



## Podcast 35: The Slippery Slope of Screen Time: It's a Balancing Act for Young Children

Episode notes: <https://prekteachandplay.com/podcast35>

- Kristie: Hey Revolutionaries, this is Kristie and just a quick reminder that the [Pre-K Teach & Play Podcast Episode 34](#) on screen time had so many important and moving parts, we had to, well, actually divide it into two parts. So if you missed part one, pause this recording and go to [PreKTeachandPlay.com/Podcast34](#). There you'll find the link to part one as well as the free download for this episode. I guarantee it's a download you don't want to miss.
- Kristie: Otherwise, in part two of this episode, be prepared for a ton of practical advice and tips from fellow revolutionaries working in four different states in the US. In this half, we unpack a three-part framework to guide developmentally appropriate decision-making that includes knowing what you are teaching when it comes to the use of screens, who you are teaching, and why- and how to promote developmentally appropriate interactions and engagement when it comes to screens and young children.
- Kristie: Okay, let's get back to the conversation.
- Kristie: Do we have a plan? Especially a parent/partnership plan for how we as a group are going to deal with our own technology. And then we're shared custody of this child, right? Even if I have them for two and a half hours a day at preschool, or I have them for 10 hours of childcare and somebody else has them the other hours, what is our collective plan for this child's screen use?
- Kristie: And then my second thing I was really hearing was intentionally teaching children [technology literacy skills](#). So how to be a good consumer. One of you [shared a video about the study](#), it was a study, a family let their kids use unlimited screen time. I think Alicia you shared it, unlimited screen time for a week and they had like an 11 year old, an eight year old and a four year old and they said let's just see what would happen.
- Kristie: And one of the things was that the older children were able to over time self-regulate more and they diminish their use. Whereas the four year old was like all over the board. And these news broadcasters were like interested and surprised by this. But it's like, people she's four, she's not regulated. How could she possibly self-regulate something to Jolene's point that we can't even regulate our use of? So this expectation that



children will just come with the skills to have impulse control and to know this is not something I should watch and to know I've had too much to consume. And that I should put it away for now and go to bed.

Kristie: That is part of a technology literacy skillset of knowing when to use something, when something is credible, when something is in the service of me. Versus something that's detrimental to my health. So for me that's just a part of a literacy skillset that we need to teach versus once again expecting kids to come with. So those were my thoughts. You guys can jump back in. Anything else here before we offer up our framework for looking at technology and screen time?

Beth: The other thing that I think about is just making sure parents and teachers understand that modeling is such an important part of young children's development. And older parents probably modeled for their children, you know, reading a book, a paper book, you know, and not having that technology right in their hand all the time versus the younger parents who are constantly modeling that you have a piece of technology in your hand. And the children are watching that. And so if you read some articles about, *is it better for an eBook or for a paper book?*, some of the conversations are saying that, well, kids prefer eBooks. Well if they've never seen a parent read a paper book, it's never been modeled to them, of course they're going to go to, *Oh what does mommy always do?* She's on her phone or she's on her iPad. So I think modeling is a huge impact that we have to have that conversation about what else are we modeling as adults?

Leslie: It's really interesting that you use that analogy because as I was going through some of the research, it talked about the [engagement using the technology](#). And if you think back to when we first became early childhood educators, what did we do? We taught the parents how to model and how to interactively read with the kids. And so when they did a comparison, they found out that yes, [we can use electronic books if we're using that same modeling strategy](#). I think that's where our red flags are, where we're falling short.

Leslie: Sometimes working with our parents is we're forgetting that we're going to have to start treating that technology in the same way as we treated the books. So when we would send a book home with the kids, we would model how to read and how to have that interaction around that book and having the conversations and showing the parents



how to model the use of technology for research. There's a difference between using technology for entertainment and using technology for knowledge. So I think it's about raising that technology IQ for our parents as well as with our kids,

Kristie: ...administrators to Leslie. Because just like we have to continually express what is unique about this period of human development, this period being pre-k let's say, that not everybody understands what is unique about this or that we have to explain for the 8,000th time the [importance of play](#), we might have to explain the pros and cons of screen time or what the intention is behind our use of the iPad that was purchased for us or why we need time to talk to other caregivers in this child's life about it. Like we might have a lot of educating to do.

