

EP 03: Mental Wellness for Kids in a Digital World

Cerys VO: Navigating the Digital Jungle with Sue Atkins and Friends.

Sue: Welcome to Navigating the Digital Jungle with me, Sue Atkins, parenting author and broadcaster, and I'm delighted to be here today with my friends. Angeline Corvaglia, creator of Data Girl and Friends, empowering young minds. Thank you with online safety, and Al literacy, videos, games, and educational materials.

And later on, Marneta Viegas, founder of Relax Kids wonderful resources, to support children's mental and emotional health and well being, with a range of tools and techniques to help children with self regulation and relaxation to build good emotional health through meditation and values-based classes and products.

Now, Marneta has been teaching important mental health skills for over 20 years that have transformed the lives of young people and their families around the world. Tara is taking a well earned break with her kids this week. So thanks for joining us. We're all here to guide you through the digital jungle.

And this week, we're diving into well being and good mental health for children and the whole family. Now, good mental health and well-being in children encompasses, for me, several key components. Emotional stability. Children with good mental health are able to understand, manage and express their emotions in very healthy ways.

They experience a range of emotions, but it can generally be described as a positive mood. They have resilience. That's the ability to cope with stress and to bounce back from challenges. That's a sign of good mental health. Healthy relationships, positive interactions with the family, with friends, with peers, and people around the world are crucial because children with good mental health can form and maintain healthy relationships and they can show empathy and they have good communication. Good mental health is reflected in behavioral control because a child is able to regulate their own behavior. They can follow rules, they can make decisions that are appropriate for their own age.

Also, they have effective social skills and that helps them interact appropriately with others, resolve conflicts and work collaboratively. And of course, there's a strong connection between physical and mental health. Regular physical activity, a balanced diet, and of course, adequate sleep all contribute to overall well being.

So let's look at how technology can disrupt children's mental health and wellbeing. Because, while we all know technology offers numerous benefits, and I love it, it's misuse or overuse can have negative impacts on children's mental health and wellbeing. And here are just a few ways that tech can do that.

As I've mentioned, it can reduce physical activity. It can interrupt sleep, electric devices before bedtime can interfere with sleep patterns. And of course, sleep deprivation can really negatively impact on their mood, their behavior, their cognitive function, that blue light keeps them buzzing, not snoring.

As we know, social isolation over reliance on digital communication can, you know, really reduce their face to face interactions. We know that about cyberbullying. We know about addiction and dependency. And of course, the one that we've been talking around a bit is the exposure to inappropriate content.

And of course the other side of this, as a former deputy head, is that decreased attention span because they get really buzzed up and they can't concentrate for long periods. So it's about balance for me. And to mitigate these risks, it's important to foster a balanced approach to technology use in children's lives.

So, Angeline, without further ado, what can parents do to balance tech at home? Angeline: Well, I think the first important step to find balance in tech at home is to understand what would cause an imbalance, whether it's already there, or whether it could potentially happen in a lot of cases, it's already there.

So maybe that's why you're listening to this podcast. So just spend some time and understand why is the child on the devices in the first place? Do they feel they don't have alternatives? Are they having trouble breaking away? Because, as I talk about a lot, the devices are designed to keep children hooked, and it can be very difficult for their minds to fight against that, so they really need our help.

So, talking to your children, making sure both of you understand what it is that makes them want to stay online, and work together to set rules to help create a balance, such as clear rules and limits. Define places and times where they need to get a digital detox, like the bedroom, I feel really strongly about that night, 10 hours in the bedroom, monitor and always, and try out as well, as I said last week, the content that your child's are using, because it might help you understand why they're having trouble getting away from it, like TikTok.

The 20 minutes of my life I spent on TikTok made me understand a lot. All for alternatives, uh, such as visits to the park, museums, playdates, sports, music, family times. So with these actions, we can maintain a healthy balance and guide children in the responsible use of technology because parents and caregivers can really help the children, the digital natives, find a balance between what they see offline and what they see online.

Sue: And as we've said in the past as well, it's about looking at our own digital kind of approach as well. Cause if we're constantly on it, they're not seeing a good role model particularly, are they? So it's about balance, not banning anything, but trying to find that balance and being confident in putting rules is what we're all about here really, to empower you as parents and caregivers, teachers and whoever.

