

EPISODE 01

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:05.2] AARESS LAWLESS: Hi there. Welcome to Today's Homeschool Teen, a podcast for homeschooling parents who want to help their teens meet the challenges of high school and reach their incredible God-given potential. I'm your host, Aaress Lawless. On behalf of our team at Dual Credit at Home, thank you for joining me.

We are thrilled to have Leah Nieman, a homeschool mom, author and technology pro joining us today. Now this is a jam-packed episode about everything teens, social media and digital technology. Buckle your seatbelts.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:40.1] AARESS LAWLESS: Leah, you mentioned that you are a homeschool mom. Tell us a little bit about your homeschool story.

[0:00:45.8] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. I always tell people that I would love to say that I just had my kids and look down with them as babies, and just instantly knew I was going to homeschool them. I feel that's what we love to hear when we talk to other homeschool moms and that's so many – that's the story here, right? From so many other homeschool moms, but that is not our homeschool story at all. I actually have my kids and my thought was they're going to go to private school, but my husband was in the navy and he got out and we had moved back to where the area where he grew up.

We started our daughter in a private school and my husband was working second shift. We had this tsunami of things happen all at once. We had moved and we had been here long enough where things had settled in. When you move, you have this high, right? Oh, it's new, we love it. Then you settle in and you're like, "Ah, it's a change."

He gotten out of the military, and so we were about six months in and we're adjusting to the move from military life to civilian life and she was going to school and preschool was fine, but

then all of a sudden, we realized she goes to school full-time now, now that she's in preschool and he's on second shift and we never see each other as a family. Our time is very, very limited.

All of these changes are mounting. My daughter just is crying every night as she goes to bed. "I miss daddy. I hate living here. Why did we move?" This was going on for – we're going into two months of it. I'm now seeing down the road and thinking, "Okay, I don't know when this second shift is going to change." My really only exposure to homeschooling was when I was in high school, I had a cousin that homeschooled.

When you ask someone how they're doing, but you're really just being polite? This is the conversation. I said to my husband, "I don't know. Well, I guess I could homeschool." He says, "Oh, honey. That would be great." I cried for two days, because I was completely overwhelmed. I didn't know how I was going to do it. I really didn't even know what – I have no idea of anything. I reached out to the local homeschooling organization in our area and the convention had just ended Saturday. This is on Monday when I called them.

[0:03:01.1] AARESS LAWLESS: Oh, just missed it.

[0:03:02.5] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah, I did. The president, his wife problem, I probably sounded like a crazy woman on the phone. They said, "Come on over to our house and sit with us for the day." I just watched them and just thought, "Okay, I think I can do this." We just still then, and then along the way I saw all of the wonderful things about homeschooling and it was just perfect for our family and we never looked back.

That was our homeschooling journey. I tell people, like I think God just had to trick me into it, but it's wonderful and I mean, even my kids now being grown and have graduate from our homeschooling has said – it was a wonderful experience for our family.

[0:03:42.9] AARESS LAWLESS: That's incredible. Your kids now are grown, you have one that's graduating very shortly, so how are old are they now?

[0:03:49.3] LEAH NIEMAN: My daughter is 25 and my son is 22.

[0:03:52.7] AARESS LAWLESS: That's awesome. Incredible. Now as a homeschool mom, how did you end up moving into becoming a technology consultant?

[0:04:00.3] LEAH NIEMAN: Oddly enough, I fell into that too. We're starting to see a pattern with me, aren't we?

[0:04:04.8] AARESS LAWLESS: Yes. Incredible how God works.

[0:04:07.5] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. Along the way with homeschooling, I was – what in homeschooling, we like to call to is a curriculum junkie. As I started homeschooling and learning about different ways of homeschooling, I like that whole thematic type unit study approach to homeschooling. It was just a fun aspect of our homeschooling. I had lots of curriculum and was always telling my husband, "I need another bookshelf."

We came out of the whole music industry with the digital media file sharing thing and e-books was emerging on the market. A friend of mine, Sally Krause who was in the publishing industry said to me, "Hey, what do you think about an e-book site?" That was just emerging technology for homeschool, for homeschooling parents.

I had been looking for downloadable stuff, because again, I had so much curriculum and really there was only some mainstream publishers just starting to put out some really small unit studies, like Evan Warren Scholastic. I was like, "Oh, that's a great idea." She's like, "Yeah, we could do it maybe part-time, try to find some homeschool publishers that would be open to it." We have the to offer the technology to protect their files and that was a really big issue. I mean, we were just two home-school moms that we could do 10 hours a week, right? For the site.

[0:05:23.6] AARESS LAWLESS: I see where this is going.