Beth: And which goes to a positive about, it is there are so many nonfiction books available online for young children and we know that if it's nonfiction, the chances of a father reading it are greater, or a male reading it a greater. And so that's a plus to have those right at our fingertips. Because often those aren't the books that are in the homes. And so there's a positive there. As long as we, I agree Leslie, we help teach them how to interact around the book.

Jolene: I think it comes down to though, Kristie, as far as like admin, is that big behavior. That there's no easy fix solution for behavior. So there are some teachers that just can't do classroom management and can't handle anything out of the norm. So putting an iPad and having the child look like they're attentive or engaged. How do you explain that to admin when they're like, *well all my kids are engaged*. And I think Alicia and I saw a great example of it was when we had an afternoon class that was extremely rambunctious and all over the place and we just felt like we weren't making a lot of gain with. A parent meeting, they turned on a TV show, and they were like little zombies. So just because their compliance, I guess, or docile-ness, I don't know. It doesn't mean that they're learning something. And I think that's kind of hard when they're just like technology, technology. It's good. And the teachers, all this. You take away that behavior and it seems like it's more beneficial than I believe it is.

Kristie: Alicia. Ashley, one more comment before we share a framework.

Ashley: One of the things that I had wanted to mention was an [article I've read in the Atlantic](#) from June of 2015 that talks about this idea of the quote, "law of amplification". Which was to say that technology's primary effect is to amplify human forces. So when we're



talking about teaching and education, that all of these technologies or screen time or whatever device we're using will amplify whatever teaching capacities are already there.

Alicia: So you know, back to what Jolene and everybody else has been speaking about in terms of that challenge, is we need to be able to have some kind of strategy or idea to communicate with families about appropriate or effective technology use and make sure that's consistent across the classroom and the home environment as well as supporting children in learning how to engage with these devices in a meaningful way. I think at the end of the day, technology can be a value added thing for any child. Again, when you are considering the contextual or unique individual factors of the kid, but then it can be value added. But just as inclusion is still something that a lot of schools might struggle with implementing effectively, I think it's the same thing with technology. But like times a thousand because now we're talking about kids, whether or not they're in special education. We're talking about more schools, more teachers involved. That comes down to an implementation thing or implementation factor about how you use technology in these effective ways. And right now we're still in search of those answers.

Alicia: Yeah, and there was a video too that I was watching, and somebody recommended having a family technology liaison. Where they would have, you know, either be at school sites or they mentioned maybe the public libraries, where there was somebody who was doing research and was helping to educate not just in a school setting, in churches just across the board and helping to have those conversations. And if you are using iPads, you know, or technology in your home, here are different ways you can do it and model that sort of thing too. And so I thought that was kind of interesting to take it out of just the teacher's hands by putting it out into the community too, to reach a larger population.

Leslie: I think that came out of Northwestern university. I do know that now the American Academy of Pediatrics actually has a [media planning tool](#) for families on their website so that families can go through and plan, you know, the amount of time and how they're going to use things. I think it still comes down to, like, the first time we ever saw Kristie face to face, one of the things that she would always ask us was, "what's your what?" I think you need to know what your end goal is before you are using that technology. Otherwise we fall in that boat of using technology as a babysitter because we're just tapped out. And when I say we, I mean as a parent, as an educator, as a caregiver,



watching for somebody, watching somebody else's child. And then for our own selves, like Jolene was talking about her technology addiction, that at a point we use it just to check out.

Kristie: Yeah, for sure. And I think we can all relate to that. So on Leslie's note of being intentional about "what's your what?", I'm going to offer up to this think tank we have gone here today a framework of three things to consider. And just know again that in our show notes we'll put links to the things that we've referenced in terms of videos or studies or tip sheets. There'll be tons of stuff and that one of the things you can download will be our [set of recommendations](#), or this framework about how you can approach being developmentally appropriate, individually appropriate- which is kind of redundant with being developmentally appropriate- but to have a way to start these difficult conversations around screen time with whoever you decide to take that conversation up with.

Kristie: So we're going to say there's three parts to the framework. I'll briefly state them and then again I'll ask the think tank to weigh in to offer up an expansion of it, the idea of one of the parts of the framework. Something that they have tried as a solution if they haven't already mentioned it or expanded upon it. Something that they would, say if you're going to have a conversation with fill in the blank, how could you have that conversation by using this framework.