That confidence to sort of guide kids. So that leads me really nicely on to my wonderful friend, Marneta Viegas. I'm a huge fan of her work for many years. So thanks for joining us today, Nettie.

Nettie: Thank you, Sue.

Sue: So listen, tell us about your award winning Relax Kids. When it started, why it started, and how it's grown and expanded to be such an integral part of so many family lives.

Nettie: Yeah, it's so interesting because when I started in 1999, there wasn't a mental health crisis, but I saw something in the change in children. I'd been an entertainer since the early nineties, and over that time, I noticed their inability to sit still and listen to my show. And I thought, well, I'm, my show's not getting worse, their minds, their brains, something's happening and, having practiced meditation since I was 12, I felt meditation was the answer. So, but I had to find a way to make meditation accessible to children and acceptable to adults, because, having grown up in the 70s, 80s doing meditation, I was called a hippie, lentil eating, all that sort of thing. It did have a stigma, it doesn't now, but it did then.

So I took all the fairy stories, and I turned them into meditations, and I really, sort of got into children's minds and it sort of took off from there. It really was just two books and then I made some CDs and then it built from there. And alongside that, I developed a set of classes, which is seven steps.

Which works through their natural energy system. Cause if you tell children who are scaling the walls, right, everybody lie down, they just can't do it. You have to work through their body, their heart, and then their mind before they can actually lie down. And then for teenagers, I've created a charger. So we've got relaxed kids, seven steps, and I've taken the seven steps to do something for teens. So it really helps them understand how their minds work, how their bodies work, how their brains work. And they need to switch off just like a computer, just like their phone. They need to reboot, they need to recharge. And so that it sort of developed from there. Yeah.

Sue: Oh my goodness.

And it really has. I mean, you mentioned it briefly there, but you've, have you noticed even more since the pandemic, a change in children's well-being in recent years?

Nettie: It's off the scale. It's unbelievable. The need, and so many of my coaches are just saying, we need more coaches because there's such a massive need in schools, in homes, in community center's, wherever there are so many issues, unfortunately, children are having.



But for me, it's about simplicity. Yes. We have so many theories out there. An interesting thing. When I first created Relax Kids, I didn't know any theory. I come from a performing arts background, music, drama, dance degree, and I used all those exercises to create these Relax Kids with the meditation, but I wasn't aware of any theory when I created it.

It's just practical. These things help children. These things help young people. They feel better after they have done it. And then of course, now every single one of my seven steps, there has been so much research by other people because these, they're basic human things that we all need. Moving, stretching, breathing, affirmations, meditation.

Yeah. But the key is simplicity. We over complicate with theory, I personally feel.

Sue: I absolutely agree. I call it KISS. You know, you gotta keep it simple, I think, really. And that doesn't mean it's not well founded in research, or it's got complicated aspects to it, but to keep it simple makes, makes it accessible to everybody.

I mean, I see your work really as an antidote, in a sense, to screens, to help children find balance. So, what do the Relax Kids classes improve? Can you tell us about that?

Nettie: Well, of course, it helps concentration, focus, builds their self esteem, helps them improve their sleep. We had some amazing surprises. They weren't created for children with neurodivergence, but I remember going into a school, this is, this is early 2000s, I went into a school and it was a mixed group and there was a, a child there with autism, well the person looking after him said, he really won't get this, but we'll let him stay for a bit. That child, her jaw was on the floor, he was just totally there.

And he got it. And he relaxed. I've had children with ADHD, literally bouncing off the walls. And after the 45 minutes asleep, and people are just like, I cannot believe this because they're exhausted. Their brains need to relax. They're just exhausted. And they're just like little wound screws. But we have to move through their body first before we get the relaxing. That's really key.

Sue: Do they then learn those skills that they can do that for themselves? You know, not in the class when they're out and about what? You empower them, I hope, don't you?

Nettie: Absolutely, a hundred percent. And again, hundreds of stories, but, two that are particularly coming to mind. Well, three actually, but there were these two little boys who needed a lot of injections.

