media. So knowing that that's probably going to continue to increase, do you have any strategies for helping encourage a love of reading in our kids as they go through this process?

Katey: I think, again, like, going back to your point about modeling, like, I have started...You know, I'm a big audiobook fan, but then I also order the paperback of it so I can highlight and take notes on it. So, if you're not a reader as a parent, at least doing the audible things, listening, making some questions, and then sitting as a family, and/or on a road trip, like, Audible is great for that. So, I hear from a lot of people, like, "I'm just not a reader. I don't have a love of reading." But, you know, ideally, the sweet spot would be, we would be talking to kindergarten parents and really talking about how to build literacy skills and keep reading going. But if you're listening to this and you have a 15-year-old that because we'll make them read things that are not relevant and that they don't get to choose to read, that's gonna be, you know, a bigger bridge to cross.

But I think really looking at that family data contract and saying, you know, "We're gonna balance technology by also reading." And we know to be true that on, you know, SAT, ACT, all of those standardized tests that we'll see if they remain around, but for now, we know that developing language skills and having a huge vocabulary really helps on those types of tests and success in college as well. So, anything you can do to encourage reading, to model reading, to do a book drive in your community, anything you can do like that, I think is a start. I happen to be a voracious reader. And so, I have always loved reading. I know there are people that aren't. And so, it may be more of a stretch for them, but it is still possible.

Katie: Yeah, I think it does go back to modeling. And someone I really admire Naval Ravikant, he has a quote that says, "Read what you love until you love to read." And I think that's especially important for kids. It's maybe, you know, don't get hung up in what they're reading. If they have a genre that they love, if it's not inappropriate, let them read as much as they want of that. Don't worry about what it is until they really develop that love for reading. And I also think that speaks to developing a family culture that's not centered just on technology. And that I think really ties in with your idea of a digital contract and of parents modeling the way. But I've noticed, basically, like if you can create a family culture, and it gives them so many options of things to do besides technology, you're gonna have fewer battles related to technology because they just simply have more things to do that keep them from being bored than just technology.

So, some examples from our family, we've recently gotten into chess as a family. I've played since I was a little girl. My kids are old enough and they're interested now, or spending a lot of time outside and camping just to get totally away from technology or whether it be a sport. For our family, it's pole vaulting, and whatever it is,

like, creating a family culture that's based around reading, or being active, or learning a new skill that's hands-on, or art or whatever it is, I think that's also a really valuable way to just give them an alternative to technology. So it's not that you're trying to keep them from being on their phone, you're not having to fight that battle. There's just simply other things they love doing that are part of your family life.

Katey: Right. Yeah. I mean, it's all about, you know, finding what makes our kids' pulse race, finding what makes our pulse race. I mean, it's so easy to get distracted by our own technology. I have a sticker on the back of my computer that says, "Showing your kids you love them is 2% effort and 98% putting down your phone." And that came from my friend, Colin Kirchner, who unfortunately is no longer with us but he would stick those stickers...We traveled together and spoke about digital wellness and every town we went to, he would stick them on stop signs. He would stick them on bleachers. He stuck them everywhere. But it's really true. We, adults, are some of the worst with our own, you know, addiction to our own devices.

Katie: Agreed. And another podcast guest who runs Positive Parenting Solutions, she said, you know, "We need to really be the example of putting down our phones and being present." And often we overestimate, like, how much of the day we need to do that. And then when we actually look at it, kids need maybe 10 to 20 minutes of uninterrupted time of us just focus on them per day to feel seen and loved and heard, not that we're, of course, not interacting with them other parts of the day, but even just that small amount of focus time and being the model of that will help them learn to do that as well.

And as we, like, get close to the end of our time, I also wanna circle back to a little bit deeper on a topic that you mentioned in passing and just go back to the idea of teenage mental health, and things we can be aware of or watch for as parents, especially, I keep seeing so many reports of, like I mentioned, teenagers struggling with various mental health issues. And certainly, mental health issues are on the rise for all of us over this past year. But are there any red flags, or check-ins, or ways that parents can really, kind of, keep an eye on that, keep a pulse on that? I know, of course, parents are gonna be the best at knowing their children but realizing we're navigating some new things, are there any other specific advice or resources you have for that?

