

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
WEBINAR

RAISING YOUNG CHILDREN IN AN AI WORLD: GENERATION AI STARTS EARLY SERIES

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SHAH: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. My name is Sweta Shah and I'm a fellow at the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. Welcome to the Generation AI Starts Early, a new webinar series that explores what AI means for our youngest children from birth to eight years.

Today's conversation is called Raising Young Children in an AI world, and I wanna begin with something simple. This topic is personal for everyone in this webinar and for many of you in the audience. The three guests joining me today are researchers and authors. Yes, but there are also parents and grandparents and aunts, and so am I. We are not just here as experts. We are here as people who love young children and who are genuinely thinking about what this moment means for the kids in our lives.

The public conversation about AI in children has largely focused on teenagers, on social media, on screen addiction, on relationships with chatbots, and much more. That conversation matters, but it misses something urgent. What is happening to our youngest children from birth to eight? They are the generation AI and their experiences now will have long lasting impacts for the rest of their, their lives. This is because early childhood is the window when the brain is developing at its most rapid pace, when language attachment, curiosity, and the capacity for human connection are literally being built.

And it is this window that we're talking about today. I am joined by three people who've spent their careers thinking about this exactly. First, I have Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, who's a senior fellow here at the Brookings Institution and a professor at Temple University. She's one of the leading researchers and how children learn through play and language.

She's written numerous books and papers, including the newly updated Einstein, never used flashcards, just released in January with a new chapter dedicated to ai. She has spent decades asking what it really takes for young children to learn and thrive. I also have Dr. Dana Suskind, who's a pediatric surgeon professor at the University of Chicago and founder of the TMW Center at the University of Chicago.

Dr. Suskind has dedicated her career to using her research and clinical practice experience to help parents and caregivers leverage their power as brain architects. Her new book, "Human Raised," which will be released in July, makes an urgent case for protecting what only humans can give children and the age of AI and what is at stake if we don't.

And thirdly, we have Isabelle Hau, who's the executive director of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning, and she's the author of Love to Learn, which makes the case for learning, makes the case that learning is fundamentally a relational act and that the quality of human connection shapes how children grow and develop. Before Stanford, she built her career at the intersection of education, investment, and social impact, including leadership roles at Imaginable Futures philanthropic fund.

We're gonna start this webinar with a conversation and leave about 10 minutes for audience questions. Please send any questions that you have to events@brookings.edu, so let's get into it. Hello, ladies.

HIRSH-PASEK: Hello.

SUSKIND: Good to be here.

SHAH: Really great to have all three of you here superstars with us today. So Dana, let me start with you. We're gonna start at the very beginning. What happens in the brain of a child from birth to eight? What does human connection talk and play actually do developmentally? And why does this window matter so much?

SUSKIND: So thank you so much, Sweta. It's so great to be here with such great friends and colleagues. So my work, just to clarify, really focuses on the first five years of life. So forgive me if sometimes I slip into talking about that period. It's not that, I'm not suggesting that six to eight aren't incredibly important, but however you measure early childhood, there is no debating that the first years of life are the most consequential period of human development.

And I don't just mean it as a motivational way, I really mean as a biologic fact because from the moment a baby is born, their brain is in a, in a state of explosive growth unlike anything that will ever happen again. By the time a child reaches its fifth birthday, they've already reached. Almost 90% of the adult volume.

So they're born with about one third the size of the adult size volume when they come into this world, and they reach 90% during that period of time, and the neural connections forming are happening at such a rapid rate, about a million new neural connections every second in response to what a baby hears, smells, touches, just that nurturing interaction.

I think the best sort of analogy that I can make is that building a child's brain in the early years is like building a computer. In the early years. It's laying down the hardware, the motherboard, the ram, the physical architecture and really. K 12 or, you know, beyond that is in some ways software updates.

So you can't really software update yourself out of an iPhone four when you were supposed to have an iPhone 16. And, you know, you ask, well, what is building this incredibly important infrastructure architecture really at the heart is human connection, the nurturing interaction with a caregiver. I think of it as sort of the instruction manual for the developing brain.

And what's important to know is that this nurturing interaction isn't just building language or literacy, it's really building the entire brain. So when a parent babbles or mirrors an expression or follows the gaze and says, oh, you know, what are you looking at? It's not just a sweet moment, it's really a biologic event.

Building the infrastructure and the synapses, you know, are strengthened. In response to that social input. And it's building, as I said, not just language and literacy, but it, you know, architecture for attention, for emotional regulation, the capacity to trust, to stay in relationships during hard times.

That is why it's so powerful. And, you know, it's, it's not just language and interaction. Things like play, you know, Kathy's world, you know, it's, you can't underestimate it. Unstructured, imaginative play, which is sometimes the frustrating part where we learn to be human. It's building not so much, you know, things like perspective taking resilience, learning how to negotiate and repair from nothing.

