

Transcript 167

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. And joining me today is Doctor Stephen Arterburn. He's the author of many different books, which I'm sure many of our listeners have read. And today, he's joining us to discuss two new books in this series. So so Steve, we'll briefly, why don't you introduce the series as a whole and then I'll mention the two books. So what is the Understanding and Loving Your Child series?

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well, we did an Understanding and Loving Your Anybody where we dealt with some things like borderline personality disorder, depression, things like that, narcissism. And so it just seemed natural to take some bigger issues with kids, different ages and to do a series just for parents on their kids. And of course this screen saturated world, I mean it's number one in the new release category for Christian education. Something like that anyway. And then the college book Understanding and Loving Your your College Student is you'd think we wouldn't need to know that stuff, but it's so very different than when my 32 year old daughter went to college. I think it's it's really an amazing book for any parent that has a child in college. We know the need for screen saturation limitations and all that. But a lot of people aren't aware that you really need to take a second look at your parenting when a child goes into college. So these are part of that series and I I love these two books especially.

Shea Houdmann

Much, much needed and where Gotquestions.org is an Internet based ministry. So in a sense we encourage people to be on screens.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

But but because there's good stuff on screens, I I like to have this little roaming picture thing that I've got going in the background.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

That you know you you have access to places you'll never go or most likely won't go. And just like this, there are good things. But the good things are really overshadowed by some of the negative stuff, especially with our younger kids.

Shea Houdmann

So that is exactly my point. There's we are thoroughly familiar with how much garbage there is on the Internet and of the dangers of people, not just kids, but adults, even spending so much time staring at their smartphones. But to you, in your experience in in your research, in this book, what are some of the risks, the dangers of kids spending so much time staring at screens that maybe their parents aren't fully aware of?

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well first of all you need to have a great relationship with your child and not assume that you've battened down all the hatches. All of us need to implement filters and limits. For one of my kids I'll just say I don't want to identify the child, but one of kids at age 8, we had everything in the house in good shape, but there was a friend that we thought great conservative parents and stuff, but they did not. And he got onto the dark web with this other child and at age 8 watched a man be decapitated. And the head used as a soccer ball. And you know, at 8 that's it's traumatic. So we thought we were doing a great job. We were not doing a great job because we hadn't fully explored what the situation was at the other house. So a child can be traumatized by what is on some screen.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

We all we know the devastation from early exposure to pornography that leading to an addiction or dependency or devaluing what of the opposite sex. With men you know more and more young people, female young people are attracted to pornography just like men.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

But there's there's also brain damage that comes. There is the the impact of social limitation. You don't really learn how to relate to people. And then there is this comparison thing. You know, one of the best advice is you could piece of advice you could give somebody and never compare yourself to somebody else. You don't know what they've been through. You don't know how easy or tough it's been, and yet the Internet just fosters this comparison between my situation and often the unrealistic comparison that's on. I just found out that the when a jet flies in, private jet flies in, maybe someone's rented that jet and it's going to sit there for 8 hours. The owner of the jet that leases it out might then have leased it to some people for a photo shoot. So it can look like they flew in. I I wasn't aware of this so. So then they send that to their friends here just got to Florida. Very dishonest, walking off a private jet. You just don't know what's real.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

And then of course, the values are absolutely decimated and deteriorate from social media. If if I said to my kids, you know, they have discovered a pink elephant walking down the street in Las Vegas, they might well, maybe that would be possible there. But some other city and I said, you know, I I saw it on the Internet. They would absolutely say, well, that's stupid dad. You can't believe everything that's on on the Internet, and yet there are people that their whole value system is based on what they have seen on the Internet. And they want everybody wants to belong and this leads to what I call a toxic tribal affinity. In other words, you can you wanna be involved in something and you might decide to be involved with something that's sick rather than be involved with nothing at all. Or belong to something that's sick. So even though it's toxic and sick, you join in.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

