

BCL ep355 Family, Transparency, and AI Friends: Responding to the Latest Tech Changes with Chris McKenna

One thing's for sure about technology, it never stops changing. It seems like just when we figure out how to set filters on our home internet, smartphones get more complicated to monitor. And now with AI, which sounded like science fiction just a few years ago, it's now impacting not only students' paper writing and researching, but attention spans, and digital fakes are adding a whole other layer of concern around what and who we can trust.

Our guest today is on the front lines of watching and monitoring these constant changes. He helps parents and educators understand how to live in the digital swirl while guiding the next generation wisely. Join us now for this episode of Basecamp Live.

Mountains, we all face them as we seek to influence the next generation, get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings. We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation. Welcome to Basecamp Live.

Now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode of Basecamp Live. Davies Owens, your host.

We are at it again this week, tackling the issue that seems like every time I'm in a room and I say, parents, what's on your mind? What's concerning you? And all the arms go up in the air. And it usually has something to do with technology. And you know what? Technology, like fire, is a blessing.

It can also burn us if we're not careful. That's why I'm so excited to have Chris McKenna back with us. Chris McKenna is the founder of Protect Young Eyes.

He's the president of the Better Tech Project, a leading voice on digital safety. In his 2019 testimony before the U.S. Senate, he sparked over 20 hearings on online child protection. And under his leadership, Protect Young Eyes has earned the Digital Defense Award and the Faze Alliance Child Safety Award.

He also coauthored the Child Device Protection Bill, which is now law in Utah and Alabama, requiring devices to active content filters for minors. Chris serves as a technology advisor to AngelQAI and represents the human change movement, speaking globally, including at the World Economic Forum, while collaborating with advocates, tech leaders, and legislators. Featured in the film Childhood 2.0, Protect Young Eyes equips families with practical safety tools.

His greatest treasure remains his family and road trips together, along with his four children and two dogs. Chris is a blessing and has been on past episodes. If you didn't hear them, you can certainly go back, go to [Basecamlive.com](https://basecamlive.com), and you can hear more.

Before we jump into this, a couple quick shout outs. I want to shout out to our friends at Faith Christian School in Roanoke, Virginia. Peter Bauer, head of school there, and his team, along with parents and educators, we are so grateful you're part of the Basecamp Live and Zipcast community, as well as Dr. Tim Dernlin.

He's the head of school now. First year there, exciting new season for them at the Classical School of Wichita in Wichita, Kansas. So again, big shout out to you guys.

And of course, thanks to our sponsors who make this episode possible, Wilson Hill Academy, as well as the Champion Group and their Feed the Need program, the Herzog Foundation, who we're in partnership with, and of course, our own Zipcast. If you're not part of Zipcast as a school, let me encourage you to take a look at zipcast.media. We've got quite a number of schools joining us early next year, January, February. It's a perfect time to jump in if you have not done so.

So check that out, zipcast.media. In the meanwhile, let's jump into this conversation with Chris McKenna. Chris McKenna, welcome back to Basecamp Live. Davies, it's so good to be here.

I love these conversations. I know you do. Well, I had the privilege of hearing you on the stage at the Think Conference, and I thought it's always fascinating to me to hear, both as a means of encouraging and discouraging sometimes, what's going on out there in the broader technology space as it pertains to families.

So you've been on before, but just jump right in with what are some of the new digital risk or behaviors you're seeing out there that might even surprise us, because things are happening so fast in this space? Well, gosh, going back to Think, it was so awesome to pop out into the hallway and to actually see the physical version of Davies Owens. I have legs. This conversation.

So that was really cool, and I think that points towards what is missing more and more. What I've been saying recently, everything is AI, this and that, and I want to unpack what that means, because I think parents often have an idea of what AI is. We either think of movies or we think of getting an email crafted for us better, but it's so much more than that.

You know that, I know that, kids know that. Social media, it's taken us about 10 or 15 years to figure out that social media lied. It made the promise to us that we were going to be better connected with each other, and we believed it for a little while.

Now we're like, yeah, that wasn't really true. We figured that out. We're trying to debunk that and so forth.

The promise that AI is making is not a better connection with each other, but it's promising a better connection with it. If we're not careful, it might just succeed. That's the concern to me, that it is showing signs of success at the very thing that it's promising to do in a way that social media never did.