And they're not extras, they're just, it's the hard work of becoming human. And that's really why this window matters so very much. You know, during this time period, neural circuits have critical periods, time, limited time periods. And when those windows close, without the

right experiences, there are architectures that should have formed, may not form or or form in different ways.

And, you know, while you, you know. I don't wanna ever say learning is a finite period of time. You can learn at many different times. You know, being able to do it right in the beginning in these first eight years of life is critically important.

SHAH: Thanks Dana, for setting that foundation for all of us. We have a similar understanding.

I'm gonna turn to you, Isabelle. Next. You know, even before we get into ai, you wr write in your new book, love to Learn that the social conditions children need to thrive have already been under pressure. You talk about shrinking networks and what those trends mean for children, birth to eight years old specifically. So what's happening and why does it matter so much for this age group?

HAU: Yeah, thank you, Sweta. And what a pleasure to be with you, Sweta, but also Kathy and Dana, such a joy to be in this amazing company here and really looking forward to to, to, to learning from all of you for this call and your questions from the audience.

So on your questions, what, what what we are witnessing all of us right at this moment is a quiet but really profound shift in this ecology of childhood. And that started well before gene AI was introduced. And if I step back millions of years our human species, our children have grown up surrounded by a dense web of relationships.

So whether they are siblings, cousins, neighbors, grandparents multiple caregivers why, because childhood and our human species is inherently social. But today, and again, well before AI was introduced and AI was introduced three, three or so years ago this web of relationships has been eroding quite meaningfully for a variety of reasons.

For example, families are getting smaller. Because of fertility rates going down. So they are less and less siblings per household. Parents are also raising children far away from their extended family. That's definitely the case for my very own family with grandparents living in Europe. Communities are also less and less connected with a decline, for example, in the practice of religion or other, other, other things that are happening societally.

And then play, which obviously is cafe's you know, expertise, but is more and more structured and often more and more solitary in, in a, you know, in, in, in, in the, so increasingly as a result of all these different trends interactions that used to happen between our little humans. Are now mediated or replaced by screens.

So that leads to multiple things that leads to a reduction, certainly in a quantity. So number of relationships, okay, but also reduction in the diversity of those relationships. And then one third one, which I'm very concerned, is also reduction in the depth in the quality of those human relationships that are young children are experiencing early.

And then I already explained why it matters so much from birth to eight. I would add a few other things. In addition to brain development, which we have tons of data on relationships also matter for leader academic success. Relationships also matter for lifelong success. So

there's more and more data that shows that future jobs will evolve toward an increasing relational sector, for example.

So the social skills that our children need today will continue increasing anyway. They are, it also matters for health and other reasons, which I will skip right now. But a lot of reasons why relationships matter tremendously in addition to brain development. And I will stop there, but we'll, we'll discuss of course about AI and the importance of this moment with AI, but relationships, the webs of relationships are on the strain right now.

SHAH: Yeah. Thank you Isabelle and Dana for setting up a sort of foundation for this conversation. And then Kathy, you know, you and I talk a lot and you've been talking about what you consider the three Ds as you've been thinking about AI and young children. So tell us what that is and what it means for young children.

HIRSH-PASEK: For sure. Well, let me first thank Dana and Isabelle. 'cause gosh, I just love being with you guys. You're so smart and I learn from you every single time. And thank you Sweta for putting all of this together.

So Dana did give you an incredible foundation. We have a fundamentally human social brain that's our species and that's our calling card. You know, like other species have every other things that they do, great humans. It's about social relationships. And Isabelle then told you, it's like she talks about this relational iq. And I know you come into some of these discussions and you say, well, aren't they the soft skills?

Well, I'm here to tell you that years, decades of psychological research tells us that they are the hard skills. Okay? And I don't mean difficult. I mean they are the preparation for everything else that you wanna build. And as Dana mentioned, the back and forth interactions that you have with babies, I mean.

I've been having these conversations with my new six month old baby, and it actually is building brain structure and I see it happening and she's only six months. All she has is, and she has, which she really likes, but they're conversational. They're building a relationship and they build it. Turns out, according to Rachel Romeo and other studies get this guys brain structure and brain connectivity.

So the question is, what happens when you don't have as much social interaction? So to the three Ds in your question, this too started a while ago. If we go back in history to the time when we first introduced the iPhone, okay. And these mobile phones that we carry with us everywhere, and which by the way, we check every five minutes or more.

Okay, now I want you to imagine that. Now imagine you're with a kid and social relationships and interaction is what's really, really important, right? And since 2 0 0 7, every time we get a text or every time we get a call, we're like you know, we are distracting or disrupting those interactions. So earlier, earlier on, I just wanted to look at it from a research lens.