And you know one of my favorite interviews was with Patrick Sprinkle and a young woman named Helena. And in the interview, she said that she was transitioning and was taking testosterone to make the starting the transition process and so uh, in the midst of it, she goes over to some uh eating disorder groups, just like she was in these transitioning groups. And she saw that in the eating disorder groups it

was very similar to those with transgender issue. Everybody, many people wanting to be worse off than the other person. Wanting to have more severe depression or anxiety and stuff. And she's a very bright person, caused her to stop, think what was going on. And then she, I mean, that began her search for truth, and she quit transitioning. But a lot of times, our kids aren't smart enough to see that. We live in a state, Indiana, where it is so conservative that in the public school system, by law, you must say that abstinence is the best way to avoid sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy. So you hear that and you think, man, that what a great place to raise kids that that would be legislated into the school system. But it isn't a reflection of the culture of young people in this state. They're so overridden with messages from social media and belonging that none of that matters. Their values are coming from the Internet and especially certain social media sites. And it's important that we say my child is not immune or I've got it all figured out. There was a big mistake we made several years ago with our own kids.

Shea Houdmann

Great points and stuff that I've observed in visitors to Gotquestions.org that are the sort of questions we received, the sort of psychological disorders people deal with, spiritual issues, they deal with from social media, from spending so much time in Internet, from comparing themselves constantly with others. You mentioned it briefly on social media, in particular, in my experience, is drive so many people to jealousy in the sense and comparison mindset. So what have you found? What is it in particular about social media that's especially dangerous to our kids.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

OK, so if you go to school, you're with kids living in reality and some have nice cars, some don't. Some have big houses, some don't. But many times online what you see people presenting a larger percentage there are presenting things, maybe they don't even have. It's a false impression. But the percentage of images, if they're not sexual or whatever, of people trying to make themselves look good causes a lot of kids deep depression, feeling deprived when maybe, you know, they have more stuff and more privileges than 90% of the people in the entire world.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

And then of course, the shaming that can come through social media if you you don't act or respond or react, just like everybody else causes kids to be suicidal or depressed or extremely anxious, certainly in their situation. And talking to them about it is so important that you continue the dialogue with your kids. You might be able to sneak in an idea that's real if you're if your child's really saturated with screens all around them, and and very few limits.

Shea Houdmann

I've I've found some of the same truths about adults on social media. I see picture on Facebook of someone's vacation, and of course, all they show you are just the all the amazing things they said. They don't tell you all the all these trials, all the struggles, all the stuff that went wrong.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

All right.

Shea Houdmann

And so you even compare my vacation to theirs' it's like man, I saw some beautiful stuff, but man, it was the pain getting there and this is awful. And the hotel was terrible. And all the so it doesn't, does not give you a realistic picture of the world and other people's lives in the world.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well, so you know, like if you're, if you pass a cute little house in the country with a nice garden and stuff, you think ohh wow, what a great way to live I. Then you start to think ohh you have to like till the soil. You have to fertilize. You have to plant. You have to water yet you know it doesn't just happen. But on line it seems like it just happens and and the to get into the reality of it like you're able to to say yeah, and the hassle and all that, they're not showing that. They're just showing an image that is a piece of reality. And here's the deal. If I gave you one piece of a jigsaw puzzle, thousand piece puzzle, and said from that piece figure out what the rest of the picture would look like. You couldn't do it, but a lot of people are doing that from one little piece that they find online and it's very destructive and sets them up for feelings of inferiority, anxiety and of course, depression.

Shea Houdmann

And in in my experience I see parents who are way, way too permissive with their child and with their use of technology, cell phones in particular. And then the other side where parents who tend to overprotect, like don't allow their child hardly any experience whatsoever with technology. So what's what? How do we strike this right balance of helping our children understand the technology does have some positive uses and can contribute positively to your life as long as you understand some of the principles we've been talking about. How do we keep things in balance?