Eventually, it broke down and we saw through it. We're like, wow, I really prefer to be with my friends, because just chatting and yelling at others is no fun. There's something more sinister about an application that makes me feel connected without being connected.

There's a video that I often show on my talks. It's never feel alone again. That's the promise of AI.

You will be alone, but you'll never feel alone because it's scratching a lot of relational itch in the companions and the way it talks to you and the humanness. It's a whole different animal that we are up against here that I really think a lot of parents and educators are underestimating in terms of its potential. I also sometimes joke, I think we're pretty close, maybe 12 months away, from knowing whether or not our relationship with AI is going to be more like Star Wars or the Matrix.

It's either going to be, I've got C3PO and life is good because he's helping me, or I'm plugged in and it's using me. I think we're one or the other here. Yeah, it's a very precarious time.

Somebody was talking about, we've all grew up on, you mentioned C3PO, and this softening of our attitudes towards this idea of machines that sort of live next to us and even romanticizing it a little bit. It feels very natural, like, oh yeah, we're going to have a C3PO. The Jetsons, whatever it is.

The Jetsons, yeah. I mean, isn't this good? This is modern. It's great.

It's very interesting what you're talking about. Most of the time I have these conversations about AI with educators, of course, their immediate concern, which is legitimate, is kids don't write the papers anymore. They don't know how to think.

You're bringing up something that's even more dangerous, this idea of virtual friends, especially for a lonely kid who probably has an AI that doesn't judge him. Gosh, now what? You can get AIs that are wrapped, if you will, and a beautiful, attractive female who has a voice. You're like the ultimate girlfriend who is always there and never judges.

I mean, is that kind of what you're talking about? It just seems like a very potent dangerous reality. Yeah. It is what I'm talking about.

It is a potent reality. And you said something that is worth circling back to because you referenced that lonely kid. That is definitely true, but there's a danger in thinking that that's who we're talking about.

This isn't just a lonely kid. We're talking about every child during this developmental phase when their limbic system is on fire between the ages of 8 and 18. That middle relational, emotional fear and anxiety and stress and emotion part of the brain that is biggest and strongest in mammals.

We have that in common with others, but in humans, is under massive reconstruction during adolescence. It asks a very specific question. That's a different question than the deep part of the brain, which is trying to figure out how do I keep this human safe.

It's different than the front part of the brain, which develops in the mid-20s, the frontal cortex, which is asking what can I learn from this? The middle part of the brain, the emotional center of the brain, the amygdala and the reward center and dopamine. All of that is asking a different question during adolescence, which is am I loved? How am I connected with others? The two phases of development that humans go through that are critical to us as thriving individuals is attachment during the first thousand days of life and then connection during adolescence. One is attaching to caregivers so that we have security and feel cared for.

The other is how do I interact with the rest of the world? How do I thrive and relate and deal with emotions and interactions with others? That's that connection phase. We're talking about something that actually answers the most potent question they have during this key developmental phase in a way that nothing has ever answered it. It doesn't matter if you're a lonely kid or a kid with a ton of friends.

There are aspects of an AI companion that feel comforting to you. Real relationships are messy. Real girlfriends have tension and it's hard.

Real boyfriends, all of this. Life is dramatic when you're a teenager. You know what isn't? It's the premium version of replica or character AI who tells me all day long I'm awesome, who at 699 will even send me sexy selfies and call my phone and tell me I'm awesome from time to time.

These are things that feel great. If the primary developmental question I'm asking is am I loved, you better believe that app makes me feel loved. Everybody listening to this who isn't young, the 14-year-old version of you would have been drawn to that like sugar as a baby just like they are today.

It is. It is. We're dealing with a very early iteration of what this thing might be.

Back to Star Wars, there probably will be the holographic 3D version of this thing sitting on your desk. Obi-Wan is there to, back to your example, not only fill all those inner needs of who am I but also help with that homework that you didn't really want to do. It's dehumanizing us as we go.

I've heard you say before there's often a big gap between what the parents think kids are doing and what they're actually doing. It sounds like this, again, is only accelerating the gap and the problem, especially when this idea, I think parents are conflicted because they know AI is the future and they don't want to leave their kids behind. They're torn with, I feel like I need to give them, I'd rather have them make mistakes under my roof than off on their own.

