EP 04: Divorce and Devices: Co-Parenting in the Digital Age

Sue: Welcome back to Navigating the Digital Jungle with Sue Atkins and Friends, where we help families find their way in the ever-evolving landscape of technology. I'm Sue Atkins, author of Navigating the Digital Jungle, scripts to start family tech conversations about smartphones, AI, online safety and other essential topics.

And I'm here with Angeline Corvalia, creator of Data Girl and Friends, empowering young minds with online safety and AI literacy videos, games, and educational materials. So, we're here to guide you through the digital jungle. And our topic today is divorce and devices. So, today we're tackling a topic that's deeply emotional and quite complicated, divorce.

Divorce is challenging, of course, for everyone involved and particularly in our digital age, and it comes with a unique set of hurdles as well as opportunities from co-parenting apps to managing kids screen time in two homes. And today's episode is all about helping families navigate divorce and separation with clarity, compassion and digital savviness.

As you know, I'm the author of the award-winning Divorce Journal for Kids, because separation and divorce are really quite traumatic events for most families. And my journal is designed to help children around about the age of 7 to 13 express, explore, and understand some of the very strong emotions that they may be feeling, and to help them process the divorce for themselves.

Because keeping a journal is a very simple but very powerful way to support children. So, check out my divorce journal for children. It's on my website. And also, I wrote the very popular, Suddenly Single Surviving to Thriving Divorce Journal for Parents. This journal is packed with my expert insights and practical advice, empowering you to regain your confidence, your independence, your financial stability, and your emotional well-being. It's called thriving through transition. Because your divorce doesn't have to define you, it can be the launchpad for a fresh start. Anyway! Let's dive into the challenges of divorce in the digital age.

Divorce has always been hard, but technology adds a new layer to it. So, whether it's coordinating schedules or communicating with your co-parent or managing how your children use tech to process their emotions, the digital world can either complicate or actually, as we learn a bit later, simplify the process.

Sue: But it is all about how you approach it. So, let's start with co-parenting communication, because when I'm working with my clients, that's always where we start because emotions are running really high during this time and direct communication. I remember this myself because I've actually been through a divorce can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and conflict.

So, this is where co-parenting apps that we mentioned a bit later, like Separating Better, that's a new free app for separating parents, and that can come in really handy. We talk about the others like Our Family Wizard and Amicable. But our sponsor today actually is Separating Better because it's guiding you through the separation process. It's got effective ways and tips for managing co-parenting, and it can be really helpful. And it's new, so I wanted to support it and let you know about it. It has things like shared calendars, message tracking, and even expense management. So, it can help reduce the stress and keep things organized while you're going through it.

But my quick tip, just out of the blue here for these apps, they have built in filters that tone down, emotionally charged language, and I really think that is a very suckle way to keep your conversation civil when things often get very heated. So, do take advantage of those built in filters.

Technology isn't always helpful. Social media, for instance, can be a minefield. It's tempting to vent your frustrations online. But remember, once it's out there, it's out there forever. So, kids, family members, and even legal professions could see what you've posted. And as we have our wonderful guest, Matthew Taylor, coming on later, he talks to us and tells us about some of those nightmares that parents sort of end up posting when they have to wake up in the morning and go, oh, I shouldn't have done that.

Let's talk about the kids. Divorce can be confusing and overwhelming for children, and technology like video calls can be a lifeline to staying connected with the parent who isn't physically present, but it's also still very important to monitor your kid's use of technologies to cope with it because you're in a heightened sense of stress and you may not be as disciplined or as consistent as you were before this happened to you.

So, be mindful, pause to ponder how you talk with your kids about how they're using their technology. So, you don't let your eyes go off the ball because older children may often go and turn to social media for support, but they can also encounter some very harmful content and even cyber bullying on there. So, that's why communication is key.

Angeline: I think another thing about the screen time, you know, in two homes to, to consider goes back to actually one of the episodes in the first series with Dr. Beth Mosley, and she was talking about the dopamine crash. And I imagine that parents who, you know, are dealing with tech in two homes will have to know about the dopamine crash.

Because it's likely, from the experiences I have with friends and family, the kid will often have a lot more technology in one home. So, when they go to the other home, it's actually a physical reaction. They have to actually detox. And it can be confusing, because you can think it's about you, but it could actually be about the technology.

Angeline: So, I think anyone who's, who's listening, who's dealing with that really will put it and maybe the link in the, in the show notes, because that's something very, very important to know, to understand your children's reactions.

Sue: That is so important. You're absolutely right. And I wrote two articles actually on the blog around the dopamine crash and how to handle it.

