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Episode #152:

**Jordan Shapiro on Screens, Kids,
and His New Book "The New Childhood"**

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Debbie: Hello Jordan, welcome to the podcast.

Jordan: Thanks. It's great to be a part of this.

Debbie: Yeah, I'm uh I've been wanting to have you on the show since I read an article about your new book, *The New Childhood*. I shared it with my community on Facebook and got some interesting comments and I just thought I want to bring you on the show to just have a deeper conversation about the work that you're doing. I think it's pretty relevant to my community. So before we get into that, can you just take a minute or two to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about the work that you do.

Jordan: I can do my best. I mean, I do a ton of things, you know, my background is in psychology and philosophy and I sort of accidentally got interested in kids and technology mostly because I was observing my own kids and worrying about what was best for them. And I just found myself doing a lot of, a lot of writing about video games, about kids and screens about, uh, about play in general about learning and before I knew it, uh, all of my, my philosophy and psychology background and my research background was, was pointed in this direction. And, and you know, maybe we're about eight years later, uh, there, there's a book about it. So.

Debbie: And tell me a little bit just about what you do kind of day to day, are you at Temple University?

Jordan: Yeah. Yeah. So day to day I do teach, I do teach at Temple University, uh, small, small seminars in the classroom with undergraduates, which I love, which is actually not at all connected to the research that I do. I mean it certainly connects by happenstance, but it's not, um, I teach totally different things and I like that because it's like, it's another space where I can like not be talking about the same thing all the time. But then I also do research with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, at Sesame Workshop and also with the Brookings Institution. I'm a fellow at both, both of those organizations doing research in a very broad way. And I do a lot of consulting internationally, globally around questions of, you know, how's the world changing and how do we, and how do we prepare kids for that changing world?

Debbie: That's great. Thank you for that. I want to just go right to the conversation about your book. So you have a book that came out, I believe in January, called *The New Childhood: Raising Kids to Thrive in a Connected World*. And tell us first what led you to write this specific book?

Jordan: I think these were, as I said, these were ideas that I had been playing with for a long time. I've actually been writing about them for a long time. I, I wrote a column for Forbes for a long time about, um, about education in 21st century parenting and um, and, and video games sometimes. I would just write about kids and games, uh, all these sorts of issues that are new to parents. And then the,

and then the time came where I felt like it really needed to be put into a long form. And that was how I got to the book. But the concern that really drove me more than the timeline, the concern that drove me is, you know, we're, we're moving into a very different time I think for people in general. I think that there's huge changes happening from a technological perspective, from an economic perspective, from a political perspective, from a geopolitical perspective.

Jordan: I mean, there's so much happening and these moments of transition really require that that grownups put a lot of thought and intention into how we prepare our kids for it, which is hard because at the same time, anything that's this big a change is really anxiety provoking because of the uncertainty and the fear and we don't know what to expect. And so I really wanted to give parents sort of a vision of the future, a way of thinking about the future, that that made it less, less scary and less confusing. And that's how, that's how the book came to be. It often gets sort of, in the press it often gets sold as this super pro screen time book, that this is the book about why screens are okay. And there certainly is some of that but, but mostly the book comes out of a really deep concern that we're not handling screens very well and that we need to think about it as grownups, how we're going to teach our kids to live well with this new connected technology. This is certainly not a book where I'm like, hey, let your kids play video games all day long, all the time and don't worry about it. Even though people tend to tend to paint it that way.

Debbie: Well one of the things, just taking a step back that I really liked about the work in general and a lot of your work, you know and things that you've written about education and and so forth before this book, was that you are encouraging people to take a step back and, and question things, right? And to acknowledge that things are changing and there are bigger conversations that we need to have. And you talked about that we're moving into a different time and just to connect it to, to my community, that's very much what, what I believe, and what my listeners believe in terms of, you know, the one in five or more kids today who are in some way neurologically atypical. And you know, so I like to include them in that conversation too, that we need to reevaluate really everything that we thought about education and you know, and screens and really all aspects of our lives because we are moving forward and that can be a great thing if we, if we stop clinging to what we think it needs to look like.

