

95 - Empowering Families to Stay Connected

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Hield. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month we come to you with a short professional development with new ideas for you to try. Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast for notifications about future episodes.

Today, we are super excited to introduce our speaker, Heidi Aileen Harris is an early childhood professional with a PhD in early childhood education from Walden University. Dr. Harris is an associate faculty member in the graduate level early childhood programs at the University of Arizona Global Campus, as well as Spring Arbor University.

Heidi's passions and research expertise lies in the constructivism-based approach, the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia inspired programs. She enjoys homeschooling her three children and implementing an eclectic approach that combines the tenets of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, nature and faith-based learning. She seeks to support adult early childhood professionals in finding joy in teaching through a focus on developing connections before curriculum and holistic approaches to learning.

Heidi, welcome and thank you for being here today.

Heidi Harris: Thank you.

Host Dr. Shipley: So, Heidi, we're super excited to have you. Today we're talking about empowering families to stay connected with their children when there is so much technology. I love this topic. It's so relevant.

I have a child in my house who I think is on her iPad way too much. So, tell us why you chose this topic and why it's so important right now.

Heidi Harris: Yes. Well, I think just like you, I'm a parent and I have three young children. I have a nine-year-old, a seven-year-old and almost two-year-old. And I think it's, it's a constant conversation piece between my husband and I, and just constantly trying to think about like, how do we set healthy boundaries for our family? And I think also, you know, as a parent and talking with other parents that have young children it's on their hearts and their minds too, and they're trying to figure it out.

And I think sometimes we don't really know what to do or where to turn. And also as a professor, so many of my, my students, my adult students have come to me and you know, have talked about this phenomenon that they're noticing with the students in their classes, the young children that they're with that, you know, they feel like their children are coming into classes and they are exhausted and they have had way too much device time at night. And some of their families are just feeling like they don't really know how to set boundaries.

And so really, I just think it's, it's such an important topic because, you know, it's not like we have an exact answer for every single family, but I do think it's something that as early childhood professionals, we want to empower families that they are doing their best to set some healthy boundaries.

Host Dr. Heald: I think that's so crucial because we are in a time where we want to make sure that we understand technology is not going away. Right. But we also have to figure out how to utilize it effectively and positively so we can figure out a balance, for lack of a better term, and to meet the needs of our digital learners. So how can teachers help families with this?

Heidi Harris: Yeah, so I think, you know, first and foremost, we want to really come at it with like an empathy based approach and helping, you know, when we because I think sometimes we can put some judgment on the parents and like, well, they're just giving way too much device time. So I think coming at it with a partnership in mind and giving opportunities to have parents come together and they're in early childhood classrooms, maybe setting up like a I we used to do like a roundtable discussion once a month for families where families could come in, talk about some of these hot topics.

And you're, you know, as an early childhood professional, there's a facilitator there that's bringing in some relevant resources. I think we need to go to research and resources. So, one of the things that I suggest for early childhood professionals to bring to families is what's called the American Academy of Pediatrics Media Statement.

And they've produced two media statements, one for young children and then one also for like teenagers. And really, they make recommendations based on the research of what is best for children. You know, and one of the things is like for children ages two to five, they should be on devices one hour a day.

So I think bringing that information to families like through, you know, a discussion time and and not, you know, really necessarily saying you have to do it this way, but offering these evidence based tools, because sometimes, you know, families, they may have no idea, like they might just be thinking, well, my father is asking for the iPad again. I'm just going to give it to him because it's easier than saying no. So really, I think making space and time and providing some of these resources for families.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love that, and I'm thinking about how teachers help families at home, but how are teachers deciding how to monitor and run and use? There's so many tools out there. How do they pick what they're going to use in their classroom? Or do you have some standards on how long you should use technology with young children and then you should be teaching? Do you have any resources or tips to share with us on that?

Heidi Harris: Yeah, that's a great question, too. So, the Fred Rogers Center, actually, and NAEYC came together, and they created a technology and interactive media statement.

Same type of thing as the American Academy of Pediatrics, but it's more geared towards early childhood professionals. And it just talks, honestly, the bottom line of it is like you have to take in consideration the context of your classroom and all of that, but it's intentionality. So, we have to come to it with a mindset of we are having intention.