There's this perhaps naive but well-intended desire to get them some technology. Again, it's a lot more problematic than we realize. Talk about that gap as you see it.

That's where the nuance comes in and why understanding when you and I talk about AI, the different flavors of AI. There is a chat GPT version of AI, which is helping me be more productive with information. Help me craft a 200-word response to this email.

Help me understand or write this in a way that is more engaging or more colorful. Something in terms of our creativity as human beings, AI is really good at that regurgitation of information. It can process so much so quickly.

Then there are say the versions of AI that are the little self-help chats that are on websites that you visit because you never get a human online. It's always some automated chat. What you and I are talking about is a flavor called AI companions.

These are large language models that have been specifically trained with very human-like interactions. You'll come back to it after a little while in the app that has, like you said, an avatar that looks like a beautiful, you can customize it whatever you want or handsome, whatever. Oh, I just finished dinner.

What did you have for dinner? A real conversation, been trained to interact with you as if you're chatting with a good friend. That's different than me going to say, I'm going to copy and paste this paragraph I wrote and help me write it better. They're all AI.

That's why understanding them is different and why the nuance is important because one might be okay for a 16-year-old, which is me maybe using ChatGPT to come up with a different way of this research that I'm doing. Honestly, I think we should be treating the companion version of AI like pornography and age-gated out of childhood altogether. There isn't a use case as a minor that to me goes, that's a healthy way to use AI.

The embodied relational talking to a human version is always better than what that is offering. Again, we've been desensitized with Siri and Alexa. There's this... Kids are growing up in a family where these devices are there.

Again, to the moment we're in, it's pretty innocuous. Hey, what's the weather or what time is it or whatever you typically talk to Siri about. You're talking about a whole another level of interaction and the danger.

They're not fenced off. This is what you're saying too. If you've got access to ChatGPT, you probably got access to the companion AI right there not far away.

Yeah. Anybody who has an iPhone or Google Play would be the same. If you were to type AI into any app store and just scroll, you'll see all the different companions that show up.

It's scroll after scroll after scroll. That's why understanding the differences and also even recognizing a little bit of nuance in what I just said because I sometimes do presentations with families who are in the foster adoptive side of things. Now they've got a young let's say a 14-year-old in the house who has been just abused by the system whose real life and real humans

have been horrible.

The digital world to that 14-year-old, an AI companion to that 14-year-old is maybe the most kind that he or she has ever been treated. Again, even in what I said in this sort of blanket statement of keep it fully gated on childhood, I have to sometimes recognize that to that 14-year-old, that AI companion might be the only salve he or she has because the real world has really abused that child. You can't fault him or her for being drawn to that in any way.

Sure. I think I've read examples. I want to go into another question.

We'll go to a break, but just real quickly, where that depressed child is asking, how do I get out of this or suicide? And the bots actually not necessarily giving them wise words in the right direction, but more like here's how you could maybe take your life. I mean, is that true? That's right. Yeah.

There are lawsuits in process right now. Character AI is the one Seuss Setser is the young man who in interactions with an AI companion in the form of a character from Game of Thrones was essentially not discouraged from dying by suicide. And now there have been other cases.

There was just a hearing. In fact, if folks listening to this would go back and look at the Senate Judiciary, there was a hearing recently about AI companions that is just crushing around some of the decisions that these young people made. Again, just in terms of mental health or counseling or therapy, they're not meant for that.

They're not tuned for that at all. Well, we're going to get, I know people are like, well, what do we do about it? We're going to get to some of that later on. But before we do, just if you could identify, we talked this problem, but if you could just name one unrecognized problem that you think families should be paying more attention to here in 2025 that maybe wasn't even such a big deal a year ago, is there anything else you would point to? Well, I mean, that certainly is the top.

The one thing that I keep putting in front of, especially good Christian parents, is I continue to see too many parents that underestimate what I'll call mature and adult content that isn't pornographic. I feel like we as a classical Christian or faith-based community, we all kind of go, well, porn's bad. We're doing a pretty good job of blocking and filtering and keeping that stuff out.