And I think we did the first study that was out there to say what happens? And what happens is the kid notices. And if you think your kid doesn't notice when you're on the phone, believe me, they do. And the kid tries to reengage and then the kid goes kind of wild and just starts throwing things 'cause they lost your attention.

Not cool. If these things are so important, then you don't wanna disrupt them. So then let's go to phase two. Now we have all this other stuff that comes online, Instagram and YouTubes. And by the way, kids are watching a lot of this stuff. Even the eight and Under. Even the two and Under, our colleague Jenny Esky, found that if you take a survey, 72% of kids, two and under have seen some stuff on YouTube.

I mean, really, and there's a lot of slop out there. What is going on? What are we displacing? Let's call that the D of displacement. Again, there's research to show that both for disruption and for displacement, you are taking away future cognitive skills 'cause they're not getting the social interactions that they need.

These hard skills that are going to build brain structure and the foundation for the cognitive house. That you want them to have at the end. I mean, you're building it on quicksand and then enter in ai. Okay, I had to buy it. This is wie. And Wie supposedly teaches you love and responsibility and relationships.

Wie? I don't think so. Okay. So Wolfie will respond to you. And guess what? It's pretty engaging, right? And kids will respond to something quickly that responds to them. That's what we are wired to do, because we don't expect wolfie, we expect a human being at the other end. And so when we do this, the question that AI raises, 'cause it's getting very sophisticated, it by the way, is really nice to interact with.

I mean, let's talk about it, right? Do you know that AI will praise your child 14 more times than you will? Well, of course you're gonna love it. And AI tells you how much it loves you and it missed you when you were away and you shouldn't turn it off. So let's get real about the potential of AI here.

That's not to say there isn't good potential, but right now we're running a study at uc, Berkeley with, to ask the question, would kids be fooled by it? Might the human social brain think these things are actually social? Might they gravitate toward it? And what are the risks if it does for building that brain that Dana told you about?

So I'm gonna call that the potential for derailment. So if we talk about it as disruption to displacement, those have been well studied. We know the impact to derailment. We don't really know the impact, but there's a lot of science to say it would not be a good thing, and I'll stop there.

SHAH: Kathy, I'm gonna stay with you.

So you showed us the dog, the toy. Mm-hmm. Wolfie was its name. Yeah. So let's make this like much more concrete for our listeners today. So, you know, that's one type of AI embedded technology that's out there that young children have access to. Can you paint us a picture of what other ways young children might also encounter AI embedded tech?

And then tell us, I mean, you mentioned some of your concerns and some of the things that you think are positive, but maybe tell us a bit more about that. Like what concerns you the most and, and what excites you, if anything.

HIRSH-PASEK: Well, I mean, the thing that that absolutely concerns me the most is what we, what are called social companion toys.

Okay. These are things that when you hear the, the people talk about teenagers this is the stuff where the, the AI becomes a companion or a therapist. And leads kid down a road you didn't want them to go down. For little kids, we saw the first toys come on the market this past December. Now we were afraid of it and then it actually became very real.

And Perg, which you know, is a group that tries to, you know, prevent and regulate and tells us what we should be looking for, came with a beautiful I think their, I think their paper was called Trouble in Toy Land. Right. And there was trouble in toy land because lemme just give you one concrete example.

If you imagine a 5-year-old might wanna light a candle, like a birthday candle. And so 5-year-old goes to companion AI and says, where would mommy hide the matches? And believe it or not, an answer came back, not only about where mommy would hide the matches, but telling you how to strike a match. Social companion, ai, common sense media reports that you could say to a social companion.

I like to jump. Oh, what do you like to jump on? The AI comes, the kid comes back and says, trampolines. It says, you can also jump off a roof. I find these very problematic. Okay? And so the public interest research group, perg said, this is not good. These should be avoided at all costs. That's one type. And these are flowing into the market.

The next is what we'll call our AI generated things that kids are watching right now. It goes under the title, AI lop. But probably it's a little more poisonous than unintentional, so we should really look at that stuff. Kids are glued to it, but unfortunately they're not telling things that are real.

They even have, you know, kids walking in streets. Is that really what you want your kids to see? So AI slop is another thing to be avoided. Now, if we go to education in ai, there's real potential, I would say, for the youngest kids, probably with Neurodiverse populations, and Dana can speak more to that than I, 'cause she's seen some of those examples.

But those are the types I know of. And I'll just say one more thing before I pop it to Dana to give you the example, which is incredibly, a lot of these toys, like Ruthie come from China. And last week Chyna banned all social companion toys for all kids 18 and under. Hmm. There's something wrong with this picture.

They're selling them, but they won't let their kids use 'em. Dana, you're on

SHAH: really super interesting. Yeah. Dana, did you wanna respond to that? And then, and then I'd love to just ask you a little bit about what you call human edge.