What a good point to make that when they go to the other house, that it's different rules. They may be having kind of withdrawal symptoms. Very good point to make actually. Because let's look at some of those issues about screen time in two homes. I mean, kids exploit, as we know, the lack of coordination between parents, saying things like, well, Dad lets me play video games for three hours, and Mom doesn't make me turn off my phone at night.

You know, they're playing you off against each other there. So, the solution to this is my Family Technology Agreement, which is on Navigating the Digital Jungle website under Resources. It's a written plan that you can print off. It outlines the rules for device use, for apps, and for screen time limits.

Just to give you a bit of clarity, and then you can share it with your co-parent and of course your children, and do it together so everybody knows the expectations, regardless of whose home that they're in. Because I think creating these very simple contracts is a really nice structured way to get you talking about tech in both households.

So, I think by creating that, it takes down the level of misunderstanding. And then I think everyone's singing from the same song sheet. So, we'll put the link to that in the show notes, but also just go to Navigating the Digital Jungle slash Resources and you'll see it under there.

But my whole point here is consistency is key. And of course, flexibility is important, of course, as well. But kids might need that extra bit of screen time to video chat with the parent that they're not with. And of course, that's being sensible. That's okay if they feel the need that they want to talk to the other parent, because the goal is to use technology to strengthen the relationships, not strain them.

So, I'm delighted to welcome our guest today, Matthew Taylor. Matthew is a partner at Stowe Family Law, specializing in family law matters such as divorce, financial settlements, and child custody disputes. With a compassionate approach, Matthew works closely with families to navigate the legal and the emotional complexities of separation.

He is particularly experienced at addressing modern challenges, including the role of technology in co-parenting and divorce, and ensuring the well-being of children remains a top priority. So, as a trusted legal expert, Matthew frequently advises clients on strategies to resolve conflicts and build stable co-parenting arrangements.

So, thank you so much for joining me today, Matthew.

Matthew: Lovely to be here, Sue.

Sue: So, tell us, how has technology impacted your work with families do you think over the years and changed?

Matthew: Oh, goodness. I mean, it, it's constant and it's evolving and it's all pervasive. As with kind of every other element of life, you know, technology is such a rapid.

Fundamental change and fundamental shifts in the way that people relate to each other. And my job is all about the way that people relate to each other. Sadly, oftentimes about the way that people struggle to relate to each other at the end of a relationship. I mean, it's really huge. Pros and cons is a blessing and a curse, but it is transformative, I'd say.

Sue: It is very difficult when people are in sort of conflict with each other, and particularly with the children stuck in the middle of some of this conflict as well, isn't it?

Matthew: Yeah, it can be really difficult. And the way they would the full range of parental disputes. And a lot of what we'll talk about today, I'm sure is going to revolve more around children, obviously, and the nest of the finances, which we also sought out.

But there's a, there's a full range. There are lots of parents who separate amicably and need a little bit of legal advice just to kind of finesse things and make sure they're doing the right things and work really actively with their ex-partner to co-parent, and there are. A lot of people who just can't, for whatever reason, it might be personality clash, it might be the history of the relationship, there might be abuse issues, there might be concerns about safeguarding and welfare.

So, that can make a big difference. But when people separate, it's kind of obvious when people separate them, we're not best mates of that. that moment, you had operation comes out for that reason. So, communications can be strained and digital communication often takes the brunt of that and is another way in which that communication can be tricky.

Sue: I know I've been on your podcast a little while ago and I talked, I think, about putting a photograph of the children on the centre of the table when you're making decisions and talking about it because I do a lot of work with family's going through a divorce to support the emotional side of it. And I remember saying, you know, this guy said something and then I just said, oh, look at the photo. What do you think Ruby would think of that? And he went, oh God, no, we can't do that. And so, it's very important, isn't it? To try and help, certainly from my point of view, keep the children at the centre of. of what you're trying to work through.

Matthew: Oh, completely. And I think any good family lawyer will be stressing that at all points and times. And look, sometimes there are occasions when parties get too hung up on the differences between the adults to really focus on the children. And that's solvable, you know, either through our negotiations, through mediation, through a bit of therapy, you know, whatever it is, that's solvable. It's centring.

And I think, you know, your tip of the literal photo of your kids can make a big difference. What's actually more difficult, I think, is often parents will say, well, I am putting the kids needs first, but there's just a fundamental disagreement about what is best for the children. And both parents think that what they are doing is best for the children.