But I still cannot believe how many families still think YouTube is okay, even though we've blocked porn and really underappreciate the amount of just overall adult themes that our young people are being exposed to day after day in digital spaces that just are not designed for them and the content. It's not just pornography. I think we were reminded of that with the assassination of Charlie Kirk and how horribly violent and gruesome content.

And unfortunately, coincidentally, that same week, we had two extremely violent events take place. And that was the stabbing of that Ukrainian woman on the subway, which was filmed

and went everywhere. And then what happened with Charlie Kirk.

And I think we saw right in our faces the impact of algorithms and how helpless we sometimes are to prevent that content from just showing up in front of young eyes. And I think that's the kind of content that not as horrific as those two videos, but there's stuff like that everywhere. And I just think we need to be more in tune with where they're going, more curious about what they're watching, and just really always verify without trust whenever we're sending them into a digital space.

And that goes for what we do in the classroom with, say, Chromebooks or iPads and also with what happens at home. That's a great point, Chris. Yeah.

I wish the world were that simple where it long for those nineties or whenever when it was just put the filter on the R-rated movies and the world's generally going to be protected out. But you're right. There's so many other things and that rise and just violence that's out there or whatever it is.

It's really unhelpful. So why don't we take a quick break and come back? I want to keep chatting with you just about not only what you're seeing, but we'll kind of turn a little bit towards what do we start doing about it? And what if we have not started at the earliest age of our children and having all this figured out and we're finding ourselves now kind of behind the eight ball and how do we remedy it? How do we kind of get things back in order? So we'll take a break and we'll come back and continue our conversation with Chris McKenna. I'm here with my friend, Joanna Hensley, head of lower school at Wilson Hill Academy to tell you about their exciting new program.

Maybe you already know about Wilson Hill Academy. We talk about Wilson Hill all the time on Base Camp Live. They're known for their really effective and helpful online classical Christian education they offer.

They have lively courses for students in grades three through 12. But what you may not know is that Wilson Hill is now offering a rich early learning program they call Forma for students in K through second grade. I'm here with Joanna.

Joanna, tell us more. Oh, thanks, Davies. Forma is such a wonderful way to begin a lifelong love of learning.

You know, we talk often about the cautions of technology, so let's just go ahead and get this out of the way. Are you encouraging kindergartners to be on Zoom all the time? Is that what this is? Absolutely not, Davies. Forma does not involve putting five-year-olds on Zoom.

Forma is a program that gives to parents valuable guidance from an experienced mentor teacher who walks them through a carefully curated curriculum for teaching reading, math, nature study, and enrichment like picture study and music, all within a like-minded, encouraging community. I love what you guys are doing, especially for children in those

younger ages. How can folks learn more about what you're doing with Forma? They can visit our website [wilsonhillacademy.com slash Forma](http://wilsonhillacademy.com/slash/Forma), F-O-R-M-A.

Fantastic. Thanks so much, Joanna. School leaders, if you have ever wondered how to make school fundraising truly effective while being meaningful and mission-driven, join us at Advance.

It's an event that's being run by the good folks at the Champion Group. The Advance is an April 8th through 10th, 2026 event in Greensboro, North Carolina, and here's the best part. It's completely free to attend.

You just have to cover travel and lodging. Advance is for heads of schools, board directors, and leaders who feel the pressure of raising big dollars without losing sight of their calling. At Advance, you're going to find tools and training and encouragement while connecting with peers from across the country, learning from top development experts, and leaving with real-world strategies that you can take home and use right away.

Plus, every attendee receives a complimentary development evaluation and review. Spots are limited, so don't wait. Register today.

The details are in the show notes for this episode. Chris, right before the break, we were talking about the constant challenge to the point of this whole conversation of, gosh, just when we think we've got it figured out, we put the filter in and we got it all worked out. And all of a sudden, big tech got a little bit more intense and things changed.

And in the meanwhile, we may even find some of our children slipping through the digital cracks into things that we don't really want them into. So give us a sense of, again, the pace of this is coming very quickly. What are ways we can kind of stay up with this pace at the same time? How do we course correct? Yeah, great question.

I'm going to guess that listeners to this conversation fall into maybe one of three categories. There are those who, from the very beginning, have said, we're going to delay or we've bought into this. The hashtag we use, Davies, and you probably know this and others that delay is the way.