SUSKIND: Sure, sure. Well, I, I think I, I like how Kathy said they, that China is creating these toys, sending us, sending it over and not letting their own children.

I mean, we can look to the same people who are building these technologies in this country. They often have their children at low tech schools and low tech childhood. So I think that if we want, if we don't have the complete science, we just need to see what the people who are building these these technologies are doing.

And. Take a, take a note from it. But going into, do you want me to share a little bit about,

SHAH: so yeah, let me, yeah. So you've mentioned in your new book that's coming out soon human Edge, something, you know, that humans possess, that AI, at least right now, cannot replicate. So what is that and why does that matter, especially for the birth to eight window?

SUSKIND: Yeah, so, you know. Parents have always been in the business of preparing their children for the world that their children will actually inhabit, right? Not just to survive, but to thrive. And it's always meant something different, right? You know, 12,000 years ago it was what berries would kill them and what tiger would kill them, and making sure that they knew how to stay safe in the agricultural period, you know, the rhythms of planting and harvesting.

And most recently in the knowledge economy, you know, in the world that most of us have been raised in kids, it meant, you know, cognitive skill optimization, you know, reading readiness, math fluency, et cetera. Because it was very much, which very much was the intensive parenting, preparing their children for, you know, those, those hard skills that the workforce required.

But let's face it, you know, AI has automated those cognitive outputs that intensive parenting was designed to produce. It doesn't mean that they're not important, they're still important, but things like, you know, can you out compute a computer is not going to give you the edge in, in the, in the future.

And so if we think about the skills that so many of in many different domains of this world are talking about that kids will need I really, I, I call them the human edge skills. And Isabelle talks about them quite a bit. And what, what are the human edge skills? They're really a set of capabilities that in some ways define us as a species.

We've touched on them a little bit, and at this point, AI. Can't genuinely replicate maybe in the future. You know, things like, you know, the ability to reason through general real uncertainty. The ability to truly connect, the ability to think critically, you know, resilience, empathy, all of, you know, not just performed empathy, but real, the real thing built through years of navigating, you know, friction and yeah, of real actual relationships.

And these are the skills that have so far so long been called the soft skills. And as everybody's said on this panel, there's nothing soft about them. They are the hardest human capabilities that we know of. And in this world of ai, it's gonna be, we think the big differentiator. Now, here's the sort of cruel twist when you think about these human edge skills, that the exact, these exact skills are the ones that premature exposure to ai, at least AI as it stands in terms of companions, threaten to undermine.

You know, things like critical thinking. It's built through the productive struggle through encountering problems. Not a frictionless experience of, you know, when you, when you learn from an AI agent, you know, things like empathy is built. Again, I think the word of the year should be friction through the friction of real relationships, perspective taking, rupture and repair cycles that happen hundreds of times in childhood, whether it be, you know, with your good enough parent or the friend on the playground who doesn't invite you to their birthday party.

You know, when you have AI companions that are, you know, sycophantic and perfectly agreeable, you don't get those experiences. And even when, and I'm sure it's gonna happen, people will intentionally embed, you know, friction into whatever product they're developing.

Really, there's so much that we don't understand in terms of the nuances of that friction that I fear, you know, we'll have a real.

Mismatch. And, you know, even things like creativity, you know, we, you know, the, that cute little toy that that Kathy shared, right? It promises, you know, building of empathy and creativity. That's not how those things are built. They're built through boredom, through the internal life of an individual.

And so these skills are again, built by relationships, the imperfect relationships, you know, during the, you know, during all of life. But those early birth to eight years are when the foundation for those human edge skills that are gonna allow children to succeed in the future are built because there's no doubt that you know, the best preparation for an AI future is a thoroughly human childhood.

So.

SHAH: Super interesting. So Isabel, I wanted to ask you, you've been, you've been really thinking you know, pushing kind of the boundaries of, of this work, and you've been thinking a lot about what you, what you coin relational intelligence or rq, you wrote about it in your book and most recently in the Stanford Social Innovation Review.

So tell us what relational intelligence RQ is, how is that different from IQ or especially EQ and why do you think that this may be one of the defining skills of our age? And I also wanna add that I understand that you're starting to now also think about how to measure that. So can you tell us a little bit about that as well?

HAU: Yeah. Thank you. And that connects so deeply with cafes and Dana's comments. So, relational intelligence is simply our human capacity to form, sustain, and repair meaningful relationships is our capacity to make meaning with others. Okay. So very, very simple. Here is why I think it's important to you know, speak about this form of intelligence increasingly, our world has been shaped as Dana explains so beautifully already by cognitive intelligence. Most of them us think about human intelligence as IQ. We all know that it's not perfect. You know, but this is what we defer to. We defer to this form, this form of of very cognitive based type of intelligence.