Matthew: Yes. And you know what? They might both kind of be right, but you've still got to navigate the compromise and the way between that.

Sue: Absolutely. That's so intriguing, isn't it? And quite complicated, I would guess. Yeah. How can co-parenting agreements then prioritize children's needs, especially regarding screen time and technology?

Because this podcast is looking at family and tech life, and today we're looking at co-parenting and how you navigate that. What's your advice, really, for that?

Matt: Just to deal with co-parenting. As, as a whole concept. And then maybe come on in a bit detail to the tech co-parenting. I suppose I should unpick the term a little bit.

A co-parenting is two people working together to cooperatively parent children in two different homes. So, it's a method by which you work together and you speak to each other and you try and establish a consistency for children, and it will often involve the same broad set of rules in both houses. So, at times nine o'clock in one is nine o'clock in the other.

If your screen time is weekends or, you know, X evenings. That's what it should be in both. Now, co-parenting is the aim for most people. There are a lot of relationships, particularly where there has been abuse or where there's real personality issues as kind of narcissistic disorders and things like that, where co-parenting just isn't possible.

And instead in those situations, you can look at what's called parallel parenting, where you say. I can only control what's under my roof. I just have to accept that when the children are with my ex, it's going to be different. So, that's even more challenging. But co-parenting should revolve around a kind of one model.

So, parenting plans, and if anyone needs a parenting plan, there is a really good, free one online from an organization called CAFCASS, C A F C A S S, who are effectively Court Appointed Social Workers. Who will do the court investigations into what's best for children. And they have a huge template parenting plan, which deals with everything.

It can be what nights do you see a little Johnny who takes to football? What do you do about new partners? What do you religion choice of school, but you can certainly put in their stuff about what the rules are on screen time. And I think this is going to be. Even more important area moving forward, you know, what age do your kids allow on social media? All of that. So yeah, really help.

Sue: And when do they get a smartphone? In fact, I have a parenting plan too, that I created, that I work with my clients on as well. But we'll put in the show notes what you've said there about where people can go and find that free one, which is really good as well. So, that is so important.

I think you're right. Screen time is coming into and tech and devices is becoming more and more part of the agenda. I've talked to some speech therapists yesterday about stuff and they said, when can we start to ask those questions about, well, how much screen time is your child using in the early years?

Sue: Because it's impacting on their vocabulary and their speech. So, it's, it's really trickling through everything. In a digital age then dominated by text and social media. What strategies can divorce parents use to maintain healthy communications?

Matthew: Goodness, that's a wide-ranging question. So, I think what I'd say is that there's, as with quite a lot of things in my job, there's no fixed right answer.

There's probably quite a lot of wrong answers, but there's certainly a different answer for every family because you've got to. Work on the basis of the personalities involved and enforcing a one size fits all approach probably doesn't help and different parents will have different levels of comfort with being tech savvy themselves and understanding it because obviously you've got to understand it to be able to protect your children.

I would always encourage, and is kind of the fallback answer to almost anything I get asked is the starting point is for the parents to be able to communicate and try and get on the same page. So, quite a lot of misunderstandings come about when [00:16:00] things just aren't addressed. And it may be that one parent naturally is a bit more relaxed about screen time than the other.

And it may be something that's not even shown itself through the course of the relationship. It may be something that's developing in future. I think when you just let that drift, it suddenly becomes a problem when child goes back from one house to another and says, oh, yeah, I was on the Xbox for, you know, four hours last night on Fortnite or whatever it is.
Oh my goodness, that is ridiculous on a school night, for example.

Angeline: Yeah, yeah, yeah. In my experience from divorced people I know, I'd never seen the case where that's not the problem. For me, it's a nightmare to deal with, right? Because it's addictive, the screen time. So, you have to balance even the emotions of the kid, right?
I mean, I would imagine it's very difficult.

Matthew: Yeah, you really do. And I think there's also one thing that I find with my clients is, at the point of a divorce, or a separation, it's traumatic for a child to know that their parents are no longer living together, assuming that they were living together before.

So, the natural inclination of the parents is then, is to, you're like, kids are going through a horrible time, so, let's be nice. They want to do this, let's let them do it, let's keep them happy.

Sue: That guilt thing.

Matthew: Yeah, 100%. And the kids have never come to turn around and say to you, do you know what, Dad? I'd probably like to be a bit less kind on my screens.

I mean, they just, that's not the way the screens work. They're addictive. So, it's easy to fall into patterns of then using it a bit much. Something else that, that comes up a lot, and I, you know, I'd be really interested to get your take on this Sue, is we talk a lot about communication with this sort of I'm going to say the absent parent, not in terms of not involved in life, but the parent they are not with at a given moment.