Katey: I would just say, like, you've got to be paying attention. And, you know, the kids that we regionally...I can only speak to here in Arizona, regionally, we have lost a lot of students to suicide. We actually had a suicide contagion, which is a term in the suicidality community about, you know, multiple suicides within a very short amount of time. And so, when you talk to the parents that have lost students, they will say, "It was very cryptic. It was very insidious. I thought I was paying attention. But there were little things like he used to ride his bike and his bike got a flat tire and he didn't fix the flat tire for four or five weeks, and I didn't even realize he wasn't riding his bike anymore. Or, you know, he used to go out all the time, and now he's in his bedroom all the time." So there are some...you know, when you look at the list of warning signs of youth mental health going downhill, so to speak, you know, your typical list is, you know, lack of appetite, isolating, sleeping more, being more irritable, drastic changes in behavior, not going out with friends, you know, those are the typical warning signs.

But we have a generation of kids who have learned how to mask a lot of their feelings, and not come out and tell people about them. And so especially with our male population, when we look at completion rates, it's 4 to 1 boys to girls. That's not to say that girls aren't struggling because girls attempt suicide 25 times more than boys do but boys tend to use more lethal means. They're more willing to jump off something, to use a firearm, to hang themselves, whereas girls typically tend to take a bottle of pills and kind of know something might happen but know that it won't be lethal. And so when we talk to both genders about how did we get here? They talk about the runway that they went down and that, "I tried to tell people," or, "My social media says it all." And so, really supervising, and monitoring, and listening to the language they're using. The language that they use with you has meaning behind it.

And so when you look at their posts...You know, we've lost a few boys and I've gone straight to their social media, and you look at their posts, and it is glaringly obvious to me, as a stranger, that this child was struggling. So just because they're 17 doesn't mean we don't need to be intervening and paying attention. Just because they're a 4.0 student and captain of the soccer team, those are actually the kids right now that are equally as at risk as, you know, the populations that we have entitled at risk. And sometimes I call them fragile thoroughbreds because they are doing so many activities, and so many honors courses, and all of those things that they're really struggling, and they're not getting enough sleep, which is leading to the anxiety and depression.

So, you know, I've said a whole lot there but I would just say there are always warning signs. There's always language coming out of your child's mouth that they are struggling. And sometimes I think as moms and dads, we wanna, kind of, live on an island called denial, which is a beautiful island. But the sooner you intervene when you see a drastic change in behavior, the better. It is much harder to come out of a crisis situation where your child's headed to crisis services and backpedal to wellness than it is in this, kind of, middle lane of distress and pushing them back to wellness. So if you think of, like, a pie chart, you have wellness, you have distress, and you have crisis. Where we're missing our kiddos is in that lane of distress. We're allowing them to get to crisis. And our communities do not have the resources for the amount of crisis we have with our children. And so if you can capture them in that distress category and bring them back to wellness, you won't ever get to that crisis point.

Katie: Such good advice. And where can parents continue to learn on these topics both from you, and you mentioned Bark, how can parents find that and begin using that in our families?

Katey: They can find me at kateymcpherson.com. In eighth grade, I changed the spelling of Katey to K-A-T-E-Y because there were so many Katies in my grade. So, it's kateymcpherson.com. I also work at Bark for Schools so you can find me there. I live here in Chandler, Arizona, so I don't know how many of your listeners are local or national but I'm happy to help in any way. I do one-on-one consults. I speak to schools via Zoom and in-person. I speak at conferences. I speak at student assemblies. I'm more than happy to be a resource for anybody that needs it.

Katie: Awesome. I'll make sure all of those links, again, are in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. For any of you guys listening, especially if you are driving or exercising, you can find all the links there. And, Katey, like I said at the beginning, I think these are increasingly important topics, and especially timely after this past year. And I'm grateful that you are out there educating and giving parents and teachers tangible tools right now to help navigate this.

Katey: Well, thank you so much for all of your time. I really appreciate it. Again, I'm honored to have been part of this, and I will blast this episode out to my followers and, hopefully, extend your reach as well.

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

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.