

Talk More, Tech Less: Digital Wellness Tips From Dawn Wible

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Announcer:

Greetings, I am a voice coming to you over the internet through some kind of digital device. There are innumerable voices like mine in this same little box, often written instead of spoken, constantly jockeying to hold your attention and take your time. But what kind of toll does this exact on our mental health and well-being and what can we do to mitigate it? Luckily, we're joined by Dawn Wible, founder of the digital wellness organization, Talk More. Tech Less. To discuss all this and more today on Mind Matters News.

Robert J. Marks:

Greetings. Welcome to Mind Matters News. I'm your digitally recovering host, Robert J. Marks. You know, digital media surrounds us. Communication theorist Marshall McLuhan famously said, "The medium is the message." It means that media embeds itself in the message creating a symbiotic relationship with us. And McLuhan wrote this in 1964 when the only media was billboards, television, radio, magazines and newspapers. We didn't have digital media per se back then. Escaping commercial media was no problem then. Just turn off your TV, spend some time with your family, go outside or read a good book. It's a lot worse today. Heck, when filling up my car at my local gas station, I am subjected to stupid ads on a screen embedded in the gas pump of all places. It used to be that I could hit a button on the gas pump, turn off the audio and pump my gas in peace. No more.

Robert J. Marks:

That feature of stopping the audio has been removed, at least at the gas station I go to. So I have now switched gas stations where the gas pumps are not trying to sell me a bag of Fritos or some sort of cold, refreshing beverage as they call it. McLuhan said, "We become symbiotic with the media." I think this is a really interesting word, symbiotic. Famously, remora fish attach themselves to sharks, eating parasites on the shark's skin and mouth. If, imagine you are the shark, digital media is the remora fish attached to your spirit. For those addicted, the media distracts us from what eats at our spirit. Now, ironically, what eats at our spirit has also been caused by digital media. So the relationship is developed into something which is addictive. We become addicted to digital media and not in a healthy way. Not like I'm addicted to coffee. I always say that my addiction to coffee is healthy. That's okay.

Robert J. Marks:

There are other addictions, serious addictions. There are severe alcoholics, for example. There are also functioning alcoholics. I would sadly confess myself as being a functioning digital media addict. And I tell you, I'd like to recover. So that's what we're going to talk today about. There is good news. Today we get an exciting perspective on digital wellness from Dawn Wible, who is the founder of, Talk More. Tech Less. The website for our organization is talkmoretechless.com. talkmoretechless.com. Politicians say you should repeat a website three times. So let me do it again. talkmoretechless.com. Dawn is a certified digital wellness educator and is an alumnus of the Digital Wellness Institute. She works with the Screen Time Action Network to combat online harm to children. Dawn trains school districts and communities in healthy and safe screen use. And if you contacted Dawn, I bet you she could help you out. Welcome, Dawn.

Dawn Wible:

Well, thank you so much for having me. I'm glad to be here.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh yeah, it's a delight to have you. We've talked a little bit before the podcast and kind of have got to know each other. But nevertheless, I don't think the listeners know very much about what's happening. So tell me more about Talk More. Tech Less. What you do, and maybe just start with the backstory. What's the backstory of Talk More. Tech Less?

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, so this really organically started out of hanging out with teenagers. My husband and I have worked with youth age teenagers for 20 plus years. I'm a former educator as well. And we really saw, about 15 years ago, the shift from when our handheld devices became such a part of our lives and really when handheld started. So when kids started getting smartphones, my husband runs an outdoor mentorship group for junior high and high school boys. Getting them outdoors, hunting, fishing, hiking, taking them to Colorado, and they hike up in the mountains and fly fish up in the lakes there. And it's just a really great avenue for connection with young men and mentoring them.

Robert J. Marks:

And I bet you Dawn, that up in the lakes and in the rivers, there's probably no cell phone service.

Dawn Wible:

No cellphones.

Robert J. Marks:

So it's a great place to go away and get away from the media, right?

Dawn Wible:

That's exactly right. And we have a T-shirt now that says, "No signal needed." And we've got a couple of those guys taking pictures up there in the mountains, because they don't have a signal up there. So yeah, that's really where it got started. He runs a summer camp in the summers and years ago it was really easy for the guys to turn in their, at the beginning of the camp, we asked them turn in your pocket knives, your medication, your cell phones, and put them in a baggie for the week and when you needed something you could go get it. But it got harder and harder for them to turn over those cell phones as the years went on and we started to realize they were giving friends their Snapchat passwords so that they could keep up their streaks while they were at camp. And just all of the things that we realized, "Oh, we're getting more dependent on these devices and so are the kids."

Robert J. Marks:

Boy, you talk about addiction. I mean these kids were, it was like it was a job and they were going away from their job and they had to have somebody cover for their work.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right. It's very meaningful for them to stay connected that way. And so taking a week off to unplug, which is a term we use to get away from all of that, is very healthy for us. But it got very hard

and now it's hard to imagine being away from our phone for one full week. I mean, that would be quite the sacrifice. So back then it wasn't as much, but now it really is. I mean our phones, we like to say Talk More. Tech Less. started with kids. But the reality is we weren't seeing this shift just happen with the teenage boys. We were seeing it happen in our own marriage, with parenting our own kids. And it wasn't just happening in our community, it was happening globally. Our work, our school, everything became a part of our lives as this all turned into... You know, our computers, became our smartphones.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. So tell me a little bit about, Talk More. Tech Less. and what you currently do. When you go out and you talk to organizations, what sort of thing do you tell them? Are you primarily aiming at the teenage audience and their parents?