So they had a lot of physical problems. So that whole, they had terrible needle phobia. And through doing these relaxations, their mother was a coach actually. So she was taking them to the classes, doing the relaxation at night and they managed to really work on their needle phobia that they were able to relax and even smile during those really horrible experiences. And there was another lovely story of this little four year old who he wasn't invited to this party that maybe his brother had been invited to and he just kicked off. And then he took himself, he took himself off to his bedroom and his mother couldn't believe this. I've got the photo and he got all his farm animals around him. He created a circle of calm and he sat in there and he did his relax.

Angeline: Oh my God.

Nettie: So he, I mean, at four, four and a half, he learnt to self regulate. There have been so many stories like that where children just, you know, once you give them the keys, you give them the tools, they will be able to, to do it for themselves.

Sue: Because you call it a box of mental health tools, don't you? Yes. And, you know, is that part of the secret or do you want to share sort of what they might be, what they cover and how that works?

Nettie: Oh yes, no secret. I mean they're, they're all the basic things that we used to do as humans, you know, dancing, moving, stretching, breathing. And I think affirmations are really key as well, because words really are like spells, I think. Yes. If you think of spelling, it's like a magic spell. So if I say, I hate, I hate this, I hate, and you hear a lot of that, you hear adults and children, teenage, oh, I hate that.

Well, that has actually got an energy. The word, sounds a bit woo woo, but all this sort of woo woo stuff has been scientifically proven now, which is amazing. So if I'm saying, I am peaceful just by saying the word peace that is bringing towards me that feeling of peace and calm and so really as parents as well to, to watch our words because they are spells.

Sue: Yeah, because even if you say to yourself, Oh, I'm tired. And then you said over and over and it, Oh, you end up yawning and you end up feeling tired. So words really do have power. I think that's lovely. They are like spells, but what's so magical?

Nettie: Have you ever done that thing? Uh, it was a long time ago now.

You said, Oh, I can't come into work today. I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm really ill. And, and you're not ill, but you want to take a day off. And next day I became ill. So your body is listening, just as, you know, we say, I am stressed, so our body is listening, and we'll become more stressed. Yes. So, this has a really massive impact.

Sue: And you have wonderful resources for that, you have affirmation cards, your artwork, oh my god, I just adore the artwork. Everything that you do is just so beautiful and it just keeps blossoming and growing and becoming amazing. So tell us about the work you do in schools as well.

Nettie: Okay, so in schools, of course, we've got our coaches going into schools. But also, we have this new program called Karma Class, which is a toolkit that every teacher can have in the classroom, or you would have loved this when you were a head teacher, Sue, and they can get it on their whiteboard, and it's set for different times of the school day. So registration, right, we need to stop and do 30 seconds, either 30 seconds or up to four or five minutes.

And so all my tools have been rearranged and we've just added the zones of regulation into that as well. And we're creating like a three week plan. So teachers can do it on a rotation like dinners. Three week dinner rotation. Love it. It's a three week plan. So you go, okay, we need to stop after, uh, you had wet play, everyone's a bit fractious. Let's sit and we'll do this. And so you are keeping them on a level, a steady level of regulation rather than going up and down and up and down.

Sue: Yes. That's the secret. What it reminds me of, because I've been into meditation and stuff like, and guided meditations myself for years and years since having studied with Paul McKenna and Tony Robbins.

But when I was working in a school, I remember, they used to come in from playtime after, you know, running around and being wild and all that. They used to come in and put their heads down because I started every day to do this thing called The Garden of Dreams. And I just sort of make it up. It was a guided meditation because I'm a hypnotherapist.

And I just would make it up and we'd go and we'd walk down the, you know, and the chakras and colors and taking them there. He loved it. And then this little boy, they were nine and they look forward to it and that brought them into a calm space for concentration after a wonderful playtime because they need play.

Kids need more play. Real life play. Climb a tree, you know, build a den. Anyway, they would come down into a more focused place. We'd have a lovely afternoon and then we'd go for a bit of a walk around the playground a bit later. So, constantly breaking up their day. So I didn't know you have these wonderful tools now.

And I hope lots of teachers will access those wonderful, wonderful ways of just trying to, you know, help children, because eventually they learn to self regulate themselves through these techniques. They don't need other people to do it for them. So, you know, tell us about your fantastic, the big wellbeing pack and how people listening today can get hold of that and what that is.

Nettie: So. I've put together a whole load of tools that we've been talking about in this big bumper wellbeing pack. And it is big. There's a lot in there. So you'll get so much for your no money. It's free. And you just go to the website and you'll see the link. I can't remember the exact link. Go to relax kids.com and you'll see it there, wellbeing pack.