Sue: Yeah.

Matthew: So, you might have three days in a row with mom and we might say, well, look on night two, why don't you have a FaceTime with that. And that quite often involves kids having their own phone because the parents might not want their ex to still be calling them and things. Which can bring in phones and smartphones at perhaps an earlier age than might otherwise happen.

Now, from my perspective, it can be a really helpful tool, but there's obviously downsides to that. So, you know, I'm really interested in your take on, on how to do that and how to enable that communication between children and their parents in a way that is easy for everyone, which is generally a phone with FaceTime or WhatsApp or whatever it is.

But also keeping the barriers and not saying to the kids, well, here's this gateway to everything and all the negatives that come with the extra tech.

Sue: That is so interesting. That's not an angle I've actually given a great deal of thought to. So, you've now got me going, oh, I can feel a blog or an article coming on around it.

But there are safer phones like Pinwheel, or there are technologies with like watches that allow you to communicate, but don't get you on to apps, or don't necessarily get you onto the internet particularly. So, there, I'm going to go off and write something about that because that is a really interesting concept about that.

Because I always encourage, you know, the idea of, well, talk to your mom or your dad on Zoom, but that's a bit kind of cumbersome, I suppose, for most teens in this sort of digital age. So, there's got to be some sort of medium ground. And of course, as you say, it's really interesting because it is about, well, do you give them a smartphone just so they can talk to their dad?

But you've got to have some parental controls around that big time. But then it all starts the conversations, I suppose. It's all about conversations, isn't it? And knowing the maturity of your own child too, I suppose.

Matthew: Of course. Yeah. And when I speak to clients about this and they've done the phone thing, I will often say, well, look, get the parental protections on, you know, limit that.

You know, you can have the shutdown of the screen time is when it cuts off at 8 o'clock at night. For example, you could parental approval to download any app so it gets buzzed through to your phone so you can approve it. You can prevent them from accessing Safari or Chrome so they can't just freely surf the internet.

Don't have YouTube kids depending on the age. All of those things. So, there are measures that you can put in place. And there are a great deal of negatives with kids being able to have unfettered access. From my perspective as a family lawyer, it can be a really positive thing as well though because it's very age specific.

Matthew: It's different for seven year old and 13 year old, but we're quite often arranged FaceTime, Skype, Zooms, whatever it is. And kids don't really like talking on them a lot of the time because it's quite an adult way of conversing. You need to have an exchange of questions and that's kids. Aren't going to say, so dad, how was your day?

Because it's just not in their world and they wouldn't do that. So, having the force, you've got to stare at a screen and do the conversation can often like not be great if they can WhatsApp and say, oh, you know, Man United were rubbish. They'd lost at the week. Nick the football's the thing, or, you know, say, oh, I've just got back from my gymnastics lesson and I'm nice to do a new flip off the, you know, whatever it is, just that little bit of conversation can be something that just keeps the contact natural and normal and flowing when the parent's not around every single day.

Sue: It's interesting because I have written a guide for parents about WhatsApp with scripts of what to say and how to use it because it is a social media app. And in fact, you're on there and you can get with, you know, bullying and cyber bullying and all sorts of stuff.

And yet you're showing actually in another way, there is a better side to or a positive side to trying to communicate with a parent that is, you know. but not with you all the time. So, it's a very interesting debate, but it needs that careful conversation. And often when parents are going through a divorce or a separation, their head is somewhere completely different.

How am I going to pay the mortgage this month? And how am I going to get childcare on Wednesday? Because I've got a meeting up in London, you know, your head and the guilt, as we talked about earlier, is all over the place. And, and tech is not something that you actually put, you know, primary in your line of vision.

It's over here. And actually, certainly with younger children, sometimes I'll have that and play on it and scroll and do whatever for half an hour. I need five minutes to put the laundry away and get my head together after work. So, it's complicated, isn't it? So, I think it just needs thinking about that's my point.

There's no right or wrong way. There's no one size fits all, but what we're podcast, I suppose, and generally with my work is trying to get you thinking about it. So, it works for you. And you're having these conversations with kids. The other area I want to go on to, that I notice obviously with lots of my clients, is what advice do you have for maintaining and managing that anger?

You know when people, because I talk about the seven stages of divorce, and incandescent anger, or was that just me? You go through anger, even though it's fairly amicable and all the rest of it, it's never very plain sailing. But, you know, they start then posting up and sharing negative stories or slagging off the ex-partner online.