We've made a lot of progress over the past 20, 30 years thanks to many, including Daniel Daniel Goldman, and others on introducing EQ emotional intelligence. The difference. So emotional EQ and a, what I call AQ, are very, very close cousins. Here is a difference. Emotional intelligence is very self-based, is the ability to empathize with someone else.

Whereas relational intelligence looks at the propensity to relate with others. So it looks at the relational aspect. Okay. And you asked a very, very important question. Why does it matter? And why, why speak about this why now? So in so not only because of what we discussed already, which is this increasingly, this world that has been increasingly lot more and more isolated or leading our children to be more and more isolated and some to feel more and more lonely.

Levels of loneliness are the highest in our teenagers. Which was a surprise for me when I saw those data because I thought, you know, the age group, that would be the expressing the most amount of loneliness will be our elders, but that's not the case. It's our teenagers. And we don't really know before teenager years how younger children actually are feeling

you know, for the very earliest years is just simply because people, young children are not able to express.

But even in this 8-year-old, six to 8-year-old, we could ask children, but we don't have good data. What we know for is another very important fact, which is the world of jobs. So we know that jobs are being disrupted at the moment, and we know that the economies are going, are heading toward more and more relational economy.

And let me pick on two, two different studies, which I love. One is from Deming at Harvard, who is an economist who looked at different types of skills and how they have evolved. And he shows that a person who has strong social skills and strong math skills does very well in life. No surprise there.

Okay, so if you're good at math and good at social skills, you have a great job trajectory. But here is what is more surprising. Maybe for some of you at least. It was surprising for me, someone who has low math skills and high social skills does much better already today than someone who has high math skills and low social skills.

So as a parent, where do you want us to invest in education? And that's a trend that I believe is going to continue rising. And let me pick on the second study that I wanted to mention, which came from Dana's University from the University of Chicago, recently from the business school there. That shows that what this economist calls the relational sector, which right now is just a few percentage of our economy is going to represent by 2050, according to the study, more than 50% of jobs.

So essentially what may have been, you know, a hundred years or 150 years ago, the industrial revolution, we might actually see it in a very different way. And what about the relational revolution that is happening at the same time as AI is rising?

SHAH: Great. And Isabel, did you wanna mention anything about what you're planning to do at Stanford in terms of measurement, or is that too early right now to, to share?

HAU: It is still on the early side, whether I'm developing some, some thinking. I just actually launched a very, very early version of what I'm thinking about, which is in, not in the form of a test yet, because a test would need to be fully validated and and developed. But I launched a little quiz where you can, as an adult take that little quiz and it has eight questions.

So it takes really a few minutes and then you get a, a little perspective on where you are on your relational you know, world. So it's just a fun way to engage on this topic for the time being and more to come.

SHAH: Great. So that's something that I guess we'll be looking, looking forward to, to seeing out there.

Once you're ready. So now let's move over to, you know, specific advice. Many members of the audience are caregivers you know, or they are aunts and uncles, you know. So I wanted to ask you, Kathy, you've developed a framework for evaluating technology. Tell us tell us what that is and walk us through how a parent or caregiver of a young child can use that when they're standing in a toy aisle or downloading an app.

Like, what questions should they be asking as they're thinking about whether they should purchase something or not, or download something or not?

HIRSH-PASEK: Yeah, I think you wanna start with start with the idea that pretty much anything out there can be called educational apps. Okay. Or educational programming.

Nobody regulates this stuff, so when you read it, go, Hmm. I guess I have to intervene. I can't just. Trust the label and there are a lot of good places that are reviewing the many things coming out. But common sense media would be one that, that I would mention that does a really good job. However, I have to say, I find it completely overwhelming what parents are facing right now.

And it seems to me crazy to think that we could do a lot of the research ourself. So we came up with a kind of tweet that we thought might help. And that tweet, are we still calling it tweets these days? But anyway but that kind of tweet or short little, you know, checklist would be, first of all, is it active?

Is does my kid have to do anything when they're using this or are they just watching? If they're couch potatoes and they're just watching ditch it. Okay. Second, is it engaging or distracting? I cannot tell you how much is distracting. Yesterday I mean, I even went yesterday to take my grandkids to the bowling alley and I had no idea that you had to watch televisions that were all over the front of the bowling alley.

You could hardly see the pins. Everything is distracting. So is it engaging or distracting? If it's distracting, ditch it. Okay. Is it meaningful? Is it anything that the kid will understand or is it over their head? Like, what are we trying to do here? Check it out. If it's not meaningful and the kid's not gonna get it dump, here's one of the keys.

You keep hearing this message. So here it is again. Is it socially interactive? Does it require another person? Now, I know as caregivers, look, I have to, you know, clean the dishes too, do the wash, I get all that. But it may be easy. To pass along what's going on with an app or a toy and say, okay, just go and play with this for a while.