And we've stood firm on that. And we're good with that. So I think that's the population.

There are others who said yes too fast and now want to course correct. They need to peel some things back. And they know that's going to be horrible, but that's an audience.

And then there are those who have given access. They saw their kid being left out of stuff. They're like, I'm not taking Snapchat away.

I know it's bad, but I'm not going to take it away. So what do I do? And I think those are probably three types of families that are out there. So maybe just a couple of words to each in

the face of some of these headwinds.

So on the delay family, great. The science, the research, the Bible supports what you're doing. To use a filter of Philippians only things that are good and excellent and honorable and praiseworthy.

And there's just not a ton out there that is. And so let's wait. The best way to prevent some of this egregious digital harm that we've talked about is to not let them enter into it.

Amen. Totally agree with you. And what I see as the biggest risk in that decision is the lack of conversation with parents of children around our children to ensure that collateral damage, even though we've got our house in order.

I just had a conversation with the mom was Chris, we've done this and this. But my kid was at another friend's house and they saw something on this explicit site. And as we kind of unpacked it, she didn't really know that family very well.

She hadn't engaged them in conversations about what her own digital values were. And that's what's missing from when you and were growing up, where mom kind of knew every home and was BFFs with most of the moms of the kids we hung out with. And that created a bit of a circle of trust that we just don't have as much anymore.

And so if we're going to have kids who aren't doing or exposed or have their own devices and stuff, then we've got to go out of our way to have sometimes awkward conversations to engage other parents, to make sure that circle of protection extends beyond our home. So that's one, the middle family, those who feel like they've got to peel some things back and turn stuff around. There's way too much to cover in just this little conversation.

There are some specific mindsets and steps that we go through. We have 10 different steps we walk families through, kind of high level. We have this HALT, which is sometimes an acronym that's used in the addiction space around what things are triggers for addiction, hungry, angry, lonely, tired.

So if you've heard HALT before, that's work, but we've defined it a different way that if you're going to turn the plane around and that's the illustration we use. If you're a pilot and you realize you're flying the wrong direction, what do you do? You announce to those passengers that you've made a mistake. We're going to turn around and then you turn the plane around.

Why? Because you're the pilot. Your mom and dad, you are the pilot. Sometimes we do need to turn the plane around.

We've made a digital decision. We've got to peel back. So do it in humility.

That's the H. Recognize that this is your fault as the parent. I'm not trying to shame you, but I want in front of your kids for them to know they did maybe nothing wrong and you jumped a

little too soon, and so you're owning this as their caregiver. Understand that they are going to be angry and it's going to be awful for a little while.

You've got to go into this, making that decision, knowing that it is going to be horrible for a little while. But that leads into the L, which is the limbic system, which is it's horrible, not because it's personal or maybe they're as mad at you as if their brain is mad at the tech because of what you're doing. So orient your anger toward it and not them.

These are mindsets for us as we're going through this. And then the T is it takes some time, so work through it. So my encouragement is if something is harming your child, then do something about it.

It's okay. Our focus is holiness, not happiness. It's okay.

And then the last one, if you've said yes, you're not going to take it away, then we encourage parents with a risk mindset. My brain, just because of my business background, is if we've introduced risk into a situation, then we have to take steps to prevent or mitigate that as much as possible. So if you've said yes to YouTube or yes to Snapchat or yes to Instagram, okay, that yes brings inherent risk.

There are things we have to do to mitigate that risk. I put them all into this category of be ridiculous. Be ridiculous as a parent.

Be ridiculously direct, ridiculously frequent with your conversations. Talk about ridiculous things that you never thought you'd have to talk about. Look your son in the eye and talk about what you do and don't take a picture of and body parts and send it to others and get their attention.

If you've said yes to risky digital places, then you also have to be one to say yes to do ridiculously intentionally as a parent to mitigate the risk around that decision. So that's like a two-minute version of what is like a 20-minute part of our parent presentation to walk through those three scenarios because there's a lot in each of them. Yeah.

And again, at the end, we'll give folks instruction on how to dig into so many of your fantastic resources. So you were describing that. I mean, one thing, a couple things that stood out that I know we've talked about a lot on this podcast, and that is it really does take a village, a community to pull this off.