What's your sort of take on that and what advice do you give clients around that sort of stuff?

Matthew: I mean, that's a very simple don't do it. I can understand why people do it, but it is never a good idea. It does not help with anything. There are a whole variety of reasons. Firstly, there are people going to see it and you want your dirty laundry spread everywhere.

Matthew: How would you feel if your ex was doing it about you? And they may well say, well, they are, so I'm going it too, but you know, we're on two roms. Only to make a right territory. It reflects badly on me, so have the self-respect to keep things quiet. Treat your partner with as much, your ex-partner with as much respect as you can because you might not like them very much, but they're the parent to your child.

Sue: And your children are watching you, listening to you, observing you. And you are the blueprint for love. And that, when, when I say that to clients, they go, oh, I hadn't thought of that. Because actually how you handle this is very important. So, that they trust men or they trust women or they see relationships do go through difficult times, but you can work through them. I mean, all these important things that they're learning from you when you're going through it.

Matthew: Parents are role models for children and they will replicate things. If a child hears that dad's talking negatively about the mom, there's a couple of things. One, it might affect their view of their mom, but two, a child knows that they're half mom and half dad.

So, are they, is the dad saying that half of you is wrong because you know, I've got these problems with, with mom, there is no good that comes of it. The internet stays forever. A post stays on the internet stays forever. Do you want your children reading it in five years' time? I can't imagine anyone would.

So, my big advice is if you're tempted to do it, the headline advice is don't. The actual kind of more helpful advice is pause, take a breath, go for a walk, put your phone away, get away, do your thing, go and call your mum, your sister, your friend, rant to them. That's what they're for.

Sue: And don't do it when you've had a drink.

Matthew: Oh, 100%.

Sue: You know?

Matthew: Yeah.

Sue: That's when the barriers go down. It's a Friday night, you've had a few, you think, oh my God, I'm so angry about that. All that advice you've just said is absolutely, great. I've got a new pop socket coming out on my website and I hadn't thought of it for divorced parents, but it says pause before posting on the back of your pop socket.

That's coming soon to just pause, just think. And then as you say, go and change, you know, your line of thought, go for a run, go for a walk around the garden, whatever it is, because you will be grateful for that tomorrow when you wake up and think, Oh my God, you know, what did I just say?

Matthew: There's a lawyer mug, which is quite well-known, with the phrase on, dance like nobody's watching, email like it will be read by a judge.

Matthew: If you are thinking about posting something on the internet, you might want to think about, either, is the judge going to see this if I end up in proceedings? Hopefully not. Posts on social media like it will be read by your children. Have a think about that before you do anything. Put down slight notebook exposure, obviously.

Sue: But that is so interesting because that led me on actually. That was my next question. Can online activity like text or social media posts be used as evidence in custody disputes?

Matthew: Absolutely can. Absolutely can. So, there are very few cases that we would have let in court don't have. In some manner, if there is a dispute between parents, some sort of tech evidence, WhatsApp screenshots, social media posts, there can be all sorts of things.

And that can show that one of the parents is being abusive to the other through tech. It can show that there is an inappropriate sharing of information about one. What the family court hates is for mom or dad to be talking badly about their ex to the kids, like we've just been talking about. So, if there are messages on the kid's phone which say, Your mom's a nightmare.

She won't let me do this. It's only me that loves you. You know, awful things like that, that can come up in court. So, it absolutely can be used. I would say that the court is, doesn't love to see tons of screenshots and things. I think that it can get in the way. There is an acceptance that look, what the court isn't looking for is perfect parents, because that doesn't exist.

It's looking for good enough parenting. So, there was an acceptance to look. Separation is heightened emotion and we will all say things that we might regret in hindsight. So, you're not being judged by that standard. But persistent constant levels are concerning. It can be racist evidence. It can also give rise to criminal proceedings if it becomes harassment.

And that's something that we've come on a lot. And that leads into some of the, certainly the darker areas where you are looking at harassment, which can be often and frequently is through tech and also other things, including tech abuse. using tech to facilitate stalking, to track movements, to make recordings, you know, air tags it, sewn into linings of bags, recording and audio equipment, and then, you know, parties and proceedings might say, I've got a recording of so and so saying this, I've got a recording of my kid saying this, and that's an absolute no no.

That just reflects incredibly badly on the person doing the recording, because that is such an invasion of privacy and is not consistent with being able to cope out.

Angeline: If the parents disagree on the amount of screen time and the kind of things that the kids can see, what kind of device they should have all of this, can that come up in court as well?