[0:05:26.2] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. We just jumped in and we went to Book Expo America that summer. We were at that show and we realized there, we were like, "Wow, this is going to be bigger than what we thought it was." We launched currclick.com. Through that website, a couple years into it, the technology for online classes started. We started doing online classes.

Through the online classes, a couple things happened; number one is most of our marketing was online. We started doing all of our marketing through Facebook and a lot of online stuff, because that's where our parents were, right? We had this neat view of what happened in the online space. Then we started offering online classes and we started seeing behaviors with students, like sharing personal information, but then also then saying, like when we would say, "Hey, don't share your phone number in the online space." Them saying, "Oh, well my mom said it was okay."

Yeah. We started doing some little seminars with our students when they started doing this, when the semester would start, both on the parent facing side and the student side. We had that happening, and so that got me digging in to safety issues and online safety and things. At that time now, my kids are 9-11, 11-13. I'm walking through all this technology stuff to my kids at home too as a parent. I'm having it on the workspace and then also I'm dealing with it as a parent at home.

It just was this unique perspective, I think where it just touched me both at a work level, but then on a personal level too with my own kids. In the parenting space, we weren't really talking about it as parents, or it was very controversial. As I'm maybe having issues with my kids when I would bring it up in church groups or in homeschool groups, parents would get very agitated and they would say things like, "Well, my child just doesn't spend time on the computer, or my child's not on Facebook." Some of these situations, I would know that they were, or I would have this feeling like, "Well, I know some kids are because we have these kids in online classroom."

[0:07:31.1] AARESS LAWLESS: Exactly.

[0:07:33.4] LEAH NIEMAN: It caused me to dig deeper. It just really became a passion. Then as we began to travel to homeschool conventions CurrClick, what we started to begin seeing was parents would come into our booth, because we were one of the only online providers at that time. Parents began to come into our booth and say, "Hey, I don't know. This isn't a question particularly about your website, but I don't know where else to go because there aren't really any techie."

They would say techie providers here is what they would call us, which again, I didn't look at myself as techie at that time. They would come up real close and they would say, "Hey, my child is doing with pornography, what do I do?" Or these really heartbreaking – where the parent was really struggling.

We began to say, "Man, we really need to talk about these issues." These are issues that we need to talk about, because we aren't just seeing it in our classrooms and we aren't the only parents that are addressing this with our kids at home. There are other parents that are walking this walk and they're searching for other parents, they're searching for parental advice. We need to start getting out there and talking about it and digging in. That's really how I began to speak about technology.

Again, it feels I fell into it, but it really became a passion of mine, because I think what happened in my heart was the more I talk with these parents and the more I felt their pain and their struggle and the frustration, the more their struggle felt like it was my struggle, or just it really tied my heart to their heart.

[0:09:02.3] AARESS LAWLESS: Exactly. I think I've seen that same naive attitude about, "Oh, this doesn't apply to my kids, or my kids aren't on Facebook." That may be true, but there's more social media outlets out there than Facebook to worry about.

[0:09:15.0] LEAH NIEMAN: Exactly. Yes.

[0:09:16.3] AARESS LAWLESS: Let's talk big picture. Give me your take on the overall state of the online world as relates to teens on social media. What social media apps are they using? What are their unique pros and cons? What are you seeing?

[0:09:30.9] LEAH NIEMAN: Right. Okay, so first of all, teens aren't using Facebook. Let's just get that out there right outside. Right. Teens are teens. They want to be where their parents aren't. That's not really that they're rebelling. It's just the normal teenage mind and heart is teens are struggling to become their own person. That's what the teenagers are, right? They're trying to figure out who I am, where's my identity? That internal struggle that teens have. That's playing out in the online world. They're still trying to create these spaces of their own.

Whenever adults began to all of a sudden start using an app that teens are using, they will find another app. Snapchat is the most used app that teens are at. Why do they like it? Snapchat seems to be very scary for parents, because it's disappearing messages, right? They might scare these parents. Why teens like it is because it feels like it's having a normal conversation. It feels it's not being recorded to them, even though we tell them whatever you say in the digital space is on a server somewhere, right?

It feels more having a conversation they would have in the hallway of their church, or in the hallway of their school, where that conversation isn't recorded. You have the conversation and it drops, if that makes sense.

[0:10:54.2] AARESS LAWLESS: It does. It does make sense.

[0:10:56.8] LEAH NIEMAN: That's what they seek. From a parental perspective, we always – our brain just goes to well, they can sex there, or they can they say things that are inappropriate. We have to understand that they can do that on any platform. We have to address the character and not the app. We have to keep enforcing that with our child and not be so – not placed a burden on the app, that's the balance that we have to have.

Don't tell your child an app is a sexing app, because they can sex anywhere, if that's what we're worried about. We have to address that as a character issue. That's a character issue.