Jordan: Yeah, I mean that's certainly the, the, I think you, you put that really nicely. That's sort of the core of the message of almost everything I do. But I'd add one more point, which is in some ways I'm also very much a sort of classicist traditionalist in it and I don't think that while we are going through a transition that's a change from what we've had for the last hundred years, hundred and fifty years, who knows, you know, where you're going to put the exact marker. But we're not going through anything that's really new for new, for, for humans. Humans have gone through huge transitions many, many, many times. Uh, and there's a lot we can learn from history and from the past and from a lot of, a lot of the old stuff. So, so I think part of what makes my position really different than a lot of other people is that it's so grounded in old wisdom, wisdom even older than 20th century. You know, I sort of see the 20th century and the industrial era as, as a

fleeting moment in a much larger human narrative. And so we need to move forward, yes, but while also clinging to those things that are really essential and traditional, not the things that felt good for 150 years.

Debbie: And you talk about that a lot in your book. I think the terms you, the metaphor that you used was the hearth and the agora, can you talk about that?

Jordan: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I make it, I mean that's a large part of the, the argument in the book is that at least during the industrial era or it was really normal to separate, uh, the hearth and the agora, right? So just think of hearth as home, just think of the agora as work. The only time in, in human history where people actually went to work was the industrial era. I mean, people worked of course, and they started to work, but they usually worked where you lived, right? You lived on the farm, you worked on the farm. Even if you had a, had a shop, you probably lived upstairs from it. This idea of going to a factory, going to an office building, of these being really separated from your everyday life is a very modern, modern concept. And that feels very familiar to us.

Jordan: Cause we, you know, we have three, four generations that have lived through that. But it's not necessarily the way things need to be. And I think it's part of what scares people so much about the new digital connected technologies is that it just breaks that down completely, right? Your, your kids, or you, can be at home and still working, right? That you can still be at work and at home at the same time. You can still be, um, sort of in the safe space of the family room and also connected out to the public space at the same, at the same time. And by the way, that also works the other direction, right? When I was a kid, my, my parents, uh, they didn't talk all day, right? Uh, they both went to work. They didn't talk all day.

Jordan: And the first, maybe they called if there was an emergency and then the first time they talked, it was at the end of the day over dinner, where meanwhile today partners talk all day long through text messages, right? So, so even that, even in the other direction that boundary has dissolved. And that's really disorienting because we don't know what to do. But, but if you look back at history, there has always been a hearth and there has always been an agora, especially if you, if you think of these things, not as home and work, but as you know, the hearth being the thing that tethers us to, whether that's family or home or history or our or our ancestry. And you think of the Agora just being as sort of the public sphere, the thing that is not so private. If you think of it as private and public. And so that metaphor becomes really important to me, cause I think we need to move away from the home-work categories and think about it in a broader, more essential way. And I think those metaphors allow you to understand how home and work functioned as important spaces for our, our psychological, emotional, spiritual, professional wellbeing, but that they don't necessarily always need to take the same form.

Debbie: Right. Super interesting. So the article that I had shared in my community, I think was the interview with Anya Kamenetz, who we actually have had on the podcast when her book came out last year. And I think the quote that I pulled specifically, you know, to highlight in my share was how are we going to maintain those

positive things, the compassion, ethics, good social skills and intimate relationships if we're teaching them to live in a world that doesn't look like the world they're living in. And that just really, that's when I was like, okay, I gotta have this guy on my podcast. You know, it really just struck me. And is that the area of most resistance that you see among parents is just not accepting the world that we're currently living in?

Jordan: I mean, I want to say yes, but I also don't want to, you know, it, it sort of, I think there's a lot of rhetoric that doesn't sort of match what parents actually do. Uh, I think we like to perform this perfect, this image of a parent who's always putting a lot more restrictions than we actually are. So while, yes, I think that's a problem in the way we think, I'm not sure where any of us act as a, as divided as it sounds. And what I mean by divided is, I think that quote came out of a discussion with, there's all this conversation about screen time, how many hours should a kid be allowed in front of a screen, all these things. And meanwhile it's just not optional anymore, right? Like, could you imagine if you had to do anything like work or your personal relationships without a phone or a computer or anything? Like imagine if I said you're only allowed one hour a day and you have to still make your life work.