And one of the advantages for most of the people who are listening, they're part of private schools, classical Christian schools, where there is a community there. Granted, the church is a community, but more often than not, your children are in community and fellowship and friendship with these children and grade levels. And so schools do have a powerful opportunity to kind of lock arms together as parents in schools.

And I see this more and more in the post-med pledge and say, we're just going to be counter

cultural. We're going to be weird together because when you're that one or two hold out parent, it really is, you really feel like you're socially, you are in effect hurting your child's social life because the whole life is digital. So it sounds like you would advocate for that really kind of counter cultural approach to creating community, kind of analog community.

Absolutely. We've known this for a long time in faith communities, the power, right, that that has in coming together in kind of more secular terms. It's what Jonathan Haidt in *The Anxious Generation*, right? Collective action.

That's sort of the scientific description of what we've known as faith communities and the power of coming together as brothers and sisters in Christ. But it's true, right? There's this power in physically in community coming together to make these agreements and to build each other up and to encourage each other. That's what it's all about.

So you're right. And there's a lot that would support that. And this is especially true in why certain Latin American countries who still aren't quite where we are in America in terms of post-modernism, but still have a very strong emphasis on say the Catholic church in Latin America.

And there's still strong family bonds that actually has inoculated some of those countries from some of the mental health charts that you see like hockey sticks here in the US. Why? Because there's this strong focus on community and relationship and taking care of each other. And it matters.

I want to take a break and I'll go ahead and set up the question. We'll come back to it. I mean, again, I'm aging myself here a bit, but I remember in the early nineties, I was doing youth ministry and I remember going, it was kind of the true love weights movement was really big.

And we took our youth to this event and, you know, there were doctors that came up and they showed these scary slides of STDs and talked about the problems. You remember those slides? Then I don't know why they didn't serve pepperoni pizza after, but that's a whole other point and another problem. But at any rate, it really did happen.

I was like, that was a bad move guys. But my point is it was like, what's the tactic? Because we don't want our kids to, you know, we wait till marriage. And of course we all believe that.

And there's all the theology that's correct and all of the warnings are correct. And yet students sit there and they think, well, yeah, I'm, I, that's all true, but I, I'm going to, I'm going to both follow my, my peers. I'm going to follow what the community does and what's not, I don't want to be weird.

I mean, those are forces that are way stronger than just the consenting to the intellectual concerns or the statistics, which is where I feel like that's kind of, I want to come back to the question is like you, you talked about in that second and third group where you have students are already exposed and you need to kind of talk with them. If you're, if your talk just consists of here's the latest stats from the surgeon general and what's wrong with too much digital use.

I mean, yeah.

Okay. That that's again, maybe not really striking at the deepest level to move them where they find that willingness and freedom to move to this new way, which I know is part of it is community, but we'll come back. I want to get your full thoughts on that idea right after this break.

During this short break, I have a special invitation to all school leaders, administrators, and teachers. I want you to imagine for a moment, stepping away from your everyday routine at school and diving deep into the rich foundations of Christian education, surrounded by world-class scholars, seasoned classroom teachers, and administrative experts with years of experience running schools with a lot of wisdom to share. That's exactly what the Herzog Foundation's Institute is offering.

I've had the joy of serving as a training coach for the last few years, leading their two and a half day training on spiritual formation and another one on parent engagement. They offer close to 50 unique training events, ranging from board governance to marketing to classroom best practices. They even offer a training on how to teach the great books and the best part of all, well, thanks to the generosity of the Herzog Foundation, these training events, including lodging are completely free for Christian educators.

Institutes are located around the country in beautiful locations, including at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC and the Reagan Library in Santa Barbara. Don't miss this incredible opportunity. Check out the details at theherzogfoundation.com. Every school year tells a story.

The big chapters, like the first day of class or graduation, are easy to see. But the real heart of the story is often written in the quieter pages. A science experiment that sparks wonder, a class pausing to memorize a Psalm, a teacher encouraging perseverance when the work gets hard.

Those are the moments parents long to hear. That's why we created Zipcast. Each week families receive a short 10 to 12 minute episode, local updates from their school leaders, paired with syndicated wisdom from trusted national experts in both Christian parenting and education.