Now, certainly if we know that our child is struggling with those issues, we want to steer them towards other apps, or say you can't be on that app. We have to stop placing the blame on the app and start addressing things as character issues with our kids. Snapchat is the most used. Instagram, kids love Instagram. The more that we flock there as adults, we have to understand that our kids are going to use it less and less, or they're going to do things like, have us listed as not seeing their Instagram stories. They have to understand.

All of a sudden if you're like, "Well, I used to see everything in my teens on Instagram, but I don't see anything now." Well, chances are they probably have you blocked from seeing their Instagram story, so understanding that.

The other thing that our teens really like is they texting apps. A lot of parents will ask me, “Well, I don't understand, because I just use texting on my phone,” but texting on your phone doesn't have the features that some of the texting apps have that our teens like. They want apps that go beyond just doing texting. Can they do video, live video with it? Can they have all the emojis and the filters? Kids love the filters.

We may again, look at some of the filters in Instagram and Snapchat. If we may not use them as much as our teens do and our tweens, but they love that. They love the ability to throw a filter on and use all those extra features. That's a lot of where we're going for the younger age for the tweens and things, we're really starting to see a lot of apps that are number one, gamified and then also games that have social sharing in it.

[0:13:06.3] AARESS LAWLESS: Interesting.

[0:13:07.2] LEAH NIEMAN: We're seeing that at a very young age. We're starting to see apps that are geared towards eight and nine-year-olds that have a very social component, so chatting within that. The whole market is really shifting at where kids are learning from a very, very young age to interact and interact almost with strangers, just like it's just part of the world. Those are a lot of the trends that we're seeing across the board with kids in general.

[0:13:34.9] AARESS LAWLESS: That's incredible. I had no idea. Now, what would you say is the biggest threats coming down? Obviously, if you have eight-year-olds that are learning to be socially connected at that age and talking to strangers, that's a threat. What about virtual reality? How do you think that's going to play in?

[0:13:50.9] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. I'm glad you brought that up, because it does – The biggest threat – I almost hate commenting on it because it seems it's so scary for a parent, but it's something that we really need to –

[0:14:00.5] AARESS LAWLESS: Sure. Yeah. Biggest concern.

[0:14:02.2] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah, yeah. It is. That virtual reality space, it gives kids the understanding of like, everyone is my friend. That's a developmental thing, right? Kids that are very, very young, it's very hard for them to understand at eight, 10, even 13-years-old that I

meet someone online and I'm not sure that who they say they are is really who they are. It's hard to teach them red flags, right? That's something they learn around along the way.

When we begin to see a lot of that social, what I call social sharing in virtual reality apps, or in apps at a very, very young age, that's something that we really have to watch for as parents. That's why I tell parents, learn the apps that your children are on. Can you get in there and shut that down? Can they play a game and you have that totally turned off, using parental controls that they can't go in and adjust, especially for your kids that are maybe 11 and 12 that may go, "Oh, I'm just going to go ahead and change it back," right? Because they're tech-savvy, they can do that. Can you shut those off altogether? There's that aspect that we need to be aware of as parents.

The other thing is we're just really now starting to talk about some of the health incidents watching for, right? We're starting to hear terms, like digital dementia and our eyes. How long and what do we use these apps for? The data is just coming out and it's not there yet, because what's happened, Millennials had to go through a whole generation before we began to see some of the repercussions of using some of these digital technologies. Now we're going to have a whole other generation go through where they're heavy, heavy usage. They're going to get all the way into college, right? All the way into their adult years before we say, "Oh, well, they're having some vision issues."

We don't want to go over the line where we begin to run around a chicken with their head cut off and start to yell, "Oh, there's something wrong." There's something wrong when there's not. As parents, we do want to be vigilant and we do want to set our child out for success later on down in life. We do want to be knowledgeable and aware that hey, there could be potential health benefits.

I want to be cautious about these and I do not want my child using technologies for six hours a day, eight hours a day. They need to be looking away from the screen. They need to be looking out from the screen about every 20 minutes. They need to be getting up, if they're – if they're doing an online class even for teens, they need to get up out of their chair every hour and a half, every two hours. They need to go outside, look at nature for at least 15 to 20 minutes. We need to be putting some of those things in place.

I mean, really as we're doing that as our kids or teens, we're teaching them how if they're in a work environment, like I am, I predominantly work online, now I know how to work healthy as an adult. These are healthy habits we want them to create as well.

[0:17:12.0] AARESS LAWLESS: That's awesome. Well, I want to come back to that topic of healthy habits as for adults, because I think parents and I need to hear some of those. As we talk about how we can help set up teens for success, one thing that comes to mind is digital footprints. Now that's a term that you and I might understand, but not all parents understand that. Can you talk about what a digital footprint is, how teens are creating them, even if they don't realize they are, and how that actually can impact future employment and college admission too?