Dawn Wible:

That's actually where it got started, but no, it's really been pretty expansive since we started. So after we realized that was happening at the camp, like I said at the camp when the guys handed over their phones, we started to notice real clear signs of withdrawal, which were the early signs of looking at this addiction. Like we talk about, at first we said dependency, but now we're really adamantly saying this is an addiction.

Robert J. Marks:

So if I can make a parallel, that's kind of like going to a detox center, isn't it?

Dawn Wible:

Exactly.

Robert J. Marks:

And getting dried out. If you're an alcoholic, you have to get dried out mentally from your cell phone.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly.

Robert J. Marks:

Those retreats are detox.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly. Day one or day two, they would be reaching for their phones when their phones weren't there. We started to see a decrease in eye contact, conversation skills. Conversations were really easy back 10 years ago and they started to get harder and harder. The guys would come into the kitchen and cook with us and we'd have easy conversations with them, but that was just getting more distant. And so we started to really look and see that this was way before the current research that is out, which is wonderful research that's coming out about this. But back in 2011, 2012, there wasn't as much research on this, but what there was, we did start to latch onto and say, "Okay, there's something we can do here." So I formed Talk More. Tech Less. because I was an educator. That's really where I got started, was into schools talking to students about this, universities, talking to college students about it. And now I'm down to pre-K age because three and four year olds actually have access to technology and use

it, and we can even teach them how to be safe and healthy when they're engaging with their technology. But I also do retreats, digital wellness retreats for adults and training in companies and organizations as well because it really affects our productivity at work as well.

Robert J. Marks:

When you said that you were actually talking about three and four year olds having availability to technology, I got a little chill and then I realized probably in most cases these are not three and four year olds that are given cell phones, but it might be something like putting them before the TV and let them watch Netflix, cartoons for children or something like that.

Dawn Wible:

Well, you may be surprised. Some of the younger kids even do have cell phones because games are so easily accessible on phones and when parents are out with strollers, their babies, our babies can actually swipe. Young toddlers know how to swipe on phones and play early games. They create games for that age. So yes, The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests one wait at least 24 months, two years before you give any kid a screen. But you'd be surprised that it's really almost accepted that younger and younger have access to it, which you're right, is a little bit chilling.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. So they're treating digital media almost like a pacifier or a binky I think is what some parents call them.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right.

Robert J. Marks:

You put it in there and it distracts them. And I'm wondering on these phones, are they safe in the sense that if they swipe something, they could come up with something inappropriate or?

Dawn Wible:

They're not safe. No. I mean there are ways to make our phones safer, but as of right now, they're not safe. We actually are working on legislation right now to help have better safeguards for phones, not just for kids, but for toddlers and very young age to be able to have some kind of something set up so that it is by default, a safer device than what it is right now.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, one of the things that I think is that parents can go overboard on banning their kids from use of cell phones for example, because if you ban a cell phone, for example, and all your friends have it, you're going to want that so bad. And when you turn 18 and the parents are no longer in control, you're going to jump there. I tell people about when I was a little kid, my mom wouldn't let watch the television program, The Untouchables. She said, "Bob, it's just too violent." But even to this day, I see The Untouchables and I want to watch it because mom banned me from it. So what's the solution to that?

Dawn Wible:

That's exactly right. I have families that say, "My kid will never get a cell phone in my home." And I always say that that's a missed opportunity to be able to walk with them through these issues while they're in your home. But I do encourage delaying, especially social media, but even cell phones for the earlier ages, delaying that. And probably the biggest question that I get from adults is how old should my kid be when they get a cell phone? And every family is different. I have a friend who just walked through a recent divorce and her ex-husband and her have different ideas about the phones, but she needs to be able to get ahold of her kids. And so we talk about ways to still delay the phone for later, but ways to set it up to where you make your smartphone a dumb phone. You're blocking lots of things like access to the internet and other things like that to dumb down your smartphone so that it's a lot safer, but you can still have access and get in touch with your kid. But really it depends on the family when you do get a phone. But I do encourage slow introduction and a lot of being involved in what your kids are involved with online, especially social media. I would delay that till high school if possible.

Robert J. Marks:

One of the things I think that is important, I'll see if you agree, is that parents talk to their kids and limit the apps and the things that their children have access over the phone. And I have a son who's great at doing this. He talks with his two boys and says, "Look, I'm doing this because of this reason and this reason and this reason." And they sit down and they talk it out. So these kids really understand the limitations and why dad has their best interest at heart. And it's that sort of thing that you can take into your 18th birthday and not run out and get a cell phone and just have a big dump of everything.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right. I mean, the name of our organization is Talk More, for a reason, Talk More. Tech Less. Because we really do encourage talking about all of these issues with your kids. An organization that I love and promote and follow and have for a long time is, Protect Young Eyes. And one of the things that they say is to have 10 talks about porn before the age of 10 with your kids. Because the early average exposure right now is 11 years old, and some studies are saying eight years old. By the time your kid is 10, you can have had all of these talks and you don't have to use the term pornography.

Dawn Wible:

You can say, you know, if you have a five-year-old, for example. If you see anything on anyone's phone, because it's not always your own kid's phone. They may not even have a phone, but their friends may or their classmates may. But if you see a picture or an image of somebody that isn't wearing any clothes, you can tell mommy. That you won't be in trouble for that. You can come tell mom or dad and we want to help keep you safe. And that way you're taking the shame aspect away, but you're opening the door and you're opening the conversation for them to feel like they can come to you, like you are a safe place. Otherwise, if it's shut down, if it's blocked, if it's this fear-based mentality, it's going to be really hard for you to be a safe and open, secure place for your family, for your kids to come to when they are encountering this kind of stuff.