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well, first of all, the reality is that kids communicate with phones and iPads and computers, and stuff. And so I think to totally eliminate that, especially in in the older up into sophomore, junior, Senior High School to totally eliminate that causes a child to be more of an outcast and creates all sorts of other problems. So you have to be careful. Our daughter, who's in high school she gets to use social media 2 minutes a day. We give her two minutes to to connect and stuff. Now she can also text her friends and e-mail her friends, but we monitor. She knows everything that goes in is going to be reviewed. And you'd think, well, then, she'd never put anything that but good stuff on there. No, they forget that it's going to be reviewed. So you have to have in engagement with it. You have to have limitations. And you know a lot of people would rather be liked by their kids than limit what's unhealthy. And you know all these people that direct that built and developed the technology or the software for things you know, you talk with them and they say no, I wouldn't let my kids use it at all. And all of the research points to that, the devastation that can come from social media is as devastating as drug addiction, alcoholism, you know, all of that stuff. And you would, I think, most parents wouldn't let their child go to their bedroom with 1/5 of vodka. So my thought is this is kind of the same thing. If you just let them go off and use this. And I relate it to an automobile. You know, if if your child is given permission to use your automobile and they come back the first time and they got a speeding ticket, or they had a crash. You're probably not going to let them use it. That's irresponsible use. But a lot of parents don't see the parallel with a cell phone. You know, if they're not responsible, it needs to go away. And maybe for a long time, maybe it needs to be replaced with a flip phone. There are a lot of things we can do, but passivity and wanting to be popular with your kids are two strategies that are not gonna go well.

Shea Houdmann

So Steve, *Understanding Your Child in a Screen Saturated World* much needed book. Excellent book. I love both how practical it is and how it really helps us to think through what we're doing. So we can make wise decisions in this. So highly recommended, we'll include links to this book and also the other we're about to discuss in the the show notes, the description when this goes on YouTube, and also at podcast.gotquestions.org. So the second book *Doctor Arterburn Understanding and Loving Your College Student*. What are some, some highlights, some key points of why it's so important to maintain a close and meaningful relationship with your child even when they're away at college?

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well, it is a it is a whole different world in college. It's very different than when my 32 year old daughter went to college. We they just, she was on the soccer team and it went to a Christian university and life was just great. Now we have a couple of boys and one, it was really a struggle because when you send your child off, even to a conservative university, there's still these elements there that want to convince you that your faith is not really founded on truth. Your parents are old fashioned. They don't know what they're talking about. And that there's this new way. And you need to understand the new way. So if you're not engaged and involved with your child either or both by phone, e-mail, texting, all of those things. If you're not engaged, then you're essentially letting them just go and fend for themselves. They need your involvement, but it it can't be overbearing involvement. They go out on a Friday night and if Saturday morning they get a 9:00 AM phone call. What did you do? Did you drink? Did you know this kind of thing. You'd think it'd be appropriate. Sounds appropriate to ask. But they're college students, and if they're going to make big mistakes, you'd kind of like them to make them and you be involved with it versus they get through school, no mistakes. And then the real world, it all happens then, and they're even further out of your reach because they're adults, married and or single and out of the house and out of college. So you need to be involved and not overbearing.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

And what you want to do is first of all you need to love your kids that are in college. And I'll get questions on our radio show *New Life Live*, how do I love a child who just told me that they're in a same sex relation? Well, it's more of a a statement of I can't love this child when many times, you know, because this is the way they are. And telling you your child needs your love more than ever when they're involved in something that you absolutely disapprove of. And so they need to know that there is nothing they could do that would cause you to not love them, want to be part of their lives, and involved with them. It's not an endorsement of what they're doing. It's an endorsement of their connection with you. Of their life. And and they're independence.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

And so then if you're able to do that well by listening, by being curious, asking not shaming questions, but really good questions to find out, well, how did what, what led you to this and and so tell me I'm really curious, if you're doing that kind of stuff what you're doing is setting your your relationship in the future to a place where if and when and most likely it's a when, they have doubts about the choices they've made. You're connected and involved, and you have the ability to speak truth in a different way to them, when it all comes crumbling down. Most likely your child knows exactly how you feel about

these issues. And if all you ever do is remind them how you feel about these issues, then of course that's going to destroy the the relationship. So it's important that we not just ship our kids off to college and there they go, but we find ways to be involved with snail mail letters, e-mail, text, phone calls, any way we can to be engaged with them.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent point. Good point is, I mean as someone who went away to college and enjoyed the freedom and thankfully had a solid enough foundation, had recently come to faith in Christ, and was at a Christian college, didn't have the huge rebellion that a lot of kids do when they go to college. But I appreciated the input of my my mom during that time, and just knowing that she was there and she was interested was huge to me, and I know a lot of other kids don't have that experience. One thing I've noticed a lot of recently, parents who think I've I've gotta strongly encourage my child to attend a Christian college. If they they go to a secular college, they're basically going to be ruined and they view going to a Christian college it's like the cure all of this. So why is this a a faulty mindset?