[0:17:42.6] LEAH NIEMAN: Right. A digital footprint is just a trail of data that you create while you're using the internet. It's websites you visit, e-mails you send, information you submit to online services. There's two aspects of your digital footprint; there's your passive, right? That's just everywhere you go online.

Think of it as you're walking through the woods, right? Every footprint that you leave, that's passive. Then there's active and that's things that you're actively doing online. Your photos that you upload, things that you intentionally submit online. I think sometimes, we talk to teens so much about it, like your digital footprint, what you're doing. We forget as parents that we are creating a large part of our child's digital photos.

[0:18:27.0] AARESS LAWLESS: That's right. Mom's blog, mom's Facebook.

[0:18:31.0] LEAH NIEMAN: Yes. We're so hard on our teens, but what have we set about our child the whole time? A lot of parents now from birth, they're creating their child's digital footprint. Sometimes we fail to recognize that. We're out there sharing our frustrations about our child, or putting photos up. Our kids, they are very aware of that. They're very aware of that.

Sometimes, I think as parents and I know this sounds harsh, but I think sometimes as parents, we need to really check ourselves and make sure that we're not doing more to harm our child's digital footprint than they actually might be. We need to really, really set the example for that for our kids, because our kids they'll go and they clean up their digital footprint.

For instance, when my kids went to college they were Facebook users, because Facebook was something that was popular when they were 13. They went through and they were curating their photos. We had a conversation about it and my kids were like, "Well, because when I get to college, that's the first thing people do is they get on Facebook and they get to know you it's awkward. I don't want people looking at my eighth-grade ballet photos."

Where as an adult, I look the same, I don't care. Our kids, they think about that. They understand that social media is the place where people go, it's that first impression. Our kids are keenly aware of that, but sometimes I think we forget as parents that we play a little bit of a role in our child's digital footprint.

[0:20:05.3] AARESS LAWLESS: It is a huge role. I see that all the time as I'm reading blogs from parents. I think parents don't always realize that that's going to be searchable, their kids can find it, their kids probably see it already. Down the road, everybody else can too.

[0:20:18.7] LEAH NIEMAN: Yes. Yeah. There's a way. I had bloggers asked me, "Well, I'm sharing my story." There's a way that you can write and share your story without damaging your child. What is your role? I always tell people, ask, am I sharing my story, or am I really sharing someone else's story? It's just my take on it. Gut check it that way as a parent. When you share your story, the light that you're painting is it are you acting for yourself like here's my struggle, or are you making the other person the main part of that struggle?

[0:21:01.7] AARESS LAWLESS: Right. I think there's some value in writing, pausing, sleeping on it and then deciding if you actually want to hit post.

[0:21:09.4] LEAH NIEMAN: Yes. I mean, if I wrote a fraction of what first went in my mind I mean, it would be a scary place. There's a lot of what I think. I mean, I think there's that for a lot of us as parents, right? Or as humans, I think there's a lot of value and imposing and reflecting and not putting everything out there on social media and just giving our self some time to reflect on it and giving ourselves just a few seconds to ask ourselves, "Is that what I really think, or feel?" Before we put it out there.

[0:21:42.0] AARESS LAWLESS: Exactly. So true. Now the parents, a lot of them are still on Facebook, their kids have moved away to other social media platforms. They're also using different apps. What do you tell parents that come to you and say, "Well, I'm just not tech savvy. Where do I even start?"

[0:22:00.9] LEAH NIEMAN: Right. First, I think that's something that culture, the media has told us. They've told us that we're not tech savvy. I mean, I ask parents all the time like, "How many of us go to IKEA and buy furniture? We don't feel like we have to be a carpenter and put it together, right?" I don't know if you ever put together a piece of IKEA furniture, but it's not the easiest thing in the world. We're all thinking about that, but we've let culture tell us as parents that our kids are tech savvy and we're not.

We don't even read the instructions for these platforms that our kids use. If you go out to most of the apps that our kids are using, they have a blog, they have a frequently asked questions section that literally walk you through using those apps. If we can read instruction manuals for their toys and everything, it's a matter of just reading those instruction manuals. That usually gives us as parents a lot of information. It's information on hey, how do you go in and change this privacy settings? By default, most social media is public by default. It's private when you go in there and change those settings. That's what we have to understand as parents. That's what makes it scary to us is that everything is public and it's wide, right?

It's not when our child does something in a club that they're in or whatever, they say something it stays within that club. When it happened to social media, it just has the ability to go to such a large group. We just need to get in there and change those privacy settings and look at, do they have the ability to change those settings? Then the other big thing as parents that we're always thinking of is can strangers contact them? Do we have the ability to limit that?

