How Screens Rewire Your Child’s Brain (Why Device Dysregulation™ Is Rising) Transcript

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Devices, regulation, and the nervous system

I don't want anybody to think that devices really are the devil. And certainly it's not about being anti-tech. It's really about understanding how constant nervous system stimulation keeps kids stuck in high alert.

That's an important distinction because we really want to list technology as here. how do we keep our kids regulated? They're on devices and how did we manage that?

And I definitely talk all about it in my book, but we are here and we're going to talk about. After COVID makes me think of a family I was working with and Tom and Rachel, and they had a 12 year old named Eli.

And just everybody knows I change everybody's names. This is just normal stuff that everyone experiences. But after COVID and so much time doing online instruction, they really struggled with getting their 12 year off.

Like any time they did, he was like, snap. beat and moody and anxious. And then it started affecting his sleep. They were finding him in the closet with the device.

Then they started to think, well, his hormones or he has ADHD, they wind up coming to me and really, you don't need a brain map. What wound up happening is that it just showed an over-activated stress pattern.

He didn't have ADHD. There wasn't a history to support that. And he just couldn't power down his brain. His brain was jacked up. That brain communication was stuck.

Yes, we could use tools like our PEMF, which we're going to talk about that next week, but there are a lot of other things we can do. And so what they started to do, were going talk including setting boundaries and daily screen resets, and they had to change some stuff at home because he wasn't the only one.

Case study: Eliu2019s post-COVID device dysregulation

What is device dysregulation? What does it mean from a brain perspective? It's not just that it's too much screen time. It is that nervous system imbalance is leading to a constant overstimulation that they're craving.

And it comes from dopamine spikes, where they are getting rapid fire, entertainment, scrolling. Really does, we know, lead to these dopamine hits. and it rewires the attention centers, our frontal lobe, to expect that level of stimulation.

And the brain becomes addicted to that novelty and loses tolerance for calm. That is a dangerous, dangerous mix because in order to be regulated, we need moments of calm and I don't know about you all.

I would love to hear from you. For people that are watching this live, I find it hard to get off my device. I find it physically hard to let go of that stimulation.

I have to actively do things to counter it including powering down. When that brain network starts craving this constant stimulation, you start to see under stimulated behaviors, low motivation, on board, all of those things.

So it's not that your child is lazy or their brain is, lazy. It's actually overloaded. What do we do? Each scroll that you're child does notifies that the brain that there's a mini dopamine hit short term.

Pleasure long term depletion and the stress system or amygdala, I call it hemagal does sometime HPA access.

stays switched on even when screens are off.

And that's what I'm talking about with myself. Your sleep cycles get disrupted. That blue light suppresses melatonin. Brain literally forgets how to power down.

You also start to see a loss of executive functioning.

What device dysregulation does to the brain

So from planning to impulse control. I think this is a big part of why we saw such a dramatic increase in ADHD diagnoses, even in adults during the pandemic.

It's like leaving your car engine on all the time when you're parked overnight. You eventually run out of gas. That's the same thing that's what's happening from a brain.

What are signs? You already know some of the signs and they're different because sometimes again, we talk about the overstimulation, the ragers, as soon as you ask them to come off, explosions and irritability and all that, the constant boredom.

But you also can see those focus problems. You can emotional flatness, sensory overload, difficulty transitioning from devices. These aren't just attitudes.

symptoms, right, because we often think, well, they're just doing this. This is signs of the nervous system saying, hello, I'm having a hard time. What do we do about it?

Because we're all in the same boat. And I think it's great. We're in this same both and we actually support each other. that where maybe you can do this together and you talk about it together, and set boundaries together because holy cow, it makes it a lot easier.

We have a group of friends where our kids are not allowed to use their devices during the week. Who has time for devices? There's so much flipping homework in high school.

If I didn't have my kids' friends doing the same thing, I would be hearing about. So please, support another mother, a father, or grandparent or caregiver out and band together because you're going to get backtalk from your kids.

I'm going use my comms framework to help us walk out of this so that we're not in constant device dysregulation states because we can't live like this.

This is some hard, hard stuff. And for sure, this is a problem for parents. In comms, C-A-L-M-S, we're gonna walk through that. So step one is that when your brain is flooded with stimulation for a child, We have to co-regulate, that's the C.

Can your child borrow your comm? It is truly one of the most powerful things that you have as a parent. and please don't dismiss that. Please go back and watch some of the episodes or listen to the episode related to co-regulation.

I recently did one on ways you're regulating and ways your not. They're just information. It's actually so easy to do some these things. And the more you regulate, the easier it is for you to regulate and the most you can help your child find that calm because you're their anchor.