Oh, wonderful. And, and try it with the children. But the key is regular. Yes. And doing it together rather than, oh, you need to go and do this. No, actually, you know when you point a finger. Yeah. How many fingers are pointing back at you? Yeah, it's three. So actually no, as a parent, I need to remember. I need to self regulate.

I need to relax. And if my child is stressed, where's the mirror? Ah, maybe I am stressed somewhere. So doing it together makes such a difference.



Sue: Oh, I love that. Absolutely love that, that we do things together. That's the whole point of it, really. I mean, what's your ultimate advice then for parents listening today to try and navigating this digital jungle?

What do you think you would like their takeaway to be from you?

Nettie: You know, Sue, last night I, I run a free art session on Meetup, and it's usually women that come, and last night, there were four young boys. I could see three of them knew each other. And so they were all in their headphones. They were laughing, obviously on mute.

I am getting to the answer. I did sort of stop and say, Oh, I think we've got some jokers here. You definitely in to do. And they, yeah. Yeah, we're definitely. And so I thought, okay, well, I'm not going to remove them from the group. And they did it and they got it and it was just, the stuff that they came out with, I was blown away.

And my friend who was there. We just thought that was a moment I will, I literally, I'm getting tingles now. Those young guys, they were opening up and I thought, hope. Yes. Hope is the thing. Yes. These young people are absolutely incredible. And my initial vision of them, I was judging them thinking, oh, they're going to ruin it.

They're going to show me rude pictures. They didn't, their work was beautiful. And so I thought hope is the secret. And, and I thought, what is hope? It's have an open, positive ear. That is what we need to do. Have an open, positive ear and really listen to them and really feel into, to what they need.

Sue: Yeah, connect.

It's connection, isn't it? Connection, yeah. Seeing the best in people, not presuming or prejudging. And that's inspiring what you've just said there because so many times it's, oh, smartphones are this and devices are that and kids are this and they're addicted that. This is not about that. For me, it's about hope and how we can make some small changes that will make a big difference.

That's what I'm about with the podcast and with my writing at the moment. All about balance.

Nettie: Yeah. And I will just add something else because I was quite blown away Three of them were from Germany and one from Portugal, which was amazing, but they were literally 15 to 18. What we were doing is we were looking at our cup, which is half full and half empty and looking at the bottom bit, looking at what the thing we're full in life and what we love and we're grateful for.

And then the top bit, the space, what we would like. And obviously they said we would like more money, but one of them said, do you know what? I am so happy with my life. I have got everything I don't want. And I was just like, I said, you've literally at 18 just reached what we all want. What we're all striving for.



It was incredible. Yeah. It was incredible to have that level of contentment. And that is what I would want for every child, every teenager, particularly, and every parent just to get to that level of this is enough. This is okay. We don't have to keep wanting more, you know, getting more money just for things that we don't really need and just being on that hamster wheel.

Oh, let's just all relax and go and have a campfire and keep it simple.

Sue: Keep it simple and be content with what we have, and I know you'll agree in terms of, I do a lot of what I'm grateful for every morning and every evening, and you start off with the usual stuff, I mean I do it with kids, I mean I do it with families when I'm working with them, you know, they always start, and I link it to brushing teeth. So in the morning they brush their teeth and they look in the mirror and they say, I am special because, because I'm working on their self esteem, so they say what they're good at and what they're proud of to themselves.

They're doing it out loud because it's about ourselves. It's not as externally all the time come from other people it's within. And then in the evening, when they brush their teeth, they have to say what they're grateful for, and it starts off with the usual sorts of stuff. And the more you do it though, the deeper you get into being grateful for the small stuff, as well as everything else, and you have a sense of wellbeing and contentment, rather than this pursuit of happiness that we're obsessed with, I think is a great way to be.

And what's wonderful to talk with you is about the way you've focused on hope. And that, for me, is the magic. And I highly recommend people go and explore all your amazing resources. So tell us where people can find you.

Nettie: Yeah, just go to relaxkids. com. you'll find I've written 20 books. There are 500 audios. It all put into it. You mean you've got more than me there? Well, they are individual audios. Yeah. 500 audios.