Kristie: So first as Leslie said is, "what's your what?" So there's always the intentionality. I'll read a quick quote for you to highlight the points of this notion. Why are you using the device or why is the child being exposed to something that is behind the screen? And if your "what" is to pacify, as we've all mentioned, it means that you're using the device in a way that's helping children regulate basically. And that when we are using it to pacify, we're not using it in a way that is helping them really learn what we know about self-regulation, but they become reliant or passive or compliant instead.

Kristie: So if you're using devices to pacify children, then you are training them to not regulate their emotions in a way that they need to. Which is part of their normal development. Being reliant on a device to do that instead. So that's the quick quote to say "that's the addiction."



Kristie: So, we've also used that word, or my crutch, or that I can't leave it behind. It's because many would say we're using the device, as Leslie said to check out, to calm down, to process something that we don't really want to face. Whatever it is, but that we're actually teaching children to use the device to regulate versus learning to do what we know as the hard work, which is to become self-regulated. But there are other ways with the intention. The intention can be to engage. It can be to increase my knowledge and my experiences, which you've heard several people say.

Kristie: So we'll come back to if anybody else wants to expand upon knowing "what's your what." That's framework part number one. Number two is, who's the child? And this is I think what Ashley invited us to think about, the context. How old is the child? What are their abilities? I would even say what is their whole map of screen time? Again, look at them holistically. As Jolene said, look at that modeling and second hand screen time as well. So that we want to look broadly at who this little learner is, and in a district, make sure that we understand that our policies that might be decided for 14 year-olds may not apply to four year-olds. And so we have to really think about who is the learner.

Kristie: And then the third part of the framework is that how are we actually using the technology or the screen time? How much thinking does it provide for the child? How much movement, how much interaction versus just broadly saying "X", "no screen time." So thinking about our intention, "what's our what", what's the why behind our actions? Who is this child? All kinds of layers about that, about the complexity of the young child. And then how is this time, this app, this video, this TV show, this district assessment, how is it promoting interaction, engagement? Is it actually distributing content? All of that stuff. So that's the quick framework at a glance.

Kristie: All right, think tank. Where would you go from here in terms of your solutions, your suggestions, your ideas about that framework. In any order is fine.

Jolene: It is most important to me to find a solution is to find out how to connect with my parents. My young parents, my parents that are overwhelmed. To kind of give them the information without being judgmental. Without letting them know that yes, I know you have a learning game on there and that's great, but one hour would be better than six. To kind of sympathize there. I know you just want to get to the grocery store and I understand and I have done it, but maybe to show them better ways to use it, ways to



supplement it, if they're going to use it. Look, let's go on a hunt in your community and see if you take pictures of different letters or different shapes. Or finding a way to connect with my parents on giving them information in a way that would benefit them rather than make them shy away from whatever I'm saying.

Kristie: It's really about scaffolding and supporting and respecting. We haven't walked in their shoes and so to decide for them what is right comes across as very judgmental and not helpful. So working with them, I like how you talked about, you know, simultaneously educating, expanding on what they're going to naturally do and what's a part of their routine already. But that always that back and forth of educating. That's, I like that mix.

Leslie: And when we think about using that technology, I think something that we haven't touched on, we always have rules for using things in the classroom. So if we taught the students rules for using technology. I use technology when I need to find new information. I use technology when I need to see how to do something. I use technology when I need to communicate with somebody that's not in the room. There are great rules for fifth graders up, but where are the technology rules for our young children. And if we had rules and we could have sound discussions around those rules and maybe had those rules posted, then it may be easier to share. These are the rules for technology in our classroom with parents and it works well for us here.

Leslie: So how can we help you with a set of rules at home for your child with technology. You know, is there, are you going to allow a 30 minute time where they can just use the technology to pacify themselves so that you can have respite? Or are you gonna use technology interactive as if you would, when we send books home for you? Like what would the rules surrounding that technology be? Because the technology is not evil, but it can be perceived as evil when we have to deal with the fallout of inappropriate use.

Alicia: Well I think in creating rules like that just to have a common discussion fellow early childhood teachers or administrators just kind of going on a side note. A lot of the times when you do have iPads and apps there, it's one dimensional and it's row and it's not very interactive. So even if that, there was a common thread across early childhood to say this is what we're using it for, just to be mindful that when we are using technology, we ourselves are making sure that we're following those guidelines when we're implementing it in our classrooms.