When you are approaching your kid, I don't care, you may be irritated. I found out something yesterday with my own kid and I was like, yes, what's happening?

Signs of overstimulation and family boundaries

There's no devices this weekend. He put up a fuss and I was like, and then he came back and he realized that

that's just an appropriate punishment. So when we regulate, we're going to send them a cue that they need to regulate.

Doesn't mean they're gonna, but what it will do is help them find it more easily. And also once they do dysregulate, they are more likely to step in. Okay.

A in comms is avoiding personalizing. This isn't about disrespect or disobedience. They're dys-regulated. They're not able to access their frontal lobes.

They are thinking. Their calm in the same way. And if you come at them, guns ablaze in, in their red, they're going to meet you with that red. If you meet them with a calm, again, you don't know if they are going be calm but they more likely and the more that you have these interactions.

But they are on this device going 100 miles an hour, getting all the dopamine hits and they're there and there struggling to downshift. So when we take it personally, because A is avoiding personalizing, we have to ignore their stress response.

OK, not easy. And you can always pause. You don't have the say anything. walk away. Then L is looking for root causes. Is this really about the game? Is it about them wanting to be with their friends?

is this about transitions? What is it that is causing this? And the number one missed opportunity parents make on devices, let me say this again, the opportunity that parents are missing and leading to device dysregulation is, it is not setting up boundaries in advance.

That leads to so much conflict because you're trying to get your kid off this device. And there aren't boundaries. And they're like, well, they should know.

I mean, we were playing Atari in our basement, OK? And we didn't have a finished basement. You know what I'm talking about, my 80s moms and dads. We didn' have that same dopamine hit constantly happening for us.

So predictable boundaries and predictable means what? You are being consistent. you must be consistent, it creates safety in the brain. It's a lot easier.

You're not yelling, you're being fair and clear about what the boundaries are. And it sets that clear predictable limits before the device turns on.

The CALMS framework: co-regulation and boundaries

Once the devices on and you try to boundary set, what's happening? They're in a dysregulated state. They can't access their frontal lobes. That means reasoning and logic are out the door.

So here's an example. You can play for 30 minutes. and then it's time for dinner, okay? Let's set the timer together. Now, I have lots of different kinds of kids that I work with, including my own.

My kids have, we use technology, Gryphon with a G, and it is budgeted time. That is it, that's all they get. So we can turn it on and we turn off, And my kids don't say anything.

There's no more reactions. It's just what it is. And we even do this with our 20 year old and they'll now politely come down and say, and I don' have perfect kids, people.

So please know this. They will polietly come dow and try to negotiate based on pre-existing things that we've done. Here are the things you can do to earn more time.

Or they will say do you mind if My friend Tommy is on. Do you mind if I finish it? And then I will say, because again, if they're calm, I'll talk to them.

How much time do you think you need? Well, think I need about this. OK. And you have boundaries that are there, and it really is incredibly helpful. If there's transition in this, looking for root causes, If the transition is constantly a problem, number one, go back to the boundaries in advance.

But you gotta think about transition warnings, and you have to think sensory transition. So let me talk about that. Transition warnings is you can set your timer on, I do it on the microwave, because nobody else's.

I use it to heat up my neck wrap thing. We don't heat food in there. And I let the timer go off so that they have get their butts up physically, take them out of the game.

and turn it off, otherwise that beeping is going to make everybody cuckoo, including the cats. So you have 10 minutes left. You have five minutes. It avoids that last second surprise to the nervous system.

Keep your tone steady. No personalization, no annoyance coming through. Your calm regulates thirst. Now, one of my secret weapons is always a sensory transition.

Transitions, sensory resets, and coping strategies

So if you're expecting your kid to go to do a device to outside activity, their homework, church, whatever, dinner, they need a sensory transition because the brain needs grounding after being on a devices.

You have to replace that digital stimulation with sensory input and that will reset the nervous system. These are habits. I talk a lot about in my book that these habits are just like brushing your teeth.

We have to do them proactively. The more you do things to calm and regulate the Nervous System, the more it will do it. Automatically, without cueing, you want self-regulating humans.

All of us that have dysregulated kids are afraid our kids will live in our basement. You absolutely have to really work on regulating yourself when you're approaching your kids on this.

Sensory transitions could be jumping on a trampoline, it could just be quick jumping jacks into all of these Asian liver exercises, it could be squats, drinking cold water, having bubbly water could, be having a sensory snack, deep breaths, walking outside, getting a barefoot, whatever.