Not albums, sort of. Different packs. Find out about the classes, online classes, and of course, training. If you're interested to train to be a coach, because we need coaches. We do. And we need people to run their own business, get out there and teach the teams, teach the children.

So it's all there, yeah.

Sue: Oh, it's, it's so wonderful. Absolutely a delight to see you and thank you so much for your time and joining us today.

Nettie: Thank you, Sue.

Sue: Today's episode of Navigating the Digital Jungle is brought to you in collaboration with World Digital Detox Day, an international movement dedicated to reclaiming our lives from the overwhelming grip of technology. So are you feeling overwhelmed by screens and technology?



Take a break and join millions of people around the world on World Digital Detox Day because it's the perfect opportunity to unplug, unwind and reconnect with the world around you, for your mental health and your family and children's wellbeing. Join this important movement with over seven and a half million people worldwide and visit World Digital detox day.com. To learn more about becoming involved with the world's largest digital wellbeing initiative. Start your digital detox journey today to better mental health and wellbeing for your whole family.

Angeline: It's time for our family change segment, where we suggest a small change that will make a big difference on your digital jungle journey. So grab your digital machetes and let's tackle this together. This week, commit to phones out of bedrooms from everyone, even you, mom and dad. So what does that mean?

Find another alarm clock. We had so many years without alarm clocks on our phones. We need to get those back again. Charge your phones downstairs and no phones in the bedrooms. And let us know how it goes. Send pictures of how well rested your family is in the morning. Send us emails at info at navigatingthedigitaljungle. com. And don't forget to send us your questions and we'll do our best to answer them.

Sue: Wonderful. So there you go. Commit to phones out of bedrooms. Ah, good luck with that one, but it's a big one because I think it makes a big difference over a few weeks. Just become a new habit.

Cerys VO: Listener questions.

Sue: So now it's time for listeners questions.

We've received some fantastic questions from our listeners this week. So let's dive in and provide some answers. So here we go. What are some strategies or boundaries that parents can use with regard to tech? Well, here we go with some effective approaches. Establish clear rules and expectations. That includes screen time limits, appropriate content, device free zones and times, you know, like during meals and before bedtime or during family activities, no tech and make sure that these rules are communicated very clearly and consistently and you're confident when you're establishing with kids. Lead by example. You know, model healthy tech habits yourself, limit your screen time and prioritize face to face interactions with your family and kids so that you're demonstrating mindful tech use, because then they're more likely to copy your behavior because they see you doing it.

Do take advantage of parental controls. I know people go, Oh, I don't know how to do that. But that is another wraparound for me of protection for kids. You know, parental control features really do help you sort of restrict your children's access to certain apps, to certain websites, to certain content.

And it will help you set some time limits for screen time as well. And then we come back to what I'm always banging on about. Encourage balanced activities off screen, you know, I worked with a client once and they tried to get her son off the tech to say, come off your device and come and do your physics homework.

And I said, well, that was compelling for him to come off and do his homework. So come off if they're young, play, and I talk a lot about ing activities, climbing, biking, roller skating, whatever it might be exploring in the garden, make those activities balanced away from screen. So it's compelling to come together and connect, talk about it with your kids about their tech use, so they don't see you just as sort of nagging all the time about it and do monitor what they're doing. Now there's a whole host of things I can say, but if you sign up to subscribe to the bonus content from our podcast now, I have written a whole extra thing all around how to do all of these things that I talk about, so you can have that bonus extra content, and I hope you'll find that useful.

What do you do, Angeline, around this problem?

Angeline: First, I really try to live by example. I'm very aware of the fact that I get caught in scrolling too long, so I avoid apps that will make me do that. I do not go on apps that are endless scrolls except for LinkedIn, which I use for work, and I'm very careful when I use it.

I'm on social media, but I have really strict rules for myself, so my daughter never sees that. And also we always have meals together. I live in a culture where family meals are still very much a thing. So it's not a strange thing, but that's very important. And another thing I have to pass on, it's not from me, it's from a fantastic privacy lawyer in California.

She reads through the privacy policy and the ratings of apps and devices that her children have to use. Obviously normal average people can't understand privacy policies, but now there are laws that make companies make child friendly privacy policies. And if you read through those things, the children will understand much better why there need to be limitations.