But that while keeps growing and growing and growing and as I said before, it's displacing something more powerful, the time that you have with a real kid, building the relational intelligence. Okay, so active, engaged, meaningful, socially interactive, and it should be fun. It should be fun. So when I go through the aisle, I look for these things and I say, does this toy, is it 90% toy and 10% kid?

Or is it 90% kid and 10% toy? Same with apps. And as we develop AI technologies, I do hope this is a plea for all of you out there who are in the technology building business. Talk to me and to Isabelle and to Dana and to people in the field who study this stuff and study the hard skills of relational intelligence and see how to build it in and make sure that what you're looking at is active and engaged, meaningful, socially, interactive and joyful.

SHAH: Great. Thanks. Really, really practical and excellent tips. Dana, you also have some tips for us that you mentioned in your book Human Raise, which is a hope framework. So tell us a little bit about that and you know, particularly like how it can help parents who might feel overwhelmed that have their dishes to do and but they still wanna do something wonderful and meaningful for their kids.

So tell, tell us a little bit about that and what do you say to those parents?

SUSKIND: Sure. I mean, to be honest, first I say I see you you know, and, and in truth, that's in some ways why I wrote human raise to give parents. Guidelines and frameworks that will hold up no matter what technology throws us. Because the truth is, parents are overwhelmed right now.

They're responding rationally to brutal conditions, economic stressors, limited childcare, increased social isolation, you know, information bombardment, and this new thing called ai. So when you know, as Kathy said, you know, if a screen gives a parent 20 minutes to breathe, we, we, we get it. We, we've all been there.

And if anything that I've said has made you feel guilty, please set that down. This is not the message. We deserve better. And you know, the hope framework, which comes from the book really is that message. It's not just a message, but a timeless set of guidelines to understand how we navigate this next terrain.

And, you know, what does Hope stand for? It's really an acronym and a statement of values. You know, h is human connection is irreplaceable. I think we've said that a million times over, but the science is unequivocal. Nothing builds the developing brain and the ability to have relationships like real human interaction.

So to the parents, you imperfect, tired, exhausted, distraught. You are the single greatest developmental tool your child has or resource. And no algorithm knows your child the way you do. You have a parental GPS that is, you know, cannot be replaced. O goes into it. O is really owning our imperfections. I think the biggest thing that I learned from really hit home for me in writing this book, that our imperfections aren't just, you know, something to, you know.

To feel bad about it is actually how our children learn to be human. It's, you know, it almost liberated me that children don't thrive on perfect responsiveness. I mean, our frictionless AI has really shown us they grow through mismatch and repair. And when your child misread your signal which every parent has occur, you know, and then reconnect and repair as Isabelle meant, you know, noted, it's where not just resilience, but your child's RQ is built so good enough.

Parenting isn't a consolation prize. It's evolutionarily advantageous. P you know, is really protecting the early years. I love, thank you Sweta and Kathy for making this happen because there's a lot of talk about AI from everything from democracy to workforce, and. Forgetting that the early years are what everything else is built upon.

But it, the early years are fundamentally different and we need to think about it and make decisions really intentionally, lest we end up in a place that we don't want. But lastly, e is for enhanced. Don't replace. You know, none of us are anti-tech. I'm a cochlear implant surgeon. I believe in, in the power of technology to allow for human flourishing.

What we need to do though is think about technology to make our lives easier, to help with developmental differences. Ones that, you know, strengthen relationships between humans and not replace them. I think that is the most important thing. So, you know, here's what I want you to walk away for. Yes, the hope framework are guiding principles, but really you don't have to be perfect.

You just have to show up. Love your kid, and, you know, and you've, you are enough. You've always been enough.

SHAH: Thanks. Thanks Dana. I think there are probably a number of parents who are now taking a breath because you, you said you're enough. It's okay. 'cause there, you know, being parent has a lot of pressure.

And Isabel, I wanted to turn lastly to you before we open it up to q and a. So, you know, you mentioned relational intelligence and we wanna protect that. We're trying to protect that and grow in that in children from birth to eight. And what does that mean practically for a caregiver today? So what does a childhood look like where AI is present, which we know AI is not going anywhere, but our Q RQ is still at the center.

HAU: Yeah, and it feels like Kathy and Dana have already answered, answered partially that question. But I would I would add for all of us to think about the different circles of relationships. So of course a parent or primary caregiver, guardian child relationship remains clearly a core, core component of it.

And so showing that this remains you know, very, very critical especially in the earliest years of life, but there are other relationships is so, peer relationships. So especially when children start forming friendships which typically happens around age three, four. Years old.

For example, having a best friend in kindergarten is one of the greatest predictor of academic motivation. So very important for children to also develop friendships. And that's a role that all of us as parents, family members, caregivers, can also encourage for play and other, other things.

