

## Tilt Parenting Podcast: A Conversation with Asher about Distraction [Transcript]

Debbie: Before we start, I wondered if you wanted to introduce yourself so people know how old you are and anything you think is important for them to know.

Asher: Okay. Well, I'm Asher. I'm 11 years old and I live in Amsterdam, etc., etc., etc., etc.

Debbie: The reason I thought it was so interesting to invite you to share your perspective through TiLT is because I think a lot of parents would find your insight interesting and potentially useful in their own lives, especially if they have children who are going through things and parents may not understand how to best help them. Or maybe they understand what it feels like for their child to be in certain situations or to be dealing with certain challenges. I think your insight could be really helpful—

Asher: Or maybe they have kids that are way too awesome. Like what if they had a kid that was way too awesome and they didn't know how to act?

Debbie: That's a good point. You and I have been having conversations lately about the idea of staying focused and how you get distracted pretty easily. And you know what I know? That's a *huge* problem for lots of kids. And there are lots of parents who don't really know how to best help their kid and they don't understand why they're getting distracted.

Asher: Okay.

Debbie: And as I'm telling you this you're blinking your eyes back and forth at me.

Asher: Well, you started it.

Debbie: Which makes me feel like you're getting distracted.

Asher: Sorry.

Distraction. Obviously this a huge problem for kids who have trouble staying on task, whether it's doing school work or tying their shoes to get out the door...really just about anything. And while kids getting distracted can be uber frustrating for teachers and parents, it took me a while to realize that it's not something that distracted kids themselves necessarily feel good about either. In our house, distraction seems to be taking center stage these days when it comes to present challenges. And in the past year specifically, I've noticed Asher getting more upset with himself when his own distraction tendencies screw up his plans for what he wanted to accomplish. Like say he's got a goal of completing a number of models in Photoshop before dinner for a mod he and his dad are making. But then he fell down the old YouTube rabbit hole and by the time I call him to the table for dinner he realized he squandered all of his time and didn't get any textures done. This kind of thing happens a lot and it's a situation he finds incredibly frustrating and I totally get it. I asked Asher if he could explain to me if he knows what the getting distracted process actually entails for him.

Asher: Well, normally I'm like, "Hey, I'll do this" and then I'm like, "Oh, cool I had this open, too." And then I go over to that and then I'm like, "Oh no, but I also have this," and I go over to that and then I never get anything done.

Debbie: Are you aware that it's happening in the moment?

Asher: Sometimes. Like sometimes I'll just be like, "Oh, crap." And then I feel too embarrassed that I just spent all my time and I didn't get anything done.

Debbie: So, you kind of notice it after.

Asher: Yes.

Debbie: Yeah. I feel like I've seen that happen and I can tell that you're really truly frustrated about that.

Asher: It's because I've used all my time and I haven't accomplished what I meant to do with that time.

Debbie: And how does that feel?

Asher: Well, that feels very, very, very annoying.

*I asked Asher if feeling annoyed was enough of a motivator to get him to try something different the next time or work on not getting distracted in the future.*

Debbie: You have the chin-in-your-hand-pondering pose at the moment. Are you considering your response?

Asher: Yes, what was the question again? I lost focus in imitating The Thinker...

Debbie: My question was, what do you do with that frustration? Is it motivating for you to make a change?

Asher: Partially.

Debbie: Why?

Asher: Because you don't want to be frustrated and do the exact same thing next time. Right, I want to make a change but then I still lose focus. I'm like, I'm planning to do that and then I lose focus. It's only when I don't think about losing focus and when I don't lose focus that I actually get focused work done.

Debbie: Say that again.

Asher: When I'm not thinking about losing focus and getting distracted, I don't think about things that are distracting. So, if I don't think about that, then I end up not losing focus and I end up getting focused work done.

Debbie: That's very interesting. Is that something you consciously choose to do or just happens sometimes?

Asher: Yeah, it just happens. I'd say like four-sixths of the time, otherwise known as two-thirds of the time. Otherwise known as 0.6666666666666666...

*Right now, we're spending a lot of time addressing this issue of focus. In fact, it's one of the major skills we're trying to build. Last year we made these planning sheets where Asher would write down his primary personal goal that he wanted to accomplish that day and he would check in on it as the day progressed.*

Debbie: That worked for a while, didn't it?

Asher: Yeah. It totally did.

Debbie: Then why are you shaking your head no?

Asher: No, it did work.

Debbie: It did work for a while but it seemed like it stopped working.

Asher: Yeah.

Debbie: So, what we're doing now is we have created screentime planning worksheets.

Asher: Yes, we have.

Debbie: Do you think you could explain what a screentime planner worksheet is and how you're using it?

Asher: Sure. There are six bubbles, one for each half hour. If you have more or less, you can add more or less. And then for the afternoon I write down my primary goal and my secondary goals. And basically I work on the primary goal and when I've done that I would go do a secondary goal.

Debbie: What about the concept of time?

Asher: I have a timer that like goes off every thirty minutes and then I'm like, Can I spend another bubble? Oh, good I can. Well then I'll reset this timer and then I'll fill that out.

Debbie: So, do you feel like that strategy is working for now?

Asher: Yes. Except for the filling it out part. Lately I've been filling it out in my head.

Debbie: Do you feel like it's not as effective when you do it in your head?

Asher: Yes. I have lost fifteen minutes on a number of occasions because I was just like I have another one and then I'm like, No! I ran out of time!

*So, in case you didn't get that, the screentime planning worksheet basically breaks down Asher's allotted screentime for the day into thirty-minute blocks of time. And before he begins a block of time, his job is to consciously decide how he wants to spend that time,*

*what he wants to accomplish during it, and then set a thirty-minute timer. And once the timer goes off, he has to fill in the corresponding bubble for that time block and determine if he has time for another thirty-minute block. If so, he needs to consciously plan how he wants to use that time and so on. (See below for a downloadable PDF for this iteration of our screentime planner worksheet).*

*But yes, to reiterate. Figuring out how to help Asher develop the neuromuscles to stay focused and reach his goals is definitely still a work in process. With Asher, I know enough by now to embrace and use the heck out a strategy when it's working, and when it stops working, which it nearly always does, tweak it or adapt it, or in some cases just toss it out and start from scratch with a new approach.*

Debbie: Is there anything else you want to add to this idea of staying focused or getting distracted?

Asher: It's very annoying when you get distracted.

Debbie: Yeah. Do you feel like you're going to be able to figure out a strategy that will help you stay more focused?

Asher: Yes, eventually.