That's number one is to go in there and do they have a blog that they have frequently asked questions, to dig in and learn that. Then there are websites that you can follow, comment, since media has a lot of great stuff on the site. The American Association of Pediatrics, they have some great guidelines for parents just in terms of how it affects your child's health, just general guidelines for that.

Then there's also a lot of information from things like Wired Magazine and some tech sources that really make it simple to understand. I think that as a general rule of thumb, we've just been told that and it makes us scared. A lot of times, we're scared of the unknown, right? We just don't search it and we just let people tell us, "Well, that's just over your head, when really it's not."

[0:24:38.7] AARESS LAWLESS: It's true that we're constantly still teaching ourselves all the time and there's no reason why we can't self-teach the new app that's out there.

[0:24:46.9] LEAH NIEMAN: Exactly. Yes.

[0:24:48.2] AARESS LAWLESS: So true. When parents are starting to work on their plan for social media, what are some things that they should keep in mind, those first steps that they can take today as they start crafting their family's digital plan?

[0:25:02.9] LEAH NIEMAN: I always tell parents, start with the end in mind. What the end is always releasing your children as young adults who are good digital citizens and understand how to use these technologies wisely. Think with the end in mind. Because if you don't, you're so focused on the apps and these little things that every time your child has a blip and they will, it just sends you over the edge. It makes you as a parent feel like number one, that you're a failure, number two, that your child's a failure and that they're just never going to recover.

Really keep a focus on the end in mind. Sit down. What's important that your kids know as they leave your home? Have your kids jot down some things that they would like to learn as well, because I think sometimes we forget about that. You might have a child that is like, "Wow, I'd really love to know how to make videos, or I'd really love to know how to make my photos look – I'd really love to know how to do some photo editing."

The really great thing about that as a parent is we get so hung up on social media, social media, social media and we forget that there are tons of tech skills articulately focus on, right? We're so focused on telling our kids what not to do, that we forget to show them what to do. Then it became this issue in our house where it's the struggle and we're always fighting about technology, because we're so focused on the negative that we never show them all the positive things.

When your child leaves your home, isn't it wonderful that you've taught them like, "Hey, here's some apps that can teach you how to focus, here's some apps that if you're struggling with notifications coming through, you can shut them all down so you can focus on writing or getting your college assignments done." Teach them all of those wonderful skills. I've had adults come to me who've gone back to college and they didn't know like, oh, there's apps you can use to throw all your research into that help you just pull in the bibliography for papers. They're like, "Oh, I didn't know that."

Teach your kids all of these great skills. Then take a few days or even a week to really look at the media patterns in your home, because a lot of times we have these struggles and when we sit down, we can see a pattern for it. For instance during dinner time and evening time, is that all of a sudden becoming the time that you guys fight about technology because you realize that, "Oh, that's when technology's the babysitter."

My kids, I look over and my kids have the Scooby Doo eyes, like the zone out eyes. It's really because they want to engage with me, but they're not. They're frustrated and they're just watching YouTube after YouTube after YouTube video. I don't even know what they're doing. Could instead, we take that time and I know they want to learn how to create videos. I say, "Hey, here's what we do during this time." I pulled them into the kitchen with me, so that even on cooking dinner, they're working on their project, but we're engaging during that moment.

[0:28:05.0] AARESS LAWLESS: It's a great idea.

[0:28:07.1] LEAH NIEMAN: I think when we see these little patterns in our home, we can cut out the negativity that's happening on our homes just by having a social media plan. In our home, because my husband works second shift, our dinnertime in all day was our precious family time. It was devices down. We didn't have devices at dinner. When people come into my home and we have family dinners now, it's still device downtime. I'll sometimes defuse the moment by half and you remind everyone when they come back in.

Sometimes it's as simple as a funny thing like, "Okay, everyone take a picture of my beautiful food. Make sure you Instagram that and then put your devices down, because we're going to have dinner."

[0:28:49.7] AARESS LAWLESS: I love it.

[0:28:50.3] LEAH NIEMAN: There are ways that you can really lighten the moment and make things funny, but you have to be intentional and purposeful about that. Look at those patterns, know what your struggles are, know where your successes are, because you want to follow those and expand out on those and then begin to create that plan. Then understand too that those need to be tweaked. What's working for your kids when they're 9 and 11, they need to be tweaked when they're 13 and it's going to need to be tweaked when they're 15.

The other thing that I think that we did that really worked for us was we discuss as a family, things that would really bother us that we share it online. For instance, we have a pool. We just said like, "Hey, I don't want pictures of me out at the pool." Our kids felt they could share too. It created this – we call it a harbor of safety. We wanted our home to be a harbor safety for our kids, so that they never felt something that was said or done in our home became a risk for them that we were going to post on social media. "Hey, so and so said this. Or oh, here's a photo." We wanted home to always be their safe place.