Robert J. Marks:

I talked to Jay Richards at the Heritage Foundation who has done research in this, and he says one of the reasons for the increase of dysphoria is the availability of pornography to young people. That a young girl who's going through adolescence might view pornography and go, "Man, that's what a woman is supposed to do. I don't feel like I should do that. I must not be a woman." And so it gives her pause in

her identity, especially going through the transition into adolescence. So anyway, he blames a lot of the dysphoria on pornography.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, that's interesting.

Robert J. Marks:

11 years old. I mean, that's chilling. That's terrible. There is such thing as a free speech, but I don't know. Where do you draw the line? I'm kind of a libertarian, but I would like to see some of that stuff outlawed or limited or something.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, similar. I mean, that is part of the work that I've been doing with, you mentioned that I was a volunteer with the Screen Time Action Network.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, what is that?

Dawn Wible:

So it's a group of parents and advocates and organizations that are working towards safer screens for kids and just awareness around the issue of screen addiction, online harms. My specific work is online harms prevention work group. There are parent survivors in that group who have lost their kids to cyber bullying or online challenges, some dangerous online challenges, different things like that that have impacted kids and they are working on legislation to do something about it. Because like we said, regulating the internet is a really hard issue to get into when you're talking about freedom of speech and politics. But there are definitely some safeguards that we can and should be responsible to put on these devices because they are so accessible to young children and to our youth, and it's negatively impacting them.

Robert J. Marks:

The copyright acts and the free speech acts are really what allows this stuff to propagate. You're probably familiar, maybe not, with Angel Studios. They're the ones that present the work, The Chosen, which is a popular dramatization of the life of Christ, really well acted. My opinion is that most biblical sort of films are kind of cheesy. They're poorly written, they preach at you, they have poor acting, they have poor writing, they have poor cinematography. That's not the case with Chosen. It's Class A from A to Z, or Alpha to Omega, I probably should say. It's really cool. Well, one of the things that Angel Studios did before The Chosen is that they made software to remove bad parts of movies. And you could go in and you could apply their software to remove bad parts of movies so that your kids could watch them. Well, the people that were making the movies didn't like that, including Disney. And Disney sued Angel Studios for violation of copyright. They were messing with their intellectual property and Disney and some of these other companies, they won the suit and it just about bankrupted Angel Studios.

Robert J. Marks:

So there is this powerful presence of, let me just say filth, if you will. Filth and inappropriate content that you can't edit, so you really have to censor it and explain to your kids why the heck you're doing it. When I found that out, that was really chilling, that Angel Studios was sued by Disney. Wow.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, that's really interesting. And when you're talking about legislation, the research, backing with the research has been so helpful because that really shows how this is impacting our youth, and the law is there to protect society. And so we are able to use that in some of this legislation. And you mentioned libertarian. A lot of this stuff is bipartisan. I mean, its parents, grandparents wanting to say, "Hey, big tech, you have a lot of power here, but in this specific area, we need some help in protecting our kids." And so it's been very bipartisan. Left, right, religious, non-religious groups backing some of this.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. Cell phones are ubiquitous. Even in Haiti. I have a friend, a colleague here at Baylor University that spends time in Haiti every year. And most of the Haitians, even though they only make on the average of a dollar a day, have cell phones. It's hard to believe. And one of the statistics from your website is that 96% of Americans own a cell phone, and most users check their phones 63 times a day. I'm going to have to put a little clicker on my cell phone. I don't know how many times I'd click it, but I don't know if it's up to 63. I hope not.

Dawn Wible:

Well, you may be able to check that in your screen time settings.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, is that right?

Dawn Wible:

Sometimes it shows how many times, yes, how many times, depending on your software, depending on if you have an iPhone or what, but it will show how many times you've picked up your phone that day.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Another statistic is 60% of the global population uses social media. 60% of the global population uses social media. And social media, here's my synopsis of it. It makes you feel like the whole world is having a good time except for you because you know specifically what you're going through. But everybody presents themselves in the most positive light. So the presentation is that everybody in the world is having a good time except for you, and therefore you must be a loser. This is the reason for some of these terrible statistics that come out about people that are exposed to social media a lot.

Dawn Wible:

Yes, that's very true. There's a lot of FOMO, fear of missing out, when you get involved in social media. And it's been interesting, the relationship research that comes out from being online and connecting online and what connections are actually increasing our wellbeing and what connections are lowering our wellbeing. And some of that really looks at who you're following, what accounts you're following. So we talked to, not just students, but even for myself, it took me a while to get my social media to a place where I actually feel better when I'm coming out of it. I go into it feeling good and I come out of it

feeling good. And that's a hard thing to do, but it really has to do with what accounts I'm following. Am I following accounts that are uplifting, that are inspiring me? If students set up their first social media account and they start following a bunch of people that have a lot of subscribers, or influencers, or celebrities, it shows that their wellbeing is lower because they see these people with these perfect bodies that actually aren't even realistic with all of these filters. And they see these people with seven Lamborghinis and two mansions, and they feel like their life is terrible, and so their wellbeing is lower. Really, it's really interesting what comparison is doing to us.