Ashley: Yeah, and another thing I would add is I think that one of the biggest concerns or fears that a lot of people have about the extent to which children and even ourselves are engaged in a lot of screen time is this idea that it's taking away from real human interaction. It's often for many people resulting in less physical activity. You know, all of those sorts of things. And I think that we are on the horizon of some exciting new possibilities. Like when we think about not just virtual reality, but now we have things like augmented reality where you might be using a screen or a device, but it's also you know, augmenting the environment you're in. And not just in terms of augmented reality in that context. But I think about my own children and how they engage with technology. And that's not to say that either of them haven't had those periods in their lives where they, I started to see a problem developing.

Ashley: Like for example, my youngest being more traditionally autistic at some point used to stim on like videos of logos, for example. And that was not healthy, to allow him to stim like that. Or my oldest at one point was so into video games, you know, I had to set parental controls that turned off the computer at specific times so that there was no way he could access it and that kind of thing. But then what I found over time as I've been more thoughtful about putting those limits on it, it is, I've been more intentional about making sure that they're not just using, you know, getting lost in technology. But also using it in a way that supports them and their own growth. Its' that in terms of my youngest, when I mentioned his tendencies to stim, particularly on logos, he might during downtime, because he is a self-learner who likes to teach himself about black holes and science and all of that just completely on his own.

Ashley: But one of his non-learning things are, is this thing with logos. And so he might spend a little bit of time finding some logos he wants. And then he would have them printed out and then he'd be using them, you know, in the environment and away from the computer. That created its own problem where he started putting out all these logos and now he has hundreds of them and he would just take up the entire, you know, basement, which is his toy room floor, with them. And that wasn't realistic either. And so for his birthday he got a digital picture frame to put the photos or the logos that he likes on it. And so now we're back into a whole different technology, or a screen, but it's a way of helping him regulate that interest, so that frame can be hanging up or you know, on a stand while he's doing learning and other tests.



Ashley: In the case of my older son who's very into Minecraft and Roblox and all of that, he's very much into those things but on the design side. So he's been teaching himself things like programming, computer coding. He in some of these Roblox games, which you know, at first blush, I just wanted to ban both my kids from Roblox at a certain point, you know, reading things that were happening in there thinking, well there's really no use of this, you know, that would benefit them. But then what I found is he was actually developing entire games himself and teaching himself those skills. He was creating businesses in there and teaching himself about labor standards and how to run a business and effectively support your employees. He was teaching himself all sorts of things that are far, far above the capacity of what I was thinking an 11 year old would know.

Ashley: And then on top of that he's into something called urban exploration, which is this idea of going out to old and abandoned places or retail stores that are no longer around or have been replaced. And so he kind of bridges the technology piece and reality and real life in that sense, too, because he has a YouTube channel where he likes to document that, and he's a kid who has been too immobile. He doesn't move enough. This is something I've been working on with him, but now since this interest has become so important to him, he's out every day walking around for... As long as we do things out in the community and documents that, but then they come back to technology as well.

Ashley: So my point is, I mean, I find that I keep circling back to it, is that context is absolutely positively everything. And I think that, in terms of thinking about that context, it's also important when we're thinking about the concerns, the worries, and the fears that we all have about our children and ourselves getting too stuck in this technology, is finding those mediums in those ways that we are bridging things with the quote "real world" at the same time.

Kristie: Yeah, for sure .Beth.

Beth: So that makes me think with the younger child, you know, the three, four and five-year-olds, and teaching them the difference between real and pretend. And I can give the example of work out in a forest, taking a field trip and a little child was scraped by a branch and a little bit of blood. And he took the blood and looked at it and had a terrible time because he, all he did at home was play video games and if there was blood- someone would die. And so he was afraid that he was going to die because there was blood. So just having those conversations about what's real and pretend and what might



be the real life versus what's you might find a computer or some type of screen. And teaching them that it is what we can do for the young kids to prepare them for later on.

Kristie: Yeah. So I want to start to wrap us up. If each of you has something brief to say, or if three people want to go, that's cool. But what I hope is that people walk away with from this conversation is that this is a complex issue. And I'm kind of like with Jolene, I know that we don't have a study or a body of studies that say this causes that. But we still can't say that smoking causes cancer in some places, right? So if we wait that long, we'll go through generations of people that are going to be negatively impacted. So I think there's enough evidence to show that there are definitely health impacts. There's definitely rewiring of the brain when we do different activities. So all of that is known.