Friends could also take the form of adult friends or adult that, and that comes down to maybe adult friends in the family unit. It could be grandparents, aunties, uncles, but it could be a broader set of friends that us as adults introduced to, to children. It could also be coaches if a child plays sports, so other, other, other activities.

All these humans are very, very important in a child's life. And in a child's development. One thing that if I miss, that has been a reflection for me living here in the Bay Area and especially here in Palo Alto, which I I call the mecca of, of a parenting. I'm observing increasingly a phenomenon that I find really fascinating about play dates.

So play dates are increasingly more and more structured. So when I think about play dates in my you know, my upbringing, I think about two or more children going, getting together and then parents staying largely away or maybe nearby, but largely not involved in that play date. What I'm observing here is a meaningful shift toward more and more structured play dates where parents actually, or primary caregivers are increasingly involved in structuring those those activities.

So you need to add some. Maybe buy even some picks or some other, you know, things for that play date. You need to sometimes hire a you know, a you know, someone who comes a clown or someone who comes to you know, to uncertain the children anyway. And it adds to the stress of parenting that Dana mentioned.

So just a reminder, it's not an AI conversation clearly. But related to relationships that children also need just unstructured playtime with other little ones or, or, or older ones, by the way. And those are critical for child development.

SHAH: Yeah. And you mentioned like the unstructured play and that, you know, when you have so much structured play, then where does the friction come in as well?

Right. So Exactly. Dana, we got like a live question following up on what you've mentioned around friction. Mm-hmm. And I'm just gonna ask you this one that healthy you mentioned healthy friction in relationships are really important. Both, all three of you actually have mentioned this theme. So there seems to be an increasingly common tendency among many who are growing up relationship averse to confuse this friction for abuse or some other undesirable conflict that might not arise to the level of abuse.

So how do we help people, either children or adults, to correctly distinguish between healthy friction and conflict that should be avoided? So that was the one of the live questions that just came up. So as we now shift into our q and A portion, and, and any of you can men you know, respond to this.

SUSKIND: No, I mean that's an in very interesting and great question.

I mean, as mentioned, even for myself in the process of writing human raised and going through this moment, I, I think that I've gotten a new appreciation for friction, not just in learning how to navigate relationships and perspective taking and really understanding it scientifically from learning theory of mind development, et cetera.

But even friction is necessary for learning, right? I mean, there's that really inter, you know, there are a number of studies, but that MIT study of you write an essay with a an LLM, you're not gonna remember it as well as the active, you know, writing of the, the essay. So I think, but what it almost feels like that question is, you know, it's sort of like.

The idea of toxic stress versus stress, right? Stress is important for kids. We all deal with it. Where whereas toxic stress in early childhood is not a functional thing. So under being able to understand and differentiate that is important, and I don't have an easy answer of like, how can we teach people about that?

But I would say that a thoroughly relationship rich childhood actually allows you to begin understanding that, that, you know, if your mom gets mad at you and shows, is upset, but then you understand that, oh, you know what, there can be rupture, repair, and my mommy still loves me. That's how you raise adults who can say, okay, this, this isn't to the level of abuse.

This is just normal parenting. And there is something about becoming a parent yourself that all of a sudden all the things that you didn't like your parents to do, suddenly you understand them. So I can't speak to that. But I think this idea of friction that I hope we don't get so enamored by friction that, you know, that we start intentionally building too, too much in.

But certainly friction is a positive part of learning to be human and learning.

SHAH: I wanted to ask you both. So another question that's come from the audience from Mohammed Abbu Shaka, and one that was anonymous. They're really similar, but it's really for all three of you to give some advice on, you know, at what point can do we transition from protecting children to act to, from AI to actively training them in literacy and, and you know, is there a particular age that you know, having more exposure is okay.

So what are your thoughts on that in terms of yeah, just transitioning from protection to AI literacy or the balance?

HIRSH-PASEK: I, I'll jump in for just a sec 'cause I, I also wanted to comment on the friction point just a bit. I think. Sometimes friction sounds like a capital F, but it, but it happens all the time.

Like you go out for recess and you want the swing, but it turns out that Sherry got to the swing before you got there. So unfortunately you have to wait. You know, that's friction for a kid, that's really friction. Okay? Or you have to go to a supermarket with a parent, you know? That's friction. You really would rather not be there.

And if you're gonna bother being there, you'd rather get all the ice cream from the ice cream aisle and certainly not stop in the veggie aisle. So. We have friction all the time in human relationships and navigating those and learning how to navigate those, that's what's gonna fill the 50% of jobs that Isabelle was talking about now and how to become responsible users.

I think the answer of how to become responsible users is the same kind of as it's always been. Michael Rich wrote a gorgeous book. He, he is what do he call himself, a media attrition. And he wrote a book a couple years ago where he talks about finding that balance and ensuring that your kids understand the contract.