Robert J. Marks:

It is. It's chilling. Here's one I identify with. Again, I'm going to do a confession here. 90% of 18 to 29 year olds sleep with their smartphones close by. I do. But I have a reason. I have a reason Dawn, and that's sometimes when I go to bed, I can't sleep and I can't sleep because my mind is racing. It's going around and thinking of this and thinking of that. And I think a lot of people get their mind racing. So I put on a boring podcast and I use earbuds, and I turn the volume way down low so that I have to think to listen to it. And I begin to listen to it. And man, I begin to fall asleep. And my secret podcast, I almost don't want to confess it, but the one that puts me to sleep the quickest is, Thru the Bible by Jay Vernon McGee. I don't know if you've ever listened to Jay Vernon McGee. He has a wonderful, wonderful series of sermons, but if you turn it down really, really quiet, man, he's good for your sleep. So I'm one of these, but 90% of 18 to 29 year olds sleep with their smartphones close by. This is a statistic from your website. This is chilling.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah. Well, it's kind of like you were getting some bedtime stories read to you to help you fall asleep. That's nice.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, I guess so. Okay.

Dawn Wible:

I understand. Well, we-

Robert J. Marks:

That's a nice way to put it. Thank you.

Dawn Wible:

Making you feel better. Yes, this is definitely what we're seeing, especially when we talk to teachers and seeing students falling asleep in class. Phones are keeping students up, keeping adults up. Melatonin sales have gone up 500% since smartphones came on the scene.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Dawn Wible:

So that just tells you how much the blue light emission impacts our natural melatonin levels. And so really having that phone set aside, at least where you're not on the screen, not staring at the screen, 30

minutes to an hour before bed, helps your natural melatonin levels rise and it helps you fall asleep and stay asleep longer. So that's one of the techniques that we give. Usually when I present, as I'm doing our trainings to the students, usually when I present a problem, I like to present just a small step, a small solution to help. And that's one of them. If you can't have the cell phone out of the room, the next best option is to have it at least put away 30 minutes before you're trying to fall asleep.

Robert J. Marks:

I think this is part of your rehab effort. I think you mentioned this with your husband's thing where they put all their cell phones and stuff in a bag, and it's called a detox box. What's a detox box?

Dawn Wible:

Yes, we created a detox box. That's right. That's what we have on our website. We created a detox box at the very beginning because this was one of the issues that the boys were dealing with. They were saying, you know, back then it was Twitter, now it's Snapchat that they're on. But the teenagers were on social media in the middle of the night. They were getting into websites they wished they weren't on in the middle of the night and they were just not getting good sleep. We had this extra wood left over from one of the work projects we were doing at camp, and we said, "You know what? Let's build these boxes and let's just put our phones in them for bedtime." You plug your phone in, put it in the box, you recharge your phone and you recharge your body while your phone's recharging and you get some good sleep.

Dawn Wible:

And then we also talked about meal times. Having that box for meal times because a lot of them were saying, "We're sitting around the table with our family and we're not really talking and connecting over meals anymore." So we say, "Well, use the detox box for that. Stick your phones in the box and go to a restaurant or stick your phones in the box and sit around your dinner table or breakfast table and have those conversations." So that's really where the box came into effect, and we definitely use it in our home. I love it. And it's just a way, this was way before we knew the science of having a home for your phone. That's what I call it, because when our phones are on us, our minds are attached to whatever is on the other end of that. So some of the newest statistics coming out are saying 22 hours a day is how often our phones are with us. I mean, they're pretty much an extension of our body. So if we can set them aside and walk away from them, we're actually freeing our mind and giving our mind space to do what it needs to do, whether that's connecting with someone or it's getting good sleep.

Robert J. Marks:

Dawn, my family owns a little cabin in West Virginia, and it used to be that there was no internet there, no cell phone service. We went there and because of the lack of all of this, it totally forced us to interact. And it was great. You got to know your family and be able to talk to them. But thanks to Elon Musk and his satellites, we now have internet there and we have phones there, back in back this woods cabin way back in the hills in West Virginia down a long holler, they call them hollers in West Virginia. So we've decided, like you said, to have a little box that when we go in there, we put all of our cell phones in the box and that forces us to interact. We're not allowed to go get it. And the funny thing is this anxiety that you talk about being separated from your cell phones, you got a good name for it by the way. Nomophobia, no mobile phone phobia. It's called nomophobia, N-O-M-O phobia. And it says that 66% of the world's population shows signs of nomophobia, and seven out of 10 people report some level anxiety when disconnected from their phone.

Robert J. Marks:

In my work, I have to have my phone with me during work time because, well, not only calls, but the idea that a lot of the websites that I check on double check with me over my cell phone to see whether the connection is safe, and I must admit that I suffer from nomophobia. You also say it's called PSA phone separation anxiety.

Dawn Wible:

Mm-hmm.

Robert J. Marks:

And so this is a very interesting malady that we have.

Dawn Wible:

It's so true. And we have a couple of locations that we used to go to that had no cell service, and now they do. I think about that old Verizon commercial. "Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?" And the guys up in the mountains and they're trying to get cell service everywhere, but it's so true. So it's just such a part of our lives. It's integrated into our lives. And one of the phrases I actually start out with our training, Gretchen Rubin coined this phrase, she runs the happiness campaign and does a lot of research on loneliness and happiness, and she said, "Technology is a great servant, but a bad master." And that is really so true. If we can keep our phones where they are serving us, then it's in the proper place. We need it for work. We need it for... During Covid, my goodness, we needed it to keep our companies open, to keep our schools, our kids educated, to keep us connected.