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well, for instance, I have a son that is a senior in high school. And I would love for him to go to one of the Christian universities around here. But he's a very, very smart, high IQ gifted kid. And he either wants to be the best in zoology, which would lead him to Ball State University, where his mom went. Not a Christian college. Or he will he may want to major in bugs and so that that university is Purdue here. So to say you gotta go to a Christian college, it may backfire on you. And they may not have what your particular child needs. I have one of our boys goes to a secular university, fluent in Chinese and he is proof that you don't have to succumb to whatever secular influence there is. He's one of the greatest young men you'd ever meet. But he he has character and if you send your child off to college, without character, you know, it may not go so well. But we love. I love sending Madeline to the Azusa Pacific, this Christian University, and she she has just exceeded all expectation. But that isn't what James needed, and he went to the secular university and now he's in ministry at that same university. So don't predict disaster, just be involved and try to make the best choice possible. And the best choice possible might be a secondary school that's closer than the ultimate that's far away. Just depends on the child. Every child is different. You putting on them what you think is best because it was best for the first born may not be best for the 2nd and 3rd.

Shea Houdmann

Knowing your child, knowing their interest, they're gifting where they're at those sort of principles are are hugely important. And viewing a Christian college as a cure all as if nothing bad ever happens in Christian colleges is a a pretty foolish mindset. I mean, thankfully, there are a lot of great Christian colleges out there, but if you don't prepare your child for college it doesn't matter what university they're gonna go to, they're going to experience freedom they've never experienced before, and there could be some rebellion. And I've I've known kids who've gone to Christian college and it was as bad in certain examples as any secular college would be. So maybe for my closing question on the second book, what are some of the key things parents can be mindful of in preparing their kids for college before they leave?

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well the first thing that they need to know is that they can always come home. Really. That there is this fail safe, that there's this, their home is a safe house if it's too overwhelming. You know, not every child needs to go to a university or a college. They there are so many great, fulfilling jobs that you get from going to a different kind of school. Like I don't think my daughter will go to a university. I think she'll go to an art school and that's, you know, that's where she'll get whatever training she needs to do what she wants to do. But there are skills, people that want to be outdoors, work with their hands, and they may not fit well in the university. You got to be willing that they're, you're not forcing your dream onto them. And so just knowing your child. And then helping them to see there will be unhealthy forces. And they will be more attractive than what we've taught you here. Often more attractive. And you really have to build up your ability to say no to things that aren't best, and your ability to make room for things that really are great for you. That's some of the preparation. But also to set out how you want to be involved with them, not overbearing, not controlling, but staying involved with them throughout the the university or the college or the trade school that you're paying so much money to help them get through.

Shea Houdmann

Thank you for that. And my wife and I were not blessed with kids so we've never had to experience this first hand, but we're at a point where a lot of our friends kids are heading off to college. And so we've seen some of the some of the parents making some of these mistakes, some parents doing a relatively good job, some kids having a great time in college and coming back with their faith in Christ strengthen. And other kids were very surprised that their college ended up not devastating their faith, but turning them from being on fire for the Lord to being kind of lackadaisical in their faith. So college itself is not going to ruin or strengthen it.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Right.

Shea Houdmann

The parents involvement is is huge. And how we prepare our kids for college is be a tremendous determining factor in their college experience. So this has been the Got Questions podcast with Doctor Stephen Arterburn for his two new books that just recently came out, Understanding and Loving Your Child in a Screen Saturated World. Understanding and Loving Your College Student. So Steve, thank you for joining me today. Thank you for the insight that's in these books again. I recommend them highly. So many nuggets of wisdom and very practical on how to parent well.

Doctor Stephen Arterburn

Well, let me just mention that my co-author for the screen book is Doctor Alice Benton, who is a brilliant female psychologist that is on our radio program. And then with the college book, it's Jim Phyllis who is one of the most committed Christians but so wise. A lot of committed Christians don't have this wisdom, and he's been through it. And I think you you absolutely learn a lot from either book or both.

Shea Houdmann

Fantastic. I agree. Please listeners, please consider both of these books. Highly endorsed by gotquestions.org. So Doctor Arterburn, thank you again for joining me today. There's been the Got Questions podcast. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.