Jordan: I don't think anyone could do that. Um, and what scares me is that kids, the message they get when we divide it into these sort of episodic moments of screen time is it becomes this sort of temptation where none of the normal rules apply, right? It's like up now you can go play freely. And that just bothers me. If screens and digital technology is going to be so integrated into our lives, it already is, but it's only going to be more so, then don't we want to make sure that our kids learn all the same values and behaviors that we expect of them if they're on the playground when they're also in a digital playground, right? Like they need to learn how to be respectful online. They need to learn how to pro. I mean, that's sort of the basic stuff when you think about trolling, like, you know, teach them, don't be disrespectful, don't bully, don't cyber bully.

Jordan: But I even think there's more to it in terms of teach them how to, how to respond and be aware of difference, right? There's so much diversity on the, on the Internet, right? You can be exposed to so many different things. How do you start to evaluate that? How do you decide how to evaluate that respectfully? How do you not make quick judgments? Uh, all those things are things we need to teach kids. We can't just expect them to know how to do it or to just be able to apply what we teach them at the dinner table to what they do online. Right? We need to, we need to hold their hands and show them how to do that. And there's just this sort of, I don't think it's happening. I don't think, I think there's sort of this, you know, that's, that's a whole other space we're going to ignore is a lot of the, you know, or we're going to restrict, is a lot of the grownup attitude to it.

Debbie: And what I see is that a lot of people restrict until their child reaches a certain age and then they can sometimes be let off leash, right? Not that our kids are dogs. But you know, there is this sense of, you know, when they're younger we need to have more control. And then when they're teenagers, it's like, oh, well that's just what teens do. And then we may totally disengage from what they're doing online.

Jordan: Yeah. Well that's, that's absolutely true. And even worse is that, I mean, actually I don't think that's a bad thing. I mean that, that is how we do so many things in life, right? We, we basically hold our hand, our kids' hands until we feel, um, um, uh, what's the right word? We feel convinced that they're, that we can trust them to make the right decisions on their own. Right? When they, when you teach them to cross the street, you do that. When you, I mean, even, even when they're really little and you take them on a playground, right? You don't, you don't let them climb alone until you know they're not going to fall, right? And then you still don't even let them alone with other kids until you know they're not going to hit, right? You, you sort of, you learn how, how much oversight they need at any given moment and you slowly want to back off.

Jordan: Um, that's true. But I think when it comes to screens, one of the things that bothers me is that it, what that often means is it's still this sort of time question. It's often, you know, I keep track of how many hours they're on it. I want parents on it with the kids when they're little, so that the kids learn to imitate mature behaviors online. So they learn to imitate ethical behaviors, not just online, I mean in a digital world so that they learn how to make sense of it. So they, the parents help them understand and mediate their digital experiences. And I think that there's not nearly enough of that happening, uh, among the really young kids. And then as you said, even with none of that happening, we still let them go when they become teenagers, where now they're not limited on time. They're also, uh, we also don't know whether or not they know how to make sense of it. And then we're surprised that the spaces end up full of bullying or, or racial slurs or radicalization. I mean, I, I don't know why we're surprised if we haven't taught kids how to deal with those kinds of things first.

Debbie: So you suggest that kids actually might be engaged in social media at much younger ages. You know, and if we're going to play that role of teaching them how to interact with it in a healthy way and draw those limits, what might that look like? Can you give us an example of, of how to help your child at a younger age learn how to engage in social media?

Jordan: Yeah. Well, the first thing I would say about the younger age is that when I say that I think they should engage in social media at a younger age. I don't mean like, hey, let's give them all a, an Instagram account at six. That would be really bad parenting I think. But what I do mean is get them involved in the sort of structure of social media. So, so in my perfect world, there would be, you know, maybe you have a, maybe you have a large extended family full of uncles and aunts and you see each other, uh, for holidays. Then it would be great if you had an extended family closed social network that the kids could be on because you could put up photos of Thanksgiving dinner, you could put up articles about how different people in your family, what they're up to, right?