Because obviously the research on this isn't really out. I don't know that there's many laws about that. So, how is that? I mean, does that ever come up? That aspect? Can it?

Matthew: It's not something that I've personally seen a court having to make a decision about screen time and I think that's going into a Level of the court would say, look, there is a limit to what we can usefully do because what the court process is very good at is setting a framework is saying what happens when and where what it can't do and is really bad at is behavior change and actually day to day parenting is just too difficult to police because even if it said, okay, here's an order, which says that little Johnny can do X hours of screen time a week.

If that order is breached by someone. I'm what's going to be the ramifications? The court isn't going to say, fine, you don't get to see your kid anymore because that would be incredibly damaging for little Johnny because he's going to be taken away from the parent. That is the sort of thing that is, are better dealt with and it requires movement on both sides.

If you're going to co-parent, that requires some cooperation, some compromise, work on it through mediation, work on it through therapy. If you just can't agree, I think that's when you have to say, fine, we have to parallel parent. I have to accept that at my ex's house, these are the rules about screen time.

I have to just role model the behaviours that I want under my roof. And if those rules are different, those rules are different. And I think you have to trust that over time. Children will see the positive role modelling and the effects of that, but that's really, really hard.

Sue: Yeah, yeah, really interesting.

Good question. Matthew, coming to the end of our time together here. So, what is your top tips, would you say, for families trying to navigate divorce, separation as well and technology?

Matthew: Yeah, so I suppose it kind of comes in three areas. The headline tip is to have the conversations with each other if you're able to do it.

Setting ground rules and trying to be as cooperative and work together as much as you can for consistency because kids love consistency. It makes their lives so much easier. So, that would be my headline tip. I suppose I've got two other tips. One about children's screen time and then one about tech communications between parents.

So, in terms of children themselves, if you are going to give them access to a mobile phone, Is to make sure that you're using those gateways, make sure that there are limitations and it's age appropriate. If that is parental approval before an app is downloaded, that is what it is. Use the setting, get familiar.

If you're not techie, there's loads of stuff online about how to do it. It doesn't require a lot. Your kids will be more techie than you try and keep up with them. So, that would be my advice is to make it age appropriate, because I think that giving the phone to a kid can be a really positive thing, or it can be a really negative thing.

Matthew: You just got to make it do the things to make it positive. Insofar as communication goes between adults, something which I would like to discuss. There are a number of co-parenting apps. The most sort of well-known one is OurFamilyWizard. So, I'll talk about that. And AppClose is another one. And these can be really useful for parents who can't communicate brilliantly.

Because one of the blessings and curses of our smartphone is it pings in your face all day long. And you don't necessarily want to be interrupted when you work and you're even trying to switch off. You're struggling to get on with your ex-partner. You may be going through difficult financial negotiations, whatever.

Having the constant messages can be triggering for people. Yes. What the parenting apps allow you to, is they create a kind of a sort of a ring fence zone on an app where communication goes into that app and you can control. Do you want a daily update of how many messages are on? Do you want them live?

You can, if you want. And they've got some great features on there as well. So, you have them all ring fence and you can say, look, this is my time. And I'm going to set aside a bit of time. Evenings go on. Family wizard and sort out what the plans are for the weekend with Little Johnny and who's paying for the school meals.

And they have things like tone meters on there. So, you can draft a message and it might say, Hmm, that seems a little bit aggressive. Maybe you might want to rephrase things.

Sue: That is brilliant.

Matthew: Yeah, it's fabulous. So, it can just calm things down a little bit. And there's also things like you can put in there.

You know, arrangements for paying the school meals and football clubs and gymnastics. You can put in there the contact schedule. So, you've got your calendar in there. Those are a really useful thing. So, if you're struggling to communicate through tech, you're finding it all a bit overwhelming with your ex-partner.

That's something that I would definitely advise anyone to have a little look at and see if it's right for you. It doesn't work for everyone, but it can be a really

Sue: Gosh, that is so helpful. Actually, I was gonna mention some of these apps as well later on in our whole episode, but you've given a wonderful kind of explanation of how it can work. Really helpful. So, where can people find out more about you, Matthew?

Matthew: I'm a partner at Stowe Family Law. We are the country's biggest family law specialist law firm. So, do feel free to come check us out at stowefamilylaw.co.uk. We also have Stowe Family Law support is our website with loads of free advice.

So, you know, this is a lot of giving stuff away for free. So, listen to this because this doesn't happen often. I know shock horror, but there are loads of blogs and webinars. And so, as you talked about earlier, you were very kindly a brilliant guest on our podcasts, which is called Stowe Talks, which I host with Lisa, who's my co-host, his partner here at Stowe.