Dawn Wible:

We had Thanksgiving dinners over phones, and so Talk More. Tech Less. is not an anti-technology in any way. We definitely use our technology, but we put it in its proper place. We make sure that it's serving us and not mastering us. When I'm scrolling on social media and I haven't done any laundry and my kids don't have pants for the next day of school, then I realize my technology's mastering me. So if I can put it in its proper place and use it as a tool, use it in a way that it's supposed to be, making me more productive, making me more connected. That's the purpose of technology. But what we're seeing is that it's becoming this piece of entertainment versus productivity and connection. It's really entertaining us and distracting us a lot of times.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. It seems that social media in general, it's hard to say general things about social media, but in general, I think social media is bad. I don't see positive things about it. It allows you, at Facebook initially, to keep up with some people that you haven't seen for a long time. That's kind of helpful, but eventually it comes back and bites you. One of the other statistics that you have on your web is teens who spend five or more hours a day on electronic devices are 71% more likely to exhibit suicide risk factors compared to teens who only spend an hour on electronic devices daily. And the number of teen suicides has skyrocketed in the last decade.

Dawn Wible:

It really has.

Robert J. Marks:

Which is just incredibly, yeah. And apparently this is social media. I guess we get back to the idea that it makes you think the whole world is having a good time except for you.

Dawn Wible:

You know, we talk about social media, keeping social media social. I think the danger comes in when we isolate with our social media. When we're by ourselves, when we're spending all of our time on it, we are deceived into thinking we're connecting, but we're really not. We're actually voyeuristically watching other people's lives, and we may be commenting or trying to really be connected on there, but if we're having the balance of that in our lives and we're keeping social media social, I say the way to do that in your home is you're on the same platforms as your kids are. When they set up a social media, you set it up, you're posting pictures of their games, you're getting to see, you know, grandparents are getting to see that they have a game this night and they're team won. Different things like that is a positive way to keep social media connected. But if we are spending a ton of time and we're isolating on it, then not only is our well-being going down, which can lead to this loneliness, anxiety, depression, even to the point of suicide, all of that is impacting us as we're separating out from real life, from the real world that we're trying to stay connected to and just connecting completely on a screen.

Robert J. Marks:

As you mentioned, not all digital media is bad. Some is pretty wonderful, but we want to move forwards to digital flourishing and away from digital addiction. Those are words that you use on your website. I like this. Digital flourishing is what we want to achieve, and we want to go away from digital addiction. Doing that will make us digitally well. So we talk about the idea of digital wellness. What is digital wellness? You outline five areas in our lives that are deeply affected by our screens and what we can do to move towards healthy habits.

Dawn Wible:

The simple definition of digital wellness is it's learning to be healthy with our technology use. In the last episode, I talked about how we have our phones with us 22 hours a day. So that's essentially pretty much all day. Besides those two hours, I don't know where it is the other two hours, but it's near us 22 hours a day. So don't you think that we should look at being healthy and the issue of health around that number?

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, I know where your phone is the other two hours a day.

Dawn Wible:

Oh, where?

Robert J. Marks:

It's recharging. It's recharging.

Dawn Wible:

That's right. Even when it's recharging, sometimes we have our chargers right by our bed or right by. No, that's right. I said maybe in the bathroom, but then there's just a lot of statistics about phones in the bathroom, so I don't think that's the other two hours.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, I tell you something, Dawn. I used to have these books called Uncle John's Bathroom Readers. I don't know if you're familiar with them. They are great books that have a thousand articles about just trivia. They're great to do in the bathroom. And you don't need those anymore. You just take in-

Dawn Wible:

That's exactly right.

Robert J. Marks:

... your cell phone. And you could you could check on Wikipedia. So you can use your cell phones there.

Dawn Wible:

That's right. Yeah. So maybe that's not the two hours. I don't know. We'll figure it out where that two hours falls. But, yeah. So we really look at the five areas of our lives that are deeply affected by our screens in our training on digital wellness. And the idea of digital flourishing is going into your phone feeling good and coming out of your phone feeling good, because a lot of times that's not happening. We're going into our phone because we want to numb out or because we're bored or because our brain is just telling us, "Hey, grab that." Because we are very dependent on it. And then we're coming out of it not feeling as good. Maybe it's because we're following accounts that make us feel lower. Maybe it's comparing ourselves to others, or maybe it's because we're opening a bunch of emails that are overwhelming us, but studies are showing we are negatively affected a lot of times when we're coming out of our phones.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, I got to tell you, every time I go to my Bank of America account, I come out feeling worse. There's some that are unavoidable, I suppose.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, I think we all can pick the app that would make us feel bad once we come out of it. So really, when you're looking at these five areas, you're saying these five areas have been the most affected in our lives from our phones. The first one is our physical health, and that's our bodies. The second area is our mental health, and that's our minds. And really those two areas overlap a lot because when we start to look at those, what is impacting our bodies, what is impacting our minds, they're very closely related because we are humans and our minds and bodies are connected. And then the third area is our time before cell phones. And we know this as we're considered digital immigrants because we knew the world before the internet, but our kids are digital natives, so they didn't know the world before the internet.

Robert J. Marks:

I like that. Digital natives, they don't know a world without digital media. And we are old enough to remember a world that it wasn't here.

Dawn Wible:

That's right.

Robert J. Marks:

What a great concept. Immigrants and natives.

Dawn Wible:

Immigrants and natives. And before smartphones, before we called them handhelds, our computer, our work, our school, everything was in our hand, our communication, we had to go to the phone when it rang. We had to go to the computer to check our email, and now it's on us. It's on our body. And so our time is not our own anymore. And a lot of our time is impacted by our distractions or notifications. And so we really dive into what it looks like to get your time back and to outline your life and be intentional, take intentional steps to get your life back and your time back. And that's the third area. And then the fourth area is-

Robert J. Marks:

Okay, let's review them again. Bullet number one is what?