Jordan: Things like that. And they would be able to participate and watch and that would be great. You might also do that with a church group or with a soccer team, who knows? Right? But in my perfect world, there would be closed networks that grown ups and kids are in together when they're little so that they're watching us, right? So that they're, so that we're modeling behaviors for them. And the, you

know, I think about this all the time. I, I learned the right behavior for interacting with people from sitting at the dinner table with my brothers and my, and my uncles and my aunts, right? That's how you learn how to sit at a dinner table and you learn what's okay and what's not. And you also learn things like prosocial teasing, right? Like, uh, uncles and aunts often tease each other, but they do it in a way that's full of respect and love and not cruel.

Jordan: I mean, sometimes it can be cruel, but it's still, it still usually had some dignity in it, preserved in it. Well, how do you learn to do that? Like I'm pretty sure my kids know how to do that at a family dinner cause they've watched my brothers and I do it for years. But did they ever get a chance to watch adults who are kind and compassionate start to have sort of back and forth banter in a digital space? I don't know. I mean most of what they see, even I who watch a lot of it don't know what a lot of it, what's happening, right. I don't know what's going, what they're seeing on YouTube. I don't know. I mean I check pretty often, but that doesn't mean I see it all. I wish I could have controlled and could still control, well they're old enough now I don't need to, but when they were little, I wish we could control how they experience it. But the real point I'm making is that they need to experience it if we want them to learn how to do it well. It can't be, hey, we need to shelter them from it because then they turn teenagers and we suddenly go, now you can have an Instagram account. I guarantee you that if you have, nobody's taught you any rules and you're suddenly full of hormones, you are not going to handle that very well.

Debbie: Yeah, absolutely. Well let's talk about video games. I really enjoyed this conversation. I will just say that I live with two gamers, my husband and my son, my 14 year old son. And you know, my husband has been a gamer since, you know, I've known him for 20 years that he's been gaming. And so I kind of gave up the fight with my son a long time ago. But you know, it's been really interesting, just my personal evolution. I homeschool my son and I used to really divide school with games or you know, reserve games for when everything else is done. And what I, and my shift in the past few years has been seeing the way that he interacts with games. For example, Kerbal Space Program is a game that he really likes. And I, you know, I see him kind of making these intricate spreadsheets to figure out problems that he's trying to solve to have successful missions. And I'm like, okay, that's learning. That's, you know, I'm always looking for where are the learning opportunities and I'm, I'm always struck by how much learning is actually happening. So can you talk a little bit about what you found, how kids can benefit from video games?

Jordan: You gave a great example already. I mean, the first thing I'll say is let's not overstate it, right? Because a lot of people will ask me questions like what are the benefits of video games? And I always want to go, okay, to be clear, video games aren't broccoli. There's no like vitamins in them. Like, it's not like playing makes you better or healthy. Like, that's not the case. But, but there are plenty of things you learn through playing. I'm not sure how many of them matter other than the social skills, the problem solving skills, the motor skills, those are all important. But I think the great thing I loved about your example is the spreadsheet. Because most of what we do in education involves the sort of, um, especially in

math. I'll use math as an example. Uh, mathematicians often call them toy problems.

Jordan: And that can be the word problems, that can be the stuff in the workbook, but they're not based on real world data, right? They're sort of imaginary problems. You don't go, hey, I want to know when are the two trains going to meet? You don't go well, the first thing I need to do is go online and look up the schedules, right? Instead, we get the toy, the toy example, and I don't see any reason why that can't be a video game example, which is what you just gave. Is why not be building mathematical spreadsheets, uh, about your video game? You care about your video game. All we did was make you care. You know, that's how you teach. You teach by sort of, uh, they used to say when they were, when I used to do a lot about learning games, people used to say, but learning shouldn't, it shouldn't be chocolate covered broccoli.