Matthew: So, you can check us out on Spotify and Apple podcasts on YouTube. We've got sessions on all sorts of things, whether it's parenting, whether it's divorce, whether it's finances, whether it's abuse. Whether it's budgeting, whether it's dating after divorce, all sorts of things about relationship breakdown. So, do. You know, have a look at those.

Sue: Well, Matthew, thank you so much for joining us today. It's been a pleasure.

Matthew: It's been brilliant. Thank you for having me, Sue.

Sue: I'd like to tell you a bit more about my new book. As a parent myself, I know firsthand how overwhelming it can feel to keep up with the digital world our kids are growing up in.

That's why I wrote Navigating the Digital Jungle Essential Scripts, for starting meaningful conversations with toddlers, tweens and teens about smartphones or social media, AI, cyber safety and much, much more. My book is bursting with ready to use conversation starters that make it easier to guide your kids through everything from screen time and social media to the tricky terrain of online safety and artificial intelligence.

It's like having a roadmap for those critical and important chats every parent needs to have. My book of Digital Jungle Scripts is all about giving you the tools to start those difficult but important conversations no matter your child's age. Easy, practical scripts to help you feel confident and connected.

So, if you're ready to feel more self-confident around discussing Roblox, Snapchat or WhatsApp, grab your copy of Navigating the Digital Jungle Essential Scripts and start transforming those tough tech talks into meaningful family moments. And let's get those conversations started at navigatingthedigitaljungle.com/resources.

So, here we come with the family change, which is not a challenge, it's just a small little change. Perhaps it will make a big difference in, in your family and we're thinking about navigating divorce. So, let's have a look at what this might be for me. It's about establishing a weekly check in routine. So, set aside a specific time each week to calmly discuss plans and schedules and concerns with your co-parent or your child.

So, you can sit down, as we've talked about, shared calendars through these special apps, these co-parenting apps that streamlines the communication a little bit. So, it avoids misunderstandings. Sometimes people are not being awkward or horrible. They just didn't get it. So, you know, you have to bear that in mind sometimes when you're a bit heightened with a bit sensitive to your ex and with children, when you're doing something like, I don't know, sitting down, eating a meal together, have a family chat about stability and about their feelings and be involved with them around how they're handling the whole process, as well as then perhaps popping in a chat about the tech. I just feel it reduces stress and gives stability. Angee, what would your tip be?

Angeline: Okay, mine is a little bit different. I'm taking it from my time in the financial services industry and seeing parents that I know that are divorced and it's just to choose your battles, basically, around tech.

Angeline: I, because there's going to be probably so many things, you know, wrong apps, too much time, time of day, you know, some of those are going to be the most important things that you're like, here, there's a line drawn, no Snapchat, you know, so the one that's the most important, you know, choose that battle and say, can we at least agree on that?

And then maybe slowly you can get to where you want to be. So, that's my, my quick tip. Basically, I learned that success in financial services is choosing your battles and private life isn't very different.

Sue: Fantastic. I love it.

Intro: Listener questions.

Angeline: Okay. Now we are onto the listener's question section. This one is my teenager is venting about the divorce on social media.

So, how do I address this without shutting them down? So, Sue, what do you think?

Sue: Well, I think acknowledge their feelings. I often say, no matter kids of any age, if you acknowledge how they're feeling, a child who feels heard feels understood. So, you could say something like, well, I've noticed you've been posting about the divorce on social media. It seems like you're trying to express how you're feeling. I understand that, but this is a challenging time for all of us, and I know why you might want to share some of this, but at the same time, I wonder how dad might feel or mum might feel if they see that, or they read that, or some of the family reads that.

What do you think? Should we have a chat about how we should monitor and where we should vent and where's a safe place to talk about this stuff? Open the conversation is another one. Invite them to share more about what they're experiencing. It's not always when you want to talk about it. I remember with my own son, who's often driving to football, and we're, I'm driving and looking straight ahead, and he's over here as a teenager.

You don't feel so intense. They're not, you're not eyeballing each other. And you sort of throw up an open-ended question to get chatting and listening to each other and say something like, well, what's been on your mind this week? Are you okay? How's it going? How do you feel about what's going on in the family at the moment?

Just start, whatever you want to say, but just get it going. And then, of course, the important one is trying to explain to them not to vent in the wrong places. What do you think, Angee? What do you suggest?

Angeline: I think it's important to understand why, what the child thinks that they're going to get from venting on social media.