You just have to do it and you have be consistent about it. And that's important. So these small sensory shifts discharge that excess energy and get them to reconnect to their body making real world engagement easier for them without over relying on you because that device that they've just been on has sent them into overdrive and we have to reconnect before we can expect them to do anything else.

And this is just a reality of modern living. We can wish that our kids didn't dysregulate on devices. What are you gonna do? Not have a device? I mean, most instruction today, I had to buy my own textbooks.

because there are no textbooks. They do have books, physical books that they read in English, but no more textbooks and I was like, oh, we need some textbooks, Dr.

Rowe needs to look stuff up. I'm not going to be looking up online. So M in comms is modeling coping strategies. Show them what you want. Don't be like on your phone going, get off your device.

Monkey see, monkey do. Kids need to see regulation to learn it. You do some exercises when you get of your devices. You say out loud, okay, I'm going to work on this for 30 minutes and then I need a break because my nervous system is in overdrive.

And it's not hard to do this. It just becomes a habit. How do you cope with too much and talk too device time and to talk about it with your kids and let them know?

And what's great about is You're showing them the real world impact without judging them. And that's really powerful, right? Because kids feel very criticized and judged, especially when you're in conflict over devices all the time.

Then S is supporting the nervous system. After screens, you've got to do things. Is it hydration? I'm following Tai Chi with mom. Get in there and do some Tai Chi.

Two minutes. Are you having magnesium? Are your putting PMF on? are you praying? or are your doing breath work? I love sensory movement to reset. So what are doing to support the nervous system?

And yes, we want our kids to play outside, but are there other kids out there? Is there an activity? Do you have to go out?

Supporting the nervous system and tolerating boredom

There do you? Have a dog like what are they doing to get out. There we can't just I think we all saw in the pandemic when you were like just go play with your stuff.

It's not so easy. Sometimes kids need some structure. Not forever, But what can you do to scaffold it so that it begins to happen more naturally for them?

We strengthen that nervous systems ability to handle stimulation of any kind. and all of us are overstimulated by these devices, then they can calm down faster the next time.

So even if it's not snapping in right at that moment, the more you practice it, The more the nervous system says, oh, I can go into a parasympathetic state, that's my hot tub state.

I could be calm. If we keep them overstimated, it is constantly crashing and clashing. We don't want to clash with our kids over devices, but what are we doing?

Comms teaches kids control without conflict and there's a lot of power in learning and we need to do that. So when we are boundaries in advance, the transition warning, this sensory, it's incredibly important to that And remember, screens aren't the villain here because we have to learn to live with that.

Disregulation is. And when you regulate the brain naturally, the Brain will start craving regulation. That's incredibly, incredibly important because the more we stay in a stimulated state, The more your child will reject calm.

It's like all those people who tell me they hate massage. I'm like, And I get it, there's a lot of reasons why people have, you know, find that. And absolutely, Rick, boredom is great for kids.

But what are we setting in place for them? What are showing them to do when they're bored? Is it art? is it playing outside? And are remodeling time off our devices?

I'm the worst culprit of it. And I talk about it with my kids. I need to work for this amount of time. Boredom does spark imagination. And how are we showing kids how to play with things?

My Max was home schooled because he was, I found home schooling because of what number one reason people home-school outside of religion is because health.

And my Max, was a pants kid and we had to do it because, he's out of his mind and he, and then we got to treatment and all that other stuff. But it is incredibly amazing to watch homeschoolers play.

They play like eighties kids. Right? A stick becomes exciting. I remember this super dysregulated kid of somebody who worked for me. And he said, what is this?

So weird. They're playing with sticks. And he struggled with mental health his whole life. And sometimes, yes, physical boredom can be distressing for kids at times.

You don't have to rescue. Don't rescue your kids. Stress and learning how to cope and manage with stress is one of the greatest gifts you're going to ever give your kid.

Now, if your child is always stressed all the time, you got yourself a problem. You need some PMF. You needs some neurofeedback. Need to find a doctor row or work with me.

We need to learn how to tolerate boredom. And again, devices don't have to be the devil and the enemy. How are we going to do that? How we gonna work to that together?

I really enjoyed not being monitored all the time. Like today, these kids have too much. They're being everything they do is being documented. But we don't have to wish for that.

What we have do is be as regulated as possible. And I hope today's conversation left you feeling hopeful because I know some of times this is very real.

This is a very high conflict daily battle with your kids. and rewatch this, listen, think about it, set those boundaries, use tools, and be as regulated as possible when you're approaching your child and teach them to regulate.

And please know that if you take two minutes to just reset yourself multiple times a day, you are not only making yourself more regulated, which you are more available as a parent and you're changing your child.

You're showing them what to do. And you changing all the generations after that. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our Disregulation Insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.