She said that if her son, who's around 10, I think, can't have conversations about like sexuality with her, like the conversation, he cannot use an app where it's the rated for sexual content. So if he's not willing to have a conversation with his mom, then he cannot use an app that has that on it.

And I just fantastic advice from, I said, I can't claim that, but I wanted to pass it on. Yeah. That's interesting. Her name is Alyssa. You can find her. on my LinkedIn.

Sue: Isn't that interesting? And I always say to kids as well, you know, if you're not wanting for your grandma to see what you've put up there, don't put it.

Because it's just, it's just a silly little way of trying to kind of get them to think about you put something on LinkedIn. Yes. And I would love to have her as a guest at some point. She's got an app, she's only 23 and she's created Rethink, isn't it? Yeah. And it just helps kids to rethink before they post.

It will flag up and stuff like that. So there are wonderful people trying to make changes and do different things.

Cerys VO: Now for some top tips.

Sue: So that leads us on to our weekly quick tips. It's our segment where we share bite sized nuggets of wisdom, hopefully, to help you navigate the digital jungle more effectively.

So, Angeline, what are your quick tips for this week?

Angeline: So my tip is to do family brainstorming session on alternatives to screen time and make a list of what you can do. You can go back to it each time you feel like the screens are the only thing to do, just like a menu in a restaurant. Like I know this is an actual need because I used to live in a city where often you couldn't figure out what else to do, but then you have a list, get out the, the alternative menu list.

Then, uh, that can go a long way to keeping you actually offline.

Sue: I tell you what I do, it's similar to that when I'm working with families, I get them to make an I'm bored jar. I did it during the pandemic when mum and dad were trying to work from home and the kids were sort of here and they weren't, they were hybrid at, you know, half time at school and half not.

So you get a lovely jam jar, you spend ages making it beautiful with glitter and all sorts of stuff, so that takes ages to decorate it. Then you get lovely pieces of coloured paper or something, you write very simple things on there that you can do for maybe just 15 minutes, or you can have longer, and you all put them into the jar, so when they say, I'm bored, or when they say, but what would I do if I came off the screen?

You go to your board jar and you pick out something, you go, Oh, I can go off and do that. It can be a very small thing, or it could be a big thing, like in the garden, make a, you know, an assault course or something. But the, I'm bored jars on my website, on my blog, and you can find out more about that if you're interested.

So listen, what are you working on at the moment, Angeline? I know I've seen these wonderful data girl videos that you post up on LinkedIn. Tell us about some of those this week.

Angeline: Well, this week I did two videos. One is focused on AI because I think it's really important. AI is in more places than we're actually aware of, and it's influencing us in ways that we're not aware of.

So it's really important, the awareness. So I'm all about AI awareness. I read the research about what teens know about algorithms and what they don't know and they know something. So I just created a video about what this research said that teens don't know about algorithms. And then I also did one that was inspired by last week's podcast about self-awareness.

About if you have self awareness, then you'll understand that what's really making you happy and often screen time isn't making you happy. So that was, I created this week for Data Girl, and I'm also rolling out a workshop series called AI for Parents for all these non tech savvy parents. Because children are digital natives and we cannot pretend to be digital natives like them because we didn't grow up that way.

So I have a workshop series to kind of get parents up to speed enough to help guide their parents with AI. So that's what I'm doing.

Sue: And it's constantly changing, but if you kind of make that effort, where can they find that, Angeline?

Angeline: Uh, you can find it on my webpage. It's very, uh, core value. Me. Or the data Girl and friends.com. Obviously on LinkedIn is where I am most of the time anyway.

Sue: But that's interesting for parents listening to that. We are put into the show notes so they can go and access that.

Cerys VO: Navigating the Digital Jungle with Sue Atkins and Friends,.

Sue: That's about it for this week that's a wrap, as they would say with Sue Atkins and friends, I hope you enjoyed it. I hope you found it helpful and even found it thought provoking. We'll chat about all sorts of things next week too. So remember to subscribe, leave us a review and tune in next week as we continue our journey through the digital jungle.

And don't forget to tell all your friends and family to join us too. Send in a question, join in the conversation, send us a photo of perhaps some of the things you're doing off screens that we can talk about. And until next time, stay safe and keep exploring.

Cerys VO: It's a jungle out there.