Jordan: You shouldn't just give them a math test that's looks like a game. And I'm like, well no, that's okay actually. Like most learning is chocolate covered broccoli to some extent. Like if I were to say to my kids, hey, you have to do math because one day you might need to do your taxes. They're already bored as soon as they heard the word taxes, right? But if I say you have to do math because it's going to help you get better at this video game, well it's also going to help them with their taxes. And that is actually an internal motivation for them because that's their world. That's what matters to them. Um, and so the more we can connect it to their world, the better. That's good teaching to be able to connect it to the world. An example similar to what you, what you brought up, which I think is good for parents to understand, especially I imagine part of why that happens in your household is because your husband is also a gamer, so there's a lot of respect for the game.

Jordan: It's not imagined as a, as this other bad thing in the house cause dad also does it. Right. So what that tells your son is this is something worth applying mathematical ideas to. This is something worth applying to things I'm learning too and it's meaningful. I think about this with my own son. I have a son who loves to play Civilization and I see how when he does his history homework, he's often thinking about all these questions of resources and and how the movements went and he's trying to apply what he's learned from the strategy game Civilization to his history lesson. Well the only reason he does that is because I've encouraged that and that's what we want them to be doing. Then they're learning from both things. They're learning ways of thinking about the game and ways of thinking about history that are both, that are both super useful. Uh, but if we don't encourage that then we have a kid who, who can't even make that connection at all, who, I mean, they might accidentally make that connection, but wouldn't it be better if we said every time you're playing a video game, think about how it relates to the things you're learning at school.

Debbie: I love that example. And that's a, another favorite game, Civilization, in our house by the way. Um, but the word that jumped out at me that I think is so important is respect. And I will just say, you know, personally, this is something I really had struggled with because you know, my husband has been trying to get me to play games since we started dating. He would buy me, you know, Roller Coaster

Tycoon or you know, just trying to lure me in and I'm like, sweetie, it's not happening. Like I am not a gamer. And I, I really don't think I respected it as a experience or you know, a way to spend time. And that has completely changed for me. And I think our kids know when we don't respect the game and it changes how they interact with it. And just like you said, it changes how they're able to kind of recognize the value in it, or feel good about the experience and get excited about applying it in, in bigger ways.

Jordan: Yeah, and draw connections between it and the things you do care about. You know, I'm glad you brought this up because, uh, often I speak and parents go, but I don't like games. You don't have to like it to respect it, right. You don't have to like playing to be able to show your respect for it, um, I, you know, people hear me all the time say you should play games with your kids. And to be honest, I don't play games with my kids anymore. I'm not good enough to play with them anymore. They're, uh, they're way better than me, but I still, no matter what game they're playing, find a reason to sit down and ask them about it, to ask them how it works, to show them that it's, that one, I respect it, but then also I'm modeling kinds of questions to ask.

Jordan: Sometimes those questions are the ones that so many of us are concerned about. Like, I'll look at what they're doing and I'll go well that seems kind of gross and violent and uh, and I don't understand why it's fun to look at that kind of violence. Can you explain that to me? And again, I don't really, I'm not really worried that if they look at the violence they're going to become sociopaths. I am worried that if they look at the violence without the capacity to reflect on it, they could. And so I spend a lot of time going, hey, let me show you that I respect what you're doing enough that I'm going to teach you what mature reflection on that activity looks like.

Debbie: So let's just talk about addiction. That is something I'm sure comes up a lot, you know, when you're talking to groups of parents it comes up, any conversation I have about screen time, it's a big concern for many parents about their kids potentially being addicted to their phones or computers or games. So what did you discover to be true or what are your thoughts on addiction in relation to how kids are interacting with technology?

Jordan: Uh, okay. I think there's two main points here. One is, well I, I think I'll start with, with where I think the language of addiction comes from. And I'm sure you know, and I'm sure your community knows that there's a lot of resistance to the language of addiction when it comes to screens. Um, and there's a lot of people who love to use the language and, and in the scientific community it sort of is, is very split on whether we should be using that language or not. Um, in general, the word addiction is, is already problematic in most cases, because people don't know whether it's a chemical addiction, whether it's a neurological issue, nobody really knows at this point. There's lots of, you they wouldn't still be writing books about it if everyone knew.