Dawn Wible:

Number one is their body. So that's our physical health.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. Number two is?

Dawn Wible:

Number two is our mind, our mental health.

Robert J. Marks:

Mental. Okay. Number three that you just went over was?

Dawn Wible:

Time, our time.

Robert J. Marks:

Time. Okay. Okay, great. Okay. Continue with four and five.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah. And four is really where we got started. Talk More. Tech Less. Four is about relationships. So it's our connections, whether that's in real life connections, IRL, or if it's on our screen connections. Because we do have a lot of online connections and that's an important thing to look at, how to have healthier online connections and safer ones for kids specifically. And then how to have offline connections and connect with the people in our lives. So that's the fourth area, and we really dive into what helps us to feel healthier and be healthier in our relationships. And then the last area, and this is where I spend a lot of time in the school trainings. The last area is ethics. It's our values. And we talk about how our two

areas of ethics, how our phones are either ethically or unethically designed for us and how we use our phones ethically or unethically.

Robert J. Marks:

Now this is interesting. You meant how our phones are designed unethically. Do you believe that there's people that design phones or maybe apps, for example, unethically?

Dawn Wible:

Absolutely I do. I definitely do.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. Elaborate on that. Who, for example? I know that for example, Facebook wants to sell you stuff.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right.

Robert J. Marks:

So many ads on Facebook now, and that really isn't an app that has your wellbeing in mind. Is that the sort of thing you're talking about?

Dawn Wible:

That's right. That's what I'm talking about. Really the study of human behavior and human design, our biology, sociology, how we connect with each other, all of that's studied and set up to monetize off of us and keep us on their apps and on their platforms as long as possible because they will make a lot of money off of us being on there a long time. And so it really is what and how our society has changed and how it's been impacted. It used to be the information age where we could go Google something and find out whatever we wanted, ask Siri, ask Alexa. It's the information age. We can find everything. And it shifted to the attention economy, and they are monetizing off of our attention. And so if we can recognize that and be aware of that, that really can help us to say, "Okay, what are our values?"

Dawn Wible:

Because I know that these companies are not really putting our values first. So what are my human values? My human values are connection. I want to be productive with my technology, like we talked about, setting it up as a tool, serving us, not mastering us. I want to be productive with mine. So what can I do having my values align with my technology use, with my phone use so that I'm not being mastered all the time, so that I'm not being pulled in all the time. Because it really is designed well. We desire connection deeply as human beings, and that is being offered to us. But when it's not connecting anymore and we're scrolling and scrolling and scrolling, and all the algorithms are pushing all the things that we like and are into toward our phone, it's just keeping us on there as long as possible.

Robert J. Marks:

I very rarely visit Facebook. Last time I think was about a month ago. And the reason I don't is because they know me well.

Dawn Wible:

They do.

Robert J. Marks:

I begin to scroll down, Dawn, and I get all sorts of ads that they know I like. I'm old enough to have been to two Rolling Stones concerts when I was younger. I don't know how they know this, but I'll scroll down and they say from 1968, The Rolling Stones such and such, and there's a video there of them and oh my gosh, I want to watch that. And then the next one is something else, a classic song or something like that.

Dawn Wible:

Oh, exactly.

Robert J. Marks:

They know me so well. They know me better than my wife, I think, in terms of what I like and what I don't like, it's really chilling. And also Google has this new thing on my cell phone where I open up the Google and it gives me a lot of news articles. And those news articles are chosen exactly for me. And I tell you, a lot of them I'm interested in, a lot of them, I must admit that I find useful. But Google knows me too. Google Chrome, and they're pitching stuff all the time trying to get me to click on this or click on that.

Dawn Wible:

Oh, exactly.

Robert J. Marks:

It's actually kind of scary. And yeah, they use algorithms and data mining, and that's how Google makes its big bucks, is selling your privacy information and you're browsing history to different people. And of course it knows it. So yeah, you're exactly right. That's very interesting.

Dawn Wible:

Yes, exactly. And really, yeah, you named it. I mean, the algorithms are a big part of that. Some say they know us better than we know ourselves because one of the areas we really hone in on the mental health is the importance of silence and how our mind craves silence. But our world is very loud. We're constantly, I mean, it's hard for me to go pick up my kids from school without turning on a podcast. I want to fill all of my time and silence with the noise that's available to me. And some of it is great because learning a ton or I'm hearing a ton, I'm connecting with a ton, but I'm not really being with myself. And that is what our minds need. That is what our hearts need, our souls need, and we're filling it with a lot of noise.

Dawn Wible:

And so they truly say that sometimes the algorithms know us better than ourselves because they are studying every little thing that we may just pass by and not pay attention to. Like where my thumb slows down on my feed on my social media account, that's even being studied, what ads I'm slowing down on, what accounts I'm slowing down on. And then the algorithm will push more of those ads toward my feed. And so my feed is designed exactly for me, exactly for what I desire or think about. I had someone say the other day, "I didn't even say it out loud and I got an ad for it. It's like it's reading my mind."

Robert J. Marks:

That is a little bit spooky. Yeah.

Dawn Wible:

It is a little bit spooky. So I think just you can go down a deep rabbit hole with that whole thing, but being aware, at least paying attention and being aware and saying, "Okay, this is what I value in my life. This is what I want to set up my technology to look like during the day. I want to take these notifications off my phone so that I'm not super distracted with that." And just making these intentional steps to help us align our use with our values. So that's what we spend a lot of the time on in that last section.