We don't just go open up our classroom and like don't have a plan for the day. Right. You have a plan of like action of how much is going to be what are you going to be doing in that time frame of your classroom? Like how much media are you going to be using and what is the intentionality behind it? Is it balanced with hands on interactive opportunities as well? So, I think that's one of the things we can do for classrooms, for educators, as well as families, is like we want to bring intentionality. We want to have a plan.

Also, there's something called a family media use plan, which I want to also highlight for as we talk about intentionality for families that we can, we can provide that for them. We can tell them about this resource.

And it's basically just a way for families to set a time, a goal for their family of what their media usage would be like day to day. And it's great because it's tailored to your specific family, to the needs of your children and to the ages of your children. And it really helps to sort of think about how much is how much is good; how much is not good.

Right. So, I think that really helps to guide their thinking on that.

Host Dr. Heald: And I think it's neat because it really does show that we can kind of empower families to make that intentional decision of when to use and when not to use.

So, for educators in classrooms, you know, preschool classrooms, early childhood classrooms, what is something that they should do to set those healthy boundaries?

Heidi Harris: Yeah. So I think that, you know, using visuals, having first of all, I think communicating with children is so important. So we want to communicate the expectation.

Right. So if you're going to give them some free time on certain games. First of all, the game should be quality. And that's something that this media statement talks about is like you should be doing research on what is the best. What is the evidence from the research saying of what is best practice in the games that are provided for the children, but then also communicating to the children.

OK, how long are you going to be able to be on this? Setting up visuals, setting up a timer system is really helpful for some children that says, OK, you get this for 15 minutes. When the timer goes off, it's going to be time for you to be done with it. Those type of things, I think those systems that you can put in place can really help manage it without having the emotional meltdown that many of us don't look forward to when the device time is done. And I think that's why it can be challenging for families and educators that are like, OK, because the emotional response can be so strong by young children when they are done that we want to really communicate the expectation ahead of time so that that can hopefully not end so challenging.

Host Dr. Heald: Right. Yeah, I think communication is definitely key. Right.

And if we're proactive in that, we've kind of started this setting those boundaries. So that's always a good thing. Also, with our youngest learners, Heidi, can you tell us three takeaways for our listeners as we wind down this session? Sure.

Heidi Harris: So, one of the things that we haven't talked about yet is that we adults, we need boundaries as well. And that's something that's really highlighted in this media statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics is we have to reflect on how much device time we're using. So helping I think, you know, not only educators know that, but parents as well.

So, you know, it talks about the usage from parents and the adults in children's life that can really be a strong predictor of the child media habits. So we have to really reflect on that and think about what can we do, like putting our devices like I do. I have a time of the day where I just put my device in my in a drawer and it stays there for like an hour, you know, setting those systems in place.

I think also a second thing would be just setting aside some practical strategies that we can come up with, like such as helping families to find alternatives, right, to the to the device time. So what are the things that the children can do and providing those? You know, we want we want books in their environment, offering books or offering other exciting materials that they can be using to help, you know, with that struggle.

And then I think the third thing is just sort of what I mentioned before, but I think it's really important to set an intentional plan of action in place and make sure that those those things are happening.

And of course, like giving ourselves, you know, grace and like you said, there's going to be times to when you want to have technology and that's OK. And I think just again, the communication needs to be there. But having like an overview of what what, you know, typically you're going to your day-to-day technology usage is going to be.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love that and I can tell you I need boundaries on my phone. Yeah, I look at it sometimes. I think I can't believe I was on it that much.

But as we wrap up, what is one challenge you have for our listeners?

Heidi Harris: Yeah, I think, you know, as we think about early childhood professionals and how we are responding to families with the usage that's happening in their homes is that it's really easy to complain, right, of complain about how that child seems to be really on devices all the time or that's all they want. But I think we want to ask ourselves, like, how can we help? Right. What can we do to help? So, I think challenging early childhood professionals to think about how can they empower families to stay connected and set boundaries? It can be something formal, like I talked about with a roundtable discussion parent night, or it can be something informal, like when they pick up, just sort of checking in with them or asking them if they have any questions regarding that.

And then also making sure that they are making the content shareable to families. So offering like I'm talking about these media statements, they're great. They have so much great content and it's very easy to read.

So I think making those available to families as well.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love it. And I think those are practical tips and tricks for any of our listeners. So, Heidi, you always come with amazing information and you are always very eloquent as you speak and try to give us better ideas of what we can be doing today to help our children and families. So thank you so much for being here. And hopefully we'll talk to you again soon.

Heidi Harris: Thanks so much. Have a good day.