Jordan: But I think the way the place that that comes from is this narrative that's always sort of bothered me about the dopamine release that happens when you're playing video games, which is a bit, um, you know, it's sort of, I don't know who

started it, but it's just pleasure comes with dopamine release. We, we know that and there's no evidence that you get more of that playing a video game than you do from eating a hot fudge sundae, you know? But there is evidence that when it's a drug, it's like 20 to 100 times more dopamine is released. And that's not true with, with video games. So, so I think that's where that comes from. And I always like to say, hey, it's not doing all the things that the scare tactics make you think about. It's not rewiring brains. It's not, you know, that's all just language games that people are using. Yes it probably, you know it, well, first of all, your brains don't have wires. Right. So it's not rewiring anything. It's obviously a metaphor, but, but even to what they mean by it, which is that the brain is changing because of it.

Jordan: Yeah, of course the brain changes because of lots of things. But to make this a villain is not really accurate. Now onto the straight addiction question because there's certainly parents who see children who can't put down their phones, who have, who, who can't stop playing video games, who have, uh, unbelievably violent reactions if the, if they can't play a video game, who have things that sort of look like typical withdrawal symptoms. To that I would say it's, you know, I've heard so many of these stories. I think, I am very concerned about them. It is absolutely possible to develop a very unhealthy relationship with a digital device. We, we've seen that. Um, two ways I deal with that once that happens is either, um, my whole message is that is that we need to start much younger in making sure we teach kids how to develop healthy relationships with their devices so that we don't get to the place that we see so many teenagers in right now.

Jordan: And young people in, right? That's part of why I say, hey, get involved younger, model these things younger because right now we're, we're sort of painting it as a temptation. We're painting it as the evil temptation and of course they behave with it the way they would behave with an evil temptation when you paint it that way. So that attitude needs to change. As to the kids who do develop these really unhealthy relationships, one of the things that scares me about that is that it's possible to develop unhealthy relationships with anything, right? You can develop an unhealthy relationship with food, sex, money, work. We, you know, I know lots of adults who have all of those kinds of unhealthy relationships. And if there's one thing we know in psychology, it's that those unhealthy relationships are often the result of other issues, whether it's trauma or a confidence issue or a self worth question, right. There's so much that underlies those kinds of unhealthy relationships. And what I would like to see when they happen is I would hope that parents give their kids all the love and support and professional help they need in order to get to the root of what that problem is. Because I get really scared that if we scapegoat the video games, we haven't solved the actual problem that led to the unhealthy relationship in the first place. And that's what we really need to worry about.

Debbie: That's such a good point. I don't think I've ever heard it stated that way, that we do tend to villainize technology and phones and screens and yeah, it's always because there's something else going on. It could, you know, they say that all behavior is communication, so what is that communicating to us about what the child's experiencing?

Jordan: Yeah. Yeah. I think it's a, it's a symptom of something deeper and yeah, we often do, you know, we need to address the symptom and the way to address the symptom might be a kind of video game rehab or whatever, but you still haven't addressed the problem.

Debbie: Right. I'm going to ask you this question, and this may not be part of your research, but I know my audience is probably thinking this question right now, so I'm going to ask it. One of the things that many of the families in my community whose kids might have ADHD or attention learning issues or executive functioning challenges that they are concerned that their child's relationship with their screens might contribute to those executive functioning challenges. And I'm just wondering, did you find any link to that or or stumble upon any interesting research as you were writing this book about that connection?

Jordan: Well, again, it's not really my field, but I will say I've seen quite a bit of research about it. It usually suggests that it goes the other way though, right? The ADHD, for example, leads to excessive interest in screens, not the other way around. And that I, I don't know if it worsens things, I don't even know if it's possible to worsen things. Right. Look, I think to me when I think about this question, and again I'm doing this without a lot of knowledge about the specific issues that your community faces, but I would still say that every kid is different and everyone needs to figure out what's best for that particular child. And um, I'm sure there are cases where the screen and the devices are in the way of starting to learn habits and behaviors and patterns that are better for, for the individual child. And in that case then we certainly need to intervene. But then I think there's times when it's not. And the idea to think that this technology is always one or the other, uh, I think is, is, is just problematic. It might be the only thing that gives your child comfort in between all the other important therapies they're doing, for example, in which case, why would you want to take that away from them?