Robert J. Marks:

That's a great observation. I think that one of the effects on me of social media and just digital media in general is the shortening of my attention span. My son the other day showed me TikTok. I've never watched TikTok before, but I watched it and he showed me one incredible video after another incredible video. And a lot of people don't like TikTok because they say that China is spying on us. But there's others say, and this was a congressman, I forget his name, that says that TikTok is fentanyl for the mind, that you just want more and more and more and more. And I have noticed that it has shortened my attention span. And when I try to spend time in quietness, I'm a Christian, so quietness, reflection, prayer, meditation and those sort of things, I'll be into it and then my mind will flip, "Oh, you should be doing something else." It's that short attention span. So gaining back that ability to be quiet for long periods of time, at least in my experience, is something which is very important, but not always easy to achieve.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly. Right. And you're speaking for your age and my age, but you think about how little kids' minds are being wired. When we take healthier steps to rewire our mind, so if some of the most recent research is saying, if you watch a lot of TikTok or you watch fast videos, short clips, lots of videos, to make sure you read something for 20 minutes a day in a book. Like a real book, get out a book and read for 20 minutes, left to right. You've got a storyline going. It's very slow and boring to your mind, but it will reset it and rewire it. But for little kids who are having that initial wiring, it's going to be so interesting to see what studies are going to come out about how they can rewire their minds. Because you're right, it does. It shortens our attention span. We're not able to focus as long. And same thing with me, I have Centering Prayer mindfulness app, and the first 10 minutes when the bell goes off, I'm like, "Oh, I need to start over because that first 10 minutes, my mind was offloading all kinds of information, and then I reset it and do the second 10 minutes and my mind is quieter after that. So you're right, it is a short attention span.

Robert J. Marks:

What other things do we see in culture regarding the overuse of our screens? Have we touched all the big points here or are there other things?

Dawn Wible:

We really have, one of the things that I like to go into on that last section on values with students specifically, and if you have any parent listeners, this is good for them to hear for their kids as well, is really having them understand what a digital footprint is. Because-

Robert J. Marks:

Really, what is a digital footprint? I'm not even sure I know what a digital footprint is.

Dawn Wible:

So, digital footprint is your online presence and it's everything that you do online. And a lot of people, I'll use an example, some people think a footprint like walking in the sand on the beach and the water washes it away, but your digital footprint is like stepping into concrete and you lift your foot up and that concrete dries and water can hit it and it's not going anywhere. So even deleted photos, the Snaps that are sent that kids think are disappearing Snaps and they're gone on Snapchat, are actually there forever. Software designers own that content. A lot of times during legal investigations, that law enforcement can get into those apps, can get into some of that stuff that you think is so private. And so really helping kids understand that privacy is essentially a myth. That what they think is between them and that screen or them and the other person on that screen is not between just them.

Dawn Wible:

Once you send that picture, it's out of your hands and you have no control over where that picture is going to get sent, who's going to see it. And so that's a big thing when we're talking about our values and what we're using our phones for and if we're using our phones according to our values. But it's also a really hard thing for kids to think about the fact that they live in this almost surveillanced world with cameras everywhere. Or I think about the slumber parties that I went to with my girlfriends when I was 13. No, we didn't care what we looked like. We could stay in our PJs and eat junk food and no one knew. But slumber parties now are very different, and kids are always on essentially, because they're being filmed on social media, they're texting constantly. They're in constant contact with people in the outside world.

Dawn Wible:

And so that really helps. It helps empower them too to know that so that they can have language for saying no to inappropriate requests for pictures or for content from them. It's an easy way for them to have an out and say, "You know what? I don't know where this picture's going. I'm not going to send it." So I like to frame that for kids to really understand the importance of their digital footprint, that it's there forever, and employers are going to Google your name and look at your social media and be able to see even back to the pictures you posted in seventh grade or whatever you were doing. So it is there forever and that's impacting kids' lives.

Robert J. Marks:

The internet is forever. Yeah, in fact, I have a close friend that's going through a divorce right now, and he emailed me some stuff and I said, "Man, don't do this. Everything that you email me, imagine it being presented in a court of law during your divorce." You just have to be careful. I mean, that's an example of being just very careful with what you do. Anything on the internet is possibly there forever.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, that's so true.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Let me ask you a question, Dawn, there's some of us who have to use a computer and a phone all day. How does digital wellness work for us? What do we do?

Dawn Wible:

That's a great question because you're right. I mean, it is really incorporated into so many of our lives, and the biggest thing that you can do is to be intentional with when you have hours in front of your screen, you're having to write something, you're having to be on your screen. I like to recommend some form of a blue light filter for your glasses. So if you can put on glasses-

Robert J. Marks:

Tell me about that. Yeah, what's the deal with the blue light? You mentioned that before. Does the blue light, is that supposed to affect you some way?

Dawn Wible:

So it does. The blue light filter glasses actually filter out that light that... Our eyes are just not meant to be in front of that. The amount of time that we're in front of screens. So we think about the outdoors, we mention the outdoors in the body section, the physical health section, and in the mental health section of our training, because we truly are meant to be outdoors and we're surrounded by concrete walls and we have these blue lights in our eyes and fluorescent lights above us. I'm reminded of that scene in Joe Versus the Volcano. Do you remember that movie with Tom Hanks?

Robert J. Marks:

I've never had the pleasure of seeing Joe in the Volcano.