Even as an adult, we want them to know that when they come home, when life feels ugly and scary for them, our home is always a safe place for them to come to. There's never a fear that they can say anything, or they can just be here and it's safe.

[0:30:19.9] AARESS LAWLESS: I think if you start those small steps like you talked about and defusing those difficult things, you're going to build trust with your teen. That if your team feels comfortable coming to you in the little things, they'll be okay with coming to you in the big things.

[0:30:33.4] LEAH NIEMAN: Oh, that's exactly it. I mean, there are times your teen is going to come and they're going to need to come tell you, "Hey, I saw this, or I have a friend that's doing this." It's really upsetting and you need to be calm for one thing. Throughout your child's life, I mean, you're going to have a lot of times where you feel you need to put your fingers in your ear and say, "La, la, la." Your child needs you to listen and be calm, because they feel they are in a very scary storm.

You need to be calm and they need that from you. To keep that happening, to keep them yeah, that level of trust needs to be built, right? Start creating that when they're young. I feel more than anything, having that family plan really is the basis for that. It's all about creating trust with your child and you just keep building on that and building on that. By the time you have to start dealing with a lot of those apps that create fear for us as an adult, hopefully that you're creating that layer of trust, so your child comes to you and they're talking to you about those things.

The other thing too is for with that plan, you're having a lot of positive conversations about technology. The time that you have to say to your child, "Hey, we need to talk about that post that you just put up and we need to discuss it. Here's why I really need you to take it down." You've had three, or four, or five other conversations that are positive and it's not that your child's going to be happy in that moment, but definitely more receptive. You've had a lot of other great conversation. Every conversation you have about technology and social media isn't always a negative conversation.

[0:32:18.8] AARESS LAWLESS: Exactly. One thing that I've noticed so much more in the news lately and I think this is something that parents are concerned about too is cyber bullying. What can parents do when they discover that their teen is a victim of it? Also, what do you recommend they do when they discover that it's their teen doing the bullying?

[0:32:38.7] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. Okay, so let's first talk about if it's happening to your child. I think number one, understand that your child may not come to you and let you know. You may need to look for other signs. If your child is beginning to withdraw, if they start to withdraw from friend groups, if they're not wanting to be on an app, or if they're obsessed with an app too, there may be other signs that you begin to look for in your child. Because it happens in a lot of ways and there's a lot of embarrassment and shame for your child when they're being bullied like that.

You may need to begin looking for other signs. If you start to notice some behavior in your child, you might need to do a little exploring yourself. Then you're going to try to peel back those layers with your child to get them to talk to you about that. Once you know that's happening, you need to address it based on their relationship that you have with the families who, or the family who is the instigator of that. If it's someone that you know closely and that you know, I

recommend going to them directly. If it's someone that you don't, then you might not be able to do that. You might need to go about just reporting it right out.

Whatever is the best route to take, absolutely advocate for your child. Before we put our kids on any platform, we taught them to block and report. When do you do that, right? I mean, if it's something like a stranger and its outright porn and something that's against the guidelines for that app, you block and report, no question asked.

I've even said that out loud. I've said that on platforms like, "Hey, if you send me porn, I'm going to block report you. I don't ask about it." I mean, it's a given so I'm not going to play around with that. I teach my kids, I tell my kids that. In the instance of cyber bullying, make sure that you get screenshots, but advocate for your child and be very, very proactive for it. If going to the parents doesn't work and going, addressing it that way, still continue to advocate for your child.

That might mean going to the provider and getting that – seeing if you can get resolution that way. It may mean, if it continues, going to the school if your child's in school, it may mean going to the authorities. There's all different levels of what happens. The bottom line is that you want to advocate strongly for your child in that situation. Then you also need to talk to your child about don't retaliate. You don't retaliate with, because that's really hard.

[0:35:26.9] AARESS LAWLESS: It is.

[0:35:27.7] LEAH NIEMAN: It's really hard for teens. You're talking about the teenage brain, you're talking about a whole host of other issues. That's why if you're advocating for your child, the chances that they're going to feel the need to fall onto that is less likely if they know that their parents are there and they're advocating for them. Okay, so what do you do if your child is cyber bullying? Again, you're advocating. It looks differently though.

[0:35:54.9] AARESS LAWLESS: You're right, but it still is advocating.

[0:35:57.3] LEAH NIEMAN: It's still advocating for them, because there it's for whatever reason, they haven't learned how to be a good digital citizens. There's some disconnect between the online – they're in their mind viewing the online space is different than what I would

do in real life, or that's the hope anyway, right, that they're not connecting it to. Then you're having to teach them kindness online. Again, that falls into a character issue.