Kristie: So I don't think that this is supposed to convince people of the good or the bad, but rather that it's complicated, but that we have to be vigilant and we have to be proactive in our conversations. And I think putting a big X and saying "no screen time" is not realistic, but we have to understand the implications. The younger the brain, the longer term duration of the exposure and certainly the content of the exposure.

Kristie: So I just want to kind of say on the record that while we're trying to walk the line, we do know that there are some significant downsides of screen time and we don't want to diminish those, but we also want to celebrate some of these amazing things that technology could do for children with diverse abilities, children of military families always come to my mind. Even just if you're wanting to connect with people on a more global perspective, I think is just amazing.

Kristie: So I wanted to just sort of acknowledge the rub. If you all were like listening in and hoping that we were gonna like give you the definitive number of hours, minutes, seconds that children should or should not be. There are definitely recommendations out there, but again, how people have defined screen time or what they mean by screen time varies greatly. So just be really cautious of some of those sensational blogs and articles, but also know that this is a huge issue that we have to be as revolutionaries on the forefront in our conversations.

Kristie: So as we close out think tank, what are your recommendations? What's your takeaway? What's your go to. Quickly, what can you share with our, our fellow revolutionaries? So Leslie, start us up.



Leslie: The one thing I would like to say is I am glad that my child was grown before the iPad came out. One of the things that sparked this and one of the that makes you go, hmm, is when you think about the people who create this technology, the people who write the apps, they do not allow their children access to mobile devices and to iPads. So these are brilliant people. What do they know that we don't know? I mean, I think we know, but it's the unsaid thing. If a doctor would not be willing to give their child a vaccination, but want to vaccinate your child, you know, it's one of those things to think about. So if I were to have a grandchild right now, I would not let my grandchild have access to my phone or to my iPad until they were five.

Kristie: All right. Beth?

Beth: My message would be as a early childhood educator, try to be a leader and educate your administrators, your parents, whoever you can and be a voice for the young children.

Kristie: All right, Ashley.

Ashley: To go back to everything I've been saying is that I believe we really have to consider the learning needs, the individual characteristics of each child developmentally, socially, emotionally and so on and so forth. When we're making decisions about how to use or not use screen time effectively. Most children will have different needs and as I said before, there's no one size fits all recommendation or guideline. So we, on that same token, should consider that when we're looking at the guidelines from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) or the [World Health Organization](#) and those things, that given that we don't have a shared definition of what screen time is even, do we mean that when we want to limit, you know, a five-year-old screen time to say two hours or whatever that particular guideline is, do we mean are we including learning time or other things? So that's one thing to consider.

Ashley: I think that all of this has clear implications for how we design learning opportunities in our classrooms. But I also think that we have existing frameworks out there that are available to help us in that task. So if we think back to things like, you know, universal the science of learning or differentiated instruction or tiered learning framework, these are all approaches that, you know, overtime us as teachers could use to design a classroom that is connected but with meaningful learning experiences that would take into account individual needs of different children.



Ashley: And so the entire point I have taken away from all of this is that technology and screen time is always going to amplify existing teaching or parenting practices. So if it's used and implemented thoughtfully and carefully that there is an opportunity to provide value added learning experiences to all children.

Kristie: All right, good. Alicia?

Alicia: Well, I agree with all the other participants, but I also feel that as early childhood educators, we also need to remember that young children learn through exploring with all of their senses and moving their whole body and interacting with materials and having face to face conversation. So although we have lots of screens and it can help to expand their learning, I think overall interacting with a human being and other children in the classroom have the most impact for student learning.

Kristie: Oh yeah. Very good. Very good. Jolene.

Jolene: And totally to piggyback off Alicia, the power of relationships and interaction. As a introverted child, I'd probably would never have left my house if I could have ordered pizza online. Or, you know, I mean, if we think back of our most favorite memories, they're not all that really good posts on Facebook or that really awesome tweet. It was something that we did with somebody else. You know, if we're not intentional, we're going to be robbing children of those experiences.

Kristie: Fabulous. All right. Thank you. Thank you. Each and every one of you and I look forward to additional conversations and of course people's feedback and ideas on this really important topic of screen time.