Dawn Wible:

It is something you should watch. It's a wonderful movie. But that opening scene is just him in this office, and it's a perfect picture of that. His eye is kind of twitching and he just needs to get out to the ocean, and it's a wonderful movie. But it is true. When we have blue light glasses, it helps our eye strain and our eye fatigue. They're starting to notice with kids who have computer tablets and iPads in front of their face for a long period of time, their eyes, they're having to get glasses younger and younger because of the eye strain and because their eyes are shifting from their iPad up to the whiteboard, or if they're watching a TV show and having phones in their lap on the couch, which that's very common. You could see that strain that your eye is shifting from that nearsighted to farsighted back and forth, back and forth, and it is causing eye strain.

Dawn Wible:

So blue light filters just help relieve your eyes a little bit from that when you're having to be in front of your screen a lot. So that's a great healthy choice to make. And then just taking breaks. Taking breaks, getting up, moving your body, not having such a sedentary life. I mean, that's what a lot of us have. And so incorporating creative ways of being outdoors and moving our body. I have a friend that spends a lot of time, a graphic designer, so a lot of time in front of the screen, and he tries to go for walks during his lunch, and he will bring a smoothie and go outside and walk. And sometimes he'll even do some of his phone calls on a walk, and he just is trying to incorporate that outdoor time, getting away from the computer screen, getting away from the light and getting some natural light. And that actually boosts your wellbeing physiologically and mentally as well.

Robert J. Marks:

Is this backed by scientific research? Excuse me for being skeptical, but do you know if there's any science research into this blue light thing?

Dawn Wible:

Yes. So that's a great question. There is. There's a website called childrenandscreens.org.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay.

Dawn Wible:

And it has a lot of the research that we find. Yes, there's just a lot of research on the eye strain and on myopia. The nearsightedness for young kids specifically who are having a lot of time on their screen. The digital wellness concept is pretty new, but a lot of computer scientists, people that spend a lot of time in front of screens have known about some of these healthy decisions and choices for a long time and have tried to implement them. And then the other thing I'd say along that is a lot of times we say that our technology is really distracting, but if we can categorize in what is essential, what's a part of our work, and it's just shifted to digital media from decades ago now. Now it's on our computer screens, it is incorporated into our life, then I think it helps us to make better decisions with our time. Because everything's not a distraction. This is actually a really important part of our life, but there are some things that are distractions. So really being intentional with our time and with our technology use.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, I just wish that Facebook and Netflix weren't on the same computer that I work on because they're distracting. It's just a click away, Dawn. It's just a click away. So it's frustrating.

Dawn Wible:

I'm going to do a little advertisement here for you. There's a great app called Freedom. Freedom app, and it's exactly for that.

Robert J. Marks:

Freedom app.

Dawn Wible:

It's called Freedom app. And they block websites. So it helps you to really do, because there is, we get to a place where our work is becoming too shallow. We're not getting to that flow state of work where we're doing our deeper work. So a lot of writers will use this app, Freedom app, and it blocks the specific websites that you need blocked. So if you need Netflix and Facebook blocked, I may not need those. I may need Instagram and whatever else. And Freedom allows you to go in and tailor which websites you need blocked, and you can do the different times of day that you need them blocked. And you go to do that one click away and it won't open, and it helps hold you more accountable. And you're not using all of your energy trying to stay away from it. It's taking that off your plate. So it's very helpful.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. Freedom app for people like me that don't have a strong free will.

Dawn Wible:

Well, it's not just you.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, I know. Yeah. It's a lot of us that are addicted. You know, when you quit smoking and you quit alcohol, there's obvious health benefits. You're a better person because you quit smoking. You're a better person because you quit alcohol. What real life benefits would I get, would somebody get, if you will, from making healthier choices on their use of screens?

Dawn Wible:

Well, your well-being will increase. And so I think that that overflows into every area of your life. That's going to overflow into your physical health, into your mental health, into your relationships. When you feel better, when you're happier, more content and not chained to this device, then you're going to have that freedom. You're going to have a healthier life. So it really overflows. And those are the benefits. I mean, it overflows into every area. The harder and trickier thing about technology is that you're not just quitting buying packs of cigarettes. It's there. It's a big part of our life, and it's right in front. You don't have a pack of cigarettes sitting in front of you when you're quitting, usually when you're quitting smoking. So that's what's trickier. And so using a lot of these tools, backing off on notifications, putting on apps like Freedom or other apps that help you, having your Centering Prayer, your mindfulness apps, having those downloaded, those are going to really help you make those better choices.

Robert J. Marks:

That is a great answer. I think that typically when we surrender to our whims, we're doing what our whims say and we're thinking about our impulses when maybe it's better to think how we're feeling. Are we feeling good? Are we feeling productive and worthy? And things of that sort. And thinking about how you are and what you do, and how what you do is going to affect how you feel is sometimes a difficult thing to do. But I think it's a better metric of what you should do.

Dawn Wible:

Yes, I agree. And I think it just really takes... Start small. I mean, the smallest changes, the smallest choices, make huge impacts in our life. And so some people will hear our training and think, "Oh, I'm going to do this and this and this and this." And I'll say, "No, just put your phone in a box at meal times, start there and see what impacts and what benefits you notice." And so I would say, yeah, just make those small choices and start there.

Robert J. Marks:

Exactly. Dawn, thank you. This has been a great conversation. We have been talking to Dawn Wible, who is the founder of Talk More. Tech Less. The website for our organization is talkmoretechless.com. Thanks for listening to Mind Matters News. Until next time, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

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