My child is not – they're lacking in that character. Parents really struggle with that, because there's a lot of shame for parenting. It's almost like, "Well, I don't want to tell anyone." Pulling strong counsel for you and for your child, so pulling their small leader, pulling their pastor, pulling the teachers who are understanding, because you need that support for both you and your child. People that are going to really firm up and be a support for your child that's going to help guide them along with you, because you want people that are speaking into their life and that are supportive of you and your efforts to get your child back on track as well.

I think too in the online community as parents, we can't do this alone. If you have a parent friend and they are struggling with their child on any of these issues, man, just lean in. Lean in and love on in and listen to them and support them, because it is a very lonely place when you have a child that struggles with anything, whether it be pornography, or them cyberbullying. I think when things happen online for some reason in the parenting world, we put it in this other category, "Oh, that's a greater sin," right?

[0:37:52.4] AARESS LAWLESS: Right. Exactly. No, it's not.

[0:37:55.2] LEAH NIEMAN: It's happening in a digital space, instead of a physical space. If our child hits someone at school, we'd be like, "Oh, that's bad." We got to correct that behavior. Man, if it happens online all of a sudden, we're the worst parent in the world. I always tell parents, "Ma'am, be happy that happened at home, so that you were able to go beside your child, pick them up, dust them off, fix that character issue and get them back on the right track. That's our job as parents, right? As our child falls, we pick them back up, we dust them off, we keep working on those character issues and we do it over and over again, until they leave home.

Be glad that that happened while they were at home and not when they're out in the adult world and you realize, "Wow, my child has a major character issues." My ability as the parent to handle that is different.

[0:38:45.7] AARESS LAWLESS: Oh, yes. Exactly. I'd love to come back to healthy habits for adults. Kids learn by watching others and I think it's funny how parents don't always model the behavior they want their kids to do, especially when it comes to digital devices. What are some healthy habits that we adults can have?

[0:39:05.2] LEAH NIEMAN: Number one, everyone including parents, need device downtime. It's interesting, because when I talk to younger kids and even teens and tweens, they need device downtime. They need time away from people constantly notifying them and saying, "Hey, I haven't heard from you. Text me back." We need that, but we don't often model it. We get so stressed that we have to text someone back and we to model that for that for kids. Device downtime.

Your kids will be like, "Ah, mom. Why? I need that." It's like eating their vegetables, they need their vegetables. They can't live on pizza and nachos. It's not healthy. We know that, right? Give them device downtime. It's permission for them to get away from everyone constantly meeting, meeting, meeting, meeting. We need that, it's healthy as adults.

Model that for them by – it can be during family time. It can be early evening. It can be device downtime during dinner, but model what that looks like for them. Because we have a generation of Millennials who really struggle with that, because as parents, we weren't modeling that. We didn't know how to do it for ourselves.

We were being told we don't know anything about technology, so we have nothing to share with our kids, right? Now we have a generation of Millennials who are now becoming parents that are really struggling with that themselves. In their jobs, they feel, "I can't tell my employer no," and they're sending me e-mails at 10:00 at night and I have to answer them. That's a real struggle. We need to work on that and prevent that for the next generation.

Also, the concept of being in front of the screen and understanding that every 20 minutes, you need to look up. The brightness of the screen, are we adjusting that brightness of the screen. It doesn't need to be at a 100%. It's not good for our eyes. Adjust that to a comfortable reading level. Are we using the nighttime setting for our screen? If are we sitting in dark rooms with our screen blasting us with a 100% power at night. Little things like that. Then also our posture in our chairs and are we getting up every hour and a half to two hours?

[0:41:27.2] AARESS LAWLESS: That's a tough one for me. Every hour and a half. Wow. I get in the zone and forget to get up.

[0:41:33.3] LEAH NIEMAN: Oh, yeah. I will admit that's a tough one for me too, especially when you're writing, right? Because you're in a flow, you're doing research and sometimes you feel it interrupts the flow. We have Google Home in our house and the thing that I did earlier this year was I actually put a Google Home in our office. I brought the one from the kitchen into our office, and so I have a reminder set.

[0:41:58.6] AARESS LAWLESS: That's brilliant.

[0:42:00.0] LEAH NIEMAN: Yes. Google Home tells me to get up every couple hours. Yeah. The message I have set isn't the most kind, but whatever works. I tell people whatever works. Yeah. The great thing about that, so if you work at home like I do and my kids watch me work at home my whole entire life, right? I want a model what that looks like in a healthy environment.

The interesting thing is my daughter now works at home. She's on online business. It's interesting for me to hear my kids talk about what they loved about not only homeschooling, but then I was one of in their mind, the first person that worked at home.

My kids will say that, "I work at home and it wasn't cool." Not only did they – we homeschool, but they're like, "Yeah, been throwing that my mom worked at home and it wasn't quite cool yet." I like to listen to them and I'm very open to hearing things like, "Did I model that well? What things did I do, or what things could I have done better that would have – because now my daughter is doing that." I think that's really important that as the workforce is moving to more and more people working at home, what are our kids seeing? What does that look like? All of those things are very important.