It's always, what's the reason that you're choosing exactly that place? You know, what can we do to help you find a different place to vent, maybe, right? Because a lot of emotions, they're hard to manage, right? So, to understand what the motivations are, right? And then find alternative solutions.

Sue: I think also it's the same thing for the adult.

I mean, you know, you've got to vent, but you've got to vent it somewhere safely. It's not great to go. I call it the pity party, go around to a friend with a couple of bottles of wine and you slag off the X that sort of part of the process to a point, but it doesn't move you forward and doesn't help you recover really in many ways.

And if you find yourself doing that more and more, then it's an idea to go and try and get a bit of help to vent and sort out. and make sense of the changes that are major changes in your own lifetime. So, I think it's really important to be available to your kids, but also make sure where you're venting and where you're talking or expressing and don't share it with your children that it's not appropriate.

You are their parent, not their friend. So, go and find a safer, better place. Because children of 12 or 13, they're not able to support you. It's the other way around. So, just bear that in mind really.

Now for some top tips. So, this leads us on nicely to the weekly quick tips. And quick tips for navigating co-parenting and divorce.

So, my first tip today is keep communication child focused. When communicating with your ex, always prioritize your child's well-being. Go and explore these co-parenting apps like Separating Better, this new free app for separating parents, or we've talked about Our Family Wizard to streamline your logistics and keep the conversations neutral.

And remember, children thrive when they see their parents working together as a team, even after separation. One big one as well, if you can keep consistent routines across both homes, that really would be fantastic. And I know it doesn't always work, but kids thrive in predictability. So, do try and have that intention to establish similar routines between both households.

That means bedtimes. That means rules around, you know, sweet, crisps screen time, all sorts of things, studying, try and keep it so there's some form of consistency because children really do thrive better with that. Because I think your child's emotional health depends on how you both handle the journey.

What do you think Angee?

Angeline: If you have different rules in terms of screen time and such. And I mentioned before the child will come home angry or nervous or something. If you can pay attention to which moments your child is angry, like you know they're going to be angry when they come home, like every time.

And talk about it in advance, you know? Like, I know when you come home, you're going to be angry, so what can we do to help you when you come back? There're certain moments when they're going to be angry, so, if you ask them in advance. I do it with my daughter when it goes to tea. You know you're going to watch another show when I tell you to turn it off, right?

Angeline: Yes. You know, what can I do to make you less nervous? You know, so doing that in advance, it actually does work.

Sue: I love that. That is a very helpful tip. Yeah, a really good one. So, what have you been working on, Angee, this week and recently?

Angeline: Well, by the time this episode airs, I'm going to say I've just finished my SHIELD Global Online Safety Conference. A lot of amazing speakers about various aspects of online safety, so, you can check that out. We'll eventually publish the recordings so everyone can see them, you know, and otherwise Data Girl and Friends is really focused on right at this moment. about EdTech and AI chatbots.

Sue: Give us the website, Angee.

Angeline: data-girl-and-friends.com with the slashes or the hyphens, whatever you want to, between all the words.

Sue: Yeah. Cause they really are fantastic. And I love your work. You know what it is.

Intro: Navigating the Digital Jungle with Sue Atkins and Friends.

Sue: Don't forget technology can also be a wonderful tool for co-parenting wins. Share your photos or your thoughts and updates around that with us if you like on our Facebook group, Navigating the Digital Jungle. Send us in some emails so that we start communicating and sharing and answering your questions or hearing your feedback because divorce is never easy, but with the right tools and the right mindset, technology can help your family navigate this challenging time with more ease and less conflict.

So, thank you for tuning into this episode. Subscribe, so you always get episodes sent to you each week. And if you found this helpful, please share it with friends, family, schools, teachers. It's a free resource and it's here to help you. Please leave us a review on across all the podcast platforms, wherever you listen to us and do check out our guides and our scripts and loads of ideas around managing family life with the digital age.

So, until next time, I'm Sue Atkins reminding you to keep talking, keep learning and keep navigating the digital jungle safely.

Intro: There's a jungle out there. Time for a word from our sponsor.

Sue: I'd like to tell you a bit about this episode's sponsor. OnePlusOne Separating Better. When parents go through separation or divorce, it can be really overwhelming.

Separating Better is a free app from the experts at OnePlusOne, offering a personal guide to a smoother separation for you and your children. Get expert advice on managing difficult emotions, understanding the legal process, and planning your co-parenting journey all in one place. Search for Separating Better on the App Store or Google Play to start your new beginning with the right support.