Well, there's two parts here. One is, again, if you wanna avoid the disruption and the displacement and the possible derailment, then we have to limit. How addicting this stuff is, and it is very addicting. It's like Candy Crush and why we can spend so much time on Candy Crush. I don't know, but we can. So we have, we have to worry about that.

The second is these things look real. And so they can fool you. They can fool you into your believing that you're getting real information. My husband Jeff, has done some wonderful programs for the American Law. American Bar Association and lawyers got fooled too, and some of them got disbarred because a lot of the times when the AI is trying to make you feel good, it just comes up with stuff.

And that stuff may not be a, you know, accurate at all. It's hallucinating. So there's that, and there's the fact that depending on the AI toy that you get, it's connected to the internet and that can have other dangerous consequences. 'cause it can reach out not only to misinformation but your stuff, your voice, your likeness becomes part of what's out there.

In the big worldwide web. So I think as parents, what I'd wanna do is one subject my kids only to what I would call closed systems, systems where the child's information cannot get out to the rest of the worldwide web. And I would hope our politicians would act on that fairly quickly. 'cause it's dangerous.

It's dangerous for families, it's dangerous for kids. The second thing is I think that young kids are pretty smart, but they're not smart at age three and four. They don't know if it looks like it's a really, I mean, they are brilliant by the way, at three and four. I mean, that's what I, I spent my whole life studying

SHAH: A book called Becoming Brilliant.

HIRSH-PASEK: I know, I know. And, and I, I don't know anyone smarter than three and four year olds. However you can fool them. You can definitely fool them. And AI is the first thing I've seen come on the market companion AI that I think can fool. So at some point we have to say it's a tool. It's a tool like a hammer and a screwdriver.

It's just a different kind of tool. It's a tool like a radio and Alexa, Alexa isn't really your friend, Alexa just listens to what you wanna play in the music stream and gives you that song. So helping them understand, even with Alexa early on, and creating that category that they can put things in will help them later when I think they really can understand AI's just a tool.

And as I said, for my money, I'd follow the Chinese example. I think these ai, social companion toys are really not what they're cracked up to be.

SHAH: Yeah. And so, so someone Kathy did ask I guess they did a Google search on China and they didn't find something on it. So they wanna know the source of, of, I mean, I've seen it in the news.

I've seen it, but --

HIRSH-PASEK: I can't come up with that in my fingertips, but I, I can find it for them.

SHAH: Yeah, I've seen it actually in a number of news sources as well.

HIRSH-PASEK: Yeah, yeah.

SHAH: That China has done this, so perhaps try again on Google. So I'm gonna, we we're almost at closing, but I wanted to ask this one quick question from Jim Gray and then we're gonna wrap up and thank you for all the questions.

There's so many. I wish we had more time to get to them. But Jim is asking, given our collective history with previous media trends like smartphones and social media, what kind of child development research might get out in front of accelerating the AI freight train rather than only playing catch up again?

All three of you mentioned research, but maybe just a super quick input on this. This idea or this question?

HAU: Yes. What I think we need two, at least two things and maybe more, but one is we need longitudinal studies and we need to start them right, like yesterday. Mm-hmm. And then second, we need causal studies, uh mm-hmm.

Which is still missing in social media. We have a lot of correlation but not causation. In, we just published a summary of AI as a state of research in AI and education in my team two weeks ago. This is across age groups. So not only focused on the earliest years of life, and we are showing that at this point we only have 22 very specific Wow.

22 causal research from across the globe, across universities on AI and education. And they tend to be very specific. They tend to be small samples anyway, so we need a lot more causal at scale research as as, as you know, as urgent as possible. This is a huge responsibility for all of us on the research side.

SHAH: Great, thank you. And I'm just gonna close now 'cause we have a, a minute left. So, firstly, thank you to Isabel, Dana and Kathy for joining. You know, when I, what I take away from this conversation is that children being born right now and children who are 2, 4, 6 years old today, they're gonna grow up in a world of ai.

It's just. It's gonna be the norm. And our job is not to pretend that it isn't true. Our job is to make sure that the human relationships that children need to become fully themselves, the serve and return, the imperfections. As you all have mentioned, the relational intelligence that cannot be automated are protected and centered in that world.

So I wanna leave you with something that all three of our guests mentioned in different ways that the most important and powerful technology in young children's life is still you, the parent, the caregiver your voice. Your attention, all your imperfections, all the mistakes that you make, your presence.

And I hear, I hear Isabelle say this a lot, but love, your love is critical and that's not a small thing. So thank you for joining us today and stay tuned for the next webinar in our Generation AI Starts Early series, which will be May 18th from 1 to 2 Eastern Standard Time where we're gonna go more deeply into what's at stake for babies and toddlers.

So, thanks, and have a great day.