Parents can listen in the rhythm of daily life on the drive to practice while making dinner or during a quiet walk. Nearly 100 schools are already using Zipcast this year to strengthen trust and community and fall or winter isn't too late to sign up. It's often the best time to begin.

Save your spot at zipcast.media. Zipcast, encouraging you on the go with what you need to know. Well, Chris, right before the break we were talking about using scary slides and pepperoni pizzas to, you know, convince students to make the right decision. And I feel like we're kind of at risk, perhaps, of showing up with our slides and our stats and all the horrible things that digital virtual AIs are going to do to you.

And yet students are just wanting to belong. And this is why kids, unfortunately, will go join gangs and kill people. Not because they want to do that, but because that's what it takes to

belong back to your points earlier.

So what do we do to kind of fight the battle at that human visceral level of identity? What does that look like in this digital space? Yeah, wow. That's big. There's books and so much written beyond what we can cover.

You only have five minutes. Go on, Chris. Let's go.

Let's do it. Yeah. So wherever possible, it doesn't even limit itself just to a conversation around AI.

I just, wherever we can, let's invite agency from the people that we're, you know, the young people that we're talking to into this conversation. I mean, maybe there's some non-negotiables about what apps they can and can't use. But gosh, wherever possible, just kind of lay out like everything that you just said.

You know, parents will come to me all the time and say, Chris, how do I talk to my kids about this or that? And they'll go through all the things they're afraid of and all their concerns and how much they love their son or daughter. And I'll pause and I'll look at them and say, have you said all those things to your son or daughter? And I'm like, no. But just literally just rewind and hit play in front of them of everything that you just shared with me.

Wherever we can turn this into a, I'm with you and not against you, that I'm alongside you and I want you to become a thriving, amazing human being that loves the Lord and loves life. This isn't because I hate you. It's because I just don't like the potential for what the tech could be doing to you.

I hate it. And it's just, we have to say a lot of things out loud that we're thinking of, put our fears, put our concerns, put them right out in front of our kids because they then have less power over our parenting and our tone when we've said them out loud. And I think they just have less power over the entire situation, right? Put it out in the light where it can be dealt with.

And so regardless of the topic, I just, I tell parents, tell your kids everything that you're afraid of that you hope never happens to them and say it out loud and wherever possible, you know, share why. It's not just that AI is bad. You can say, you know, I bumped into this study from MIT that even for adults who constantly used AI, it actually made them dumber if they just used it instead of came up with their own thoughts.

First, it's called cognitive offloading. I'm reading about this now. I just, I want you to be aware of it and, you know, invite them in with some of the explanation.

Again, it's not just because I'm a boomer and I don't get stuff. I've, I've read a study and like, this is what it's telling me. And this is why no matter how rough or how horrible you think your first ideas are, always write them down before you ask chat GPT to be the brain for you.

Otherwise you're going to create a brain that can't think for you at all. And here's the study that supports that. So I guess I'm talking in big sort of kind of the principles, the principle of authenticity, just put it out there.

Everything that you're concerned about, everything you hope never happens. The principle of sort of why and an explanation, the principle of agency, giving them some ownership and say in offering what their thoughts are. What is it about this new technology? What is it about this app that they can't put down? What is it about these videos that they really enjoy watching? Invite them into that conversation wherever possible.

Now I say all of that and some are still going to listen to this and go, Chris, that sounds really Pollyanna and great. And I understand that. And I wish I had perfect silver bullet sort of responses to this, but you know, you know, your kids best, you know what works best with them.

And I got to believe that something in those principles in your specific situation, thinking about where you are in that continuum of family, A, B, or C, where you are with your tech, there's going to be a spot where you can sort of meet in the middle, look at each other and go, man, this is really hard. Amazing son or daughter of mine. You agree? Yeah, this is really hard.

What can we do together and come to that place? Well, and I think you, you know, you were talking about just the, again, depends on the age of the child, these conversations, but certainly middle upper school. I mean, we, we train our children in school to, you know, to wrestle through difficult ideas. So this is very much an appropriate topic.

I, I want to, I noticed in the few minutes we have left, I hear often from school leaders that the difficulty is this isn't just a problem that our children have. It's obviously a problem that the whole world has, including us as adults and parents. And I, I'm curious your thoughts on, it seems like, you know, kind of to the biblical idea, we got to have to kind of take the log out of our own eye.