Debbie: You talk about that in your book. You know, you talk about stuffies and you know, and that technology as being, not a security blanket, but something that can help kids feel more, you know, kind of at home or more connected at a time when they might be feeling isolated or confused about who they are.

Jordan: Yeah, well that came out if I was on a, I was traveling with my kids and at first I was really frustrated because they were always on looking at their smart phones, playing games while we were traveling. And I'd go, why are you doing that? Can, you know, look around. You've never been here, don't you want to see, don't you want to observe things? And then it sort of, you know, I took the devices away of course. It was a mistake, but I did. And the way I knew it was a mistake was, was I discovered when they didn't have them they immediately got homesick. And so I had to find a balance because of course we could be traveling and once they're playing a game, they would stay in the hotel room all day and not do anything. Right. Because partially because there's, it's anxiety, it's different.

Jordan: You know, think about how scared you are if you're in a foreign city, imagine if you're a kid and you're not even the one like who knows how to get on the subway, right? You have to be, someone has to lead you to everything. So, so I think it makes sense that that's frightening to them. So I have to say stop. No, you can't stay in the hotel room and play on your phone all day. But, but I also don't want to say, hey, you can't play on your phone at all. Because I recognize that the phone gives them comfort. What I've tended to do now that I've realized this as I've gotten older, is talk to them, try to, what's the right word? Think of ways, creative ways to get them to be doing both at the same time. So I'll say things like, don't you want to take a picture of that for Instagram?

Jordan: So I'm sort of encouraging them to be present with whatever the, the sightseeing thing we're doing is while also allowing them to use their phone as a way to get more present with it. And I think that puts it, allows it to be this transitional object that helps them deal with being in a foreign place but also being in a comfort, a comfortable space at the same time. And that's a good thing. I mean, you know, we'd like to think that when we're traveling and we all take Instagram pictures, we're just showing off. But I think we're also trying to stay connected to an anchor to, to what I call the, the hearth, right, to our communities. Like we want to share with them because we want, it makes us feel like we're not so alone and so isolated and so far away.

Debbie: Yeah, super interesting. Yeah, that really, I had never thought of it that way and it made total sense when I read that story and I think that's something all of us listening can relate to. So okay. Before we say goodbye, for parents who are listening to this and they want to stop either fighting their child's use of screens or just form a more healthy relationship with how their child interacts with technology. Any strategies or, or suggestions for things parents can think about changing?

Jordan: Yeah. Well the first thing I would say is, um, you said for parents who are tired of fighting, and I like to point out to parents all the time that like, if you're tired of fighting, sorry, you know, this is part of parenting, right? It's not always fun. If kids always did the right thing without you having to nag them, then they wouldn't need their parents. Right? So, so don't expect everything to be calm all the time or even that it's gonna make everything easy. But to the second part about how, how do you change the attitude so that you're not fighting a screen? I have no problem if you're fighting your child to make sure your child goes to bed at a reasonable hour. I just don't want you fighting a screen to make sure your bed, your child goes to bed at a reasonable hour.

Jordan: And to do that, I think I would start by saying, uh, start immediately, like whatever it is that your child is so obsessed with on that screen, sit down with them and go, show it to me. I want to understand it. Explain it to me. Uh, and, and while they're explaining it to you, don't be afraid to, to share your honest opinions with it. I so often tell my kids that I don't like what they're doing or that I find it stupid. Um, but I do that with respect and with love. Right? The same way I would tell a friend that, right? I don't say, hey, you can't do it. I go, why would you like that? That, that seems problematic to me. That seems gross to me. That

seems dumb to me. That's, that's not my kind of humor. I'm not 12 year old, 12 years old anymore. Penis jokes aren't funny to me anymore. Right? Like, um, oh, well some of them are, but, but, but, but just saying the word isn't funny to me anymore.