I think, mainly it's important that our kids really learn that all this technology gives us new ways to communicate. It's all communication. What does that look like? What does healthy communication look like? It's not that we're available to anyone 24/7. We have to begin to talk about that as families and as partners in work. What does that look like and where are those balance? Honestly, we're still forming that, right?

[0:43:44.7] AARESS LAWLESS: Right. Yeah.

[0:43:46.4] LEAH NIEMAN: I think it's okay, even within our families to talk about that and have conversations about that and adjust that so that it feels healthy for us.

[0:43:56.5] AARESS LAWLESS: So true. Well, I could keep talking to you about this for a lot longer. I still have questions. Tell us about some of your e-books that you have. How can parents find your e-books, how can they subscribe to your blog, how can they get on your e-mail list?

[0:44:13.3] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. You can subscribe to my blog right on the front page. There's a sign-up. When you do, I have a free tech talk conversation cards, which I love. The cards are just questions that you can ask your kids when they're trapped in the car with you, or when you're sitting around the table.

The questions really just give you an idea for how your kids think about things. Again, it's the whole idea that have conversations about technology when your kids are in trouble, so that you begin to create that conversations in your home. You get those free when you sign up for my newsletter. I send out a newsletter every week. It's all conversations and topics that are just related to number one, things that are happening in the world of social media, technology that relates to families and kids.

I try to take all of the stuff that's coming through the network of news that's about technology and I try to pick out things just really relevant for families. That comes out every week. Like I said, you get the tech talk conversation cards when you sign up for the newsletter. Then on my website –

[0:45:22.3] AARESS LAWLESS: What's the URL for that?

[0:45:23.6] LEAH NIEMAN: Oh, sorry. It's leahnieman.com.

[0:45:27.0] AARESS LAWLESS: Great. We'll have that in the show notes too, so that everybody can find it easily.

[0:45:30.9] LEAH NIEMAN: Then all of my books are on my website as well. I have e-guides for almost every app that you can think of for kids. I have a YouTube e-guide for families and I have Tik-Tok. I have a guide for Android and how to do parental controls for Android and iPad. There's a ton of those in my shop.

Then my blog just has it. I try to put up a new blog post on just varying topics for families and social media and apps. There's a search bar, so just pretty much anything relevant for social media and apps that you can think of, you can just type it in the search bar and hopefully find what you're looking for. I should mention too, I also offer services.

[0:46:12.7] AARESS LAWLESS: Yes, please tell us about that. I think, is it social media audits?

[0:46:16.8] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. I do social media audits for teens. A lot of teens will get to like, "Oh, I'm getting close to applying to college and go maybe want to do a social media audit," and they don't even know where to start, so I can help with that. Sometimes the whole family needs an audit. As we talked about digital footprint, sometimes it's not a bad idea for the whole family to get audit together.

[0:46:39.1] AARESS LAWLESS: Mom's Instagram go through that.

[0:46:40.5] LEAH NIEMAN: Exactly, exactly. I'm light-hearted about it, so I'm not going to berate anyone. It's really a great way to just keep tabs on yours. I personally audit my accounts and my kids do as well. It's a good habit to get into. I can get you started on that. I'll do the first one for you. Then once we talk about what we do, it's something that you can continue doing yourself, or I'm happy to do it every now and then for you whenever you want.

Then the other services I offer is I help teens with the social media startup. I can help guide them towards based on what they tell me their interests are, things that you should be posting, things that you should not be posting, here are some platforms that would be great for you to use. I have a lot of different services over there geared towards teens and families.

Then I also will just do consultation. If you're a parent and you have something that you just want consultation on, you can click that and we can discuss what your needs are. I also do private consultation, consultation for families.

[0:47:45.6] AARESS LAWLESS: That's incredible. Well Leah, thank you so much for taking time to join us for the podcast today. This has been incredibly helpful.

[0:47:53.5] LEAH NIEMAN: Yeah. Thank you so much for having me. It's been fun chatting.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:47:57.2] AARESS LAWLESS: Now, Leah gave us a lot of food for thought in today's episode, as well as some insights into some helpful resources. I would recommend that you check out some of the links inside of today's show notes for the podcast. You can find that at dualcreditathome.com/podcast. There, you'll find some of the links to Leah's social media, audits, as well as some other resources that she has available. Be sure to check that out and pass along to some of your friends who might be dealing with teens and technology as well.

Thank you so much for joining us for today's podcast episode. Be sure to hit subscribe, so you don't miss the next edition of Today's Homeschool Teen. Thank you so much and we are praying that God will be with you and your family as you homeschool high school.

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