We have to kind of come to terms with our own relationship with technology, because if we're not convinced it's that bad, and what we're really just doing is trying to do the kid rated version of this thing. It seems like there's some work that we probably need to do in our own soul searching and our own research to realize what's it doing to us, and then really own that and then have that conversation with their child. Would you agree with that? I mean, it seems like there's a gap sometimes that we just don't really understand ourselves, what's happening to us as a, as, you know, seemingly intelligent adults.

Yeah, I think that's, I think that's absolutely true, which is why the, um, I have a son that's joined us here. So if you can hear him in the background, there's always other things happening. It's good to have family around.

Speaking of community and family. I love it. Speaking of community, right? You were talking

earlier that sometimes it's important to be reminded of what's authentic in an AI world.

Well, this is an authentic conversation. I love it, Chris. Yes.

Um, but to your point there, we have five habits that we teach families when we have the opportunity to speak with them. And the number one is to model the right behaviors. And I think that gets said quite a bit, but it doesn't have to be big macro changes to becoming, you know, totally on, you know, analog with you as a parent.

I understand that part of navigating being a parent today is having certain apps and having, you know, power school and checking in and all these different things we do to keep track of sports and life and school and all that. I get that. It's a lot of micro moves sometimes.

And I just think we lose sight of if you were to sort of do a time study of the 168 hours that you have and looked at all the different ways in which you interact with technology as a parent, I know there's opportunity to scale a few things back to do a few things differently, little micro moves to show your children that embodied physical experiences matter. For example, super simple at the grocery store. I go out of my way to go through the manned or person to checkout lane.

I could go through the automated every time. Why? Because it's easier, but to interact with another human being with my kids, to show them a conversation, it might be that that teenager who is scanning your groceries needed your smile, who knows, but I want to show them wherever possible that interacting with other human beings, but I'm not talking about throwing your smartphone out the window with this example. I'm not talking about deleting all the apps off.

Instead, look for opportunities to show them what human to human interaction looks like in a digital world so we can find that balance between the two little micro moves, things like that that I think we lose sight of. I even use traveling as an example where every time I'm 24 hours out from checking into the Hampton Inn, I'm in next. I get a reminder from the Hilton app that I can do contactless check-in.

Everything became contactless and no human interaction because of COVID. I ignore it every time. Why? Because I want to interact with the person at the front desk.

What's great about this community? There's usually something that I could do close by. I've got wild stories of things that I've learned from talking to the person at the front desk and the places that I go to. These aren't radical life changes.

I just think we miss some of these micro moves that we can make that show our kids a different way to be. Love it. It's just retake our analog humanity is really in these small ways, just conversations around a family dinner table.

These are in so many ways lost experiences for modern families. I love your ideas. I know you

have many more.

Why don't you just share with folks a little bit about how they can find you and the resources that you guys offer? Sure. [Protectyoungeyes.com](https://protectyoungeyes.com) and ironically, finding us on social media at Protect Young Eyes. We're trying to use it for as much- Or I guess they can write you a letter.

Good. Absolutely. I'd get it.

Definitely. I'm not hard to find. If you were to type Chris McKenna, PYE, even into chat GPT, it will point you in my direction.

We have different layers of help, whatever you need. If you can self-help your way through, our website will do that for you with explanations and descriptions of how to set up devices. That's great.

If you need one step greater in terms of education, we have on-demand course that you can take to walk you through what we do live in front of parents. If you need one step deeper, I have a tech support geek squad-like environment called The Table where you can get one-on-one help from Abby on my team, who's an amazing mom, former high school teacher who now homeschools and is very technical. She answers these kinds of questions.

How do I set up my router? What's the best parental control solution for this or that? She answers those questions. Wherever you find yourself on the IQ of technology and needing your questions answered, we hope we have something. You certainly do.

It's been exciting to know you over the years and just watch the development of new and better resources to meet the modern families. Chris, you guys do such a great job. Again, so thankful to talk to you.

Hopefully, next time we talk, there won't be the holographic virtual AI assistant friend there. We can maybe push that down the road a little bit more while we enjoy analog living. Thanks for your encouragement today.

I really appreciate it. My pleasure, Davey. Talk again soon.

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See you back next week.