Jordan: But I say that to my kids all the time. And so asking them what it is and then having that real engagement with it, all you're doing is modeling for them the capacity to have that critical engagement themselves, right? When they're watching YouTube videos, I often say to my kids, who's paying for this? Right? Did the video game pay for them to make that? Is it like, or is it the console? Somebody must pay them. They're not doing it for free and then I overhear them doing the same thing to their, to their friends, right? They become the icon of class going, this isn't, it's a, and that's great to me. And all that is, is me sitting down going, I'm willing to have the same conversation with you about this that I'd have about anything. I don't see this as something frivolous.

Jordan: I see this as something worthy of our conversation, worthy of our reflection and worthy of a critical perspective. Um, and so I would encourage parents to just do that immediately. You don't have to like the game, you don't have to want to play it, but just ask your kids what it is they like, why they like it, what's good, what's bad, what makes you good, what makes you bad, what is that? You know, you may see a crazy goblin. What's that crazy goblin? Why is it a goblin? Um, for a long time we talked about, it's changed, but I remember the early, years ago having conversations when my kids were even really little about how come all the, uh, all the heroes in the games were always white men. We had lots of conversations about that and that that's changed a lot since, since those early days. But it was true once and that just that discussion about representation is, is a way of taking something seriously, um, and taking what your kids do seriously and showing that it's worthy of that and not just kid stuff.

Debbie: Awesome. So much food for thought. I really appreciate you just sharing all this with us today and I'll be very curious to hear what kind of feedback I get on this episode as well. Um, before we go -

Jordan: Wait, I want to know what, when you posted, you said you got a lot of interesting comments when you posted the interview, was there lots of, uh, uh, controversy, people who thought I'm like pro, pro screen addiction?

Debbie: Well, there was a lot, I'll read one of them to you. One of the comments I got said 'so we also teach them to responsibly use opiates too, because that's the world they're living in?'. So obviously that -

Jordan: But that, no, but actually we do, right? There's times when you're allowed to use prescription pills and there's times when you're not. And we, and we teach them that.

Debbie: That's true. That is true. But yeah, so I think, I think obviously this is a trigger for some people and not a surprise. Right? Um, I get this with a lot of episodes that I air, I tend to push buttons just even by the guests I have on. I don't know that this is going to be that controversial, but I think because there's a lot of fear, a lot of

insecurity and shame even, you know, around parents who are maybe more permissive with screen time rules or maybe they don't have guidelines and then they feel the judgment from parents who do. It is, it's a contentious subject. So.

Jordan: Yeah. And there's a lot of, I mean one of the reasons I wrote the book is because there is a lot of judgment and, and I kept talking to parents and I went, wait a second, kids are using screens more than anyone is admitting. Parents are okay with it way more than they're saying and they don't have permission to say that. And if anything good comes out of this book it's that I hope that parents end up feeling like they're allowed to have their own opinion about this and not just, and not just a black or white opinion.

Debbie: Yeah, that's great. Well, hopefully, you know, this is part of the conversation and and spreading it. And I think it's important to be talking about these issues because the world is changing. This is the future. There is no future.

Jordan: It's actually the present, right?

Debbie: Yeah, that's true. That's true. So anyway, it's super interesting. I really enjoyed this conversation. And if listeners want to engage with you on social media or otherwise connect with your work, how do they do that?

Jordan: The best way is to get is to get me on Twitter. I'm @jordosh. Um, and then you could also, if you want to engage with me or email or something, you can go to www.thenewchildhood.com and there's lots of different ways to get in touch with me there.

Debbie: Excellent. And listeners as always, I will include links to Jordan's book and all of his social media handles on the show notes page as well. So if you didn't write that down, you're in the car, you can go check that out later. So Jordan, thank you so much again. Super interesting conversation. I really enjoyed learning more about your work and I look forward to seeing what's next for you.

Jordan: Thank you so much, and it's such a pleasure to be here and to have this opportunity to speak to your whole community.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- Jordan Shapiro's website
- *The New Childhood: Raising Kids To Thrive in a Connected World* by Jordan Shapiro
- Forget Screen Time Rules — Lean In To Parenting Your Wired Child, Author Says (NPR / Anya Kamenetz)
- Writer Anya Kamenetz on The Art of Screen Time (podcast episode)
- Kerbal Space Program / KSP (video game)
- Civilization (video game)