Parent 1:

I'll go first I guess. My name is Parent 1. I have four children. Child 1 is 22. He's in the autistic spectrum. Child 2 is 21, Child 3 is 18, and Child 4 is 15. And today I'm here to discuss mostly about Child 3. And my favorite show lately is Supernatural. I watch binge-watch it with my daughter. So it's fun.

Speaker 2:

Sounds like fun.

Parent 2:

Okay, I guess I'll go next. Hi everyone. My name is Parent 2. I also have four children. The oldest is 36. The one that follows is 26, 25.

Administrator:

So sorry, I just saw that you joined. I just wanted to make sure that everybody was in the group. Sorry guys.

Parent 2:

That's okay. And then the last one is Child 3, who is 16, who was diagnosed with ADD and a cognitive disorder. And that's who I'm here for. My favorite show, I don't know if anybody can believe, but it's General Hospital. That's a go-to. I recorded every day for the past, like 40 years. So that's it for me.

Parent 3:

I guess I can go next. My name is Parent 3. I'm 48. I have one daughter, Child 1. She is 16 and she has ADD and a lot of physical health problems. Chronic illnesses.

Parent 4:

Oh, your show. What show do you watch?

Parent 3:

Oh, well I like the Real Housewives of anything.

Speaker 2:

Okay. Someone else want to take us? Parent 4? You were-

Parent 4:

Sure. Yeah. Sorry. What happened to my picture? Sorry. Oh, there.

Hi. I'm Parent 4. I have two children. Both of who have gone through the HBN studies. So I'm not really sure which one I'm here for today. I believe it's probably Child 1 because he's the older one and is much more technologically problematic, is the way I would say it, but also savvy. And I just finished watching the Woody Allen Farrow documentary, which was kind of a downer. And now I'm watching something even more depressing, Mare of Easttown, I think it's called. Anyway, that's what I'm watching.

Speaker 2:

Parent 5:

Hello? Can you hear me?

Speaker 2:

Yep. I can hear you.

Parent 5:

Sorry. Trying to figure out how to work this out. Hi, I'm Parent 5. I have three children. I believe I'm here for my oldest who is eight going on 40. I don't know exactly what he's diagnosed with yet because we are having him tested. So I believe that's why I'm here.

Speaker 2:

Okay.

Parent 5:

Did you need my favorite do you need my favorite show?

Speaker 2:

Sure.

Parent 5:

My favorite show is Mayans. I'm a big motorcycle person.

Speaker 2:

Okay. Parent 6?

Parent 6:

Can you hear me?

Speaker 2:

Yes.

Parent 6:

So my name is Parent 6. I have three sons and I have three stepsons. And I am here for my son, Child 1, who has had multiple brain surgeries. He has brain tumors, which has caused cognitive delays.

Speaker 2:

Okay, well, we'll get started and move pretty quickly today so we can finish in time. I like to do this exercise just so can understand a little bit about where we each come from, what's going on with our children, and their use of technology. I like to get a lot of different opinions and just different thoughts. If you can just jot down on a piece of paper or a note, whatever is handy, three positives about your child using technology during the pandemic and three negatives. And circle the most important one on each. And we'll share those.

And whenever you're done, you can just shout out and let me know and we'll talk through some of them.

Parent 1:

Okay, I'll go again. Which I forgot to say about Child 3 who's the one I'm speaking most about today, is diagnosed with OCD and anxiety and stuff like that. He's 18, like I said. I am thinking of having him reevaluated because I honestly think he may be on the spectrum due to some of his behaviors. But anyway, so what I wrote down is positive is that he can stay in touch with his friends, he can play games, use his brain a bit, and have schoolwork. Negatively is that he's constantly on his device. Really doesn't want to leave the house much at all anymore.

And the worst was over the summer last year he, I guess, I don't know if it was from being on the computer or his phone, but he almost had a breakdown or I honestly thought we were going to have to admit him to a hospital because he became obsessed with thinking that he was cursed. He was watching these videos with people would say, "If you see this doll or you look at this thing, you're going to be cursed."

He's always had issues, but this was, I mean, honestly, very bizarre for him to be out there with that. We had to get him psychiatric help. And he started taking medication. And now he sees a therapist and a psychiatrist and it just, like I said, he always had issues, but I think the whole Corona being stuck in the house and by being on, therefore then, the computer and his phone so much, I don't know what it did to his mental state. I mean, really had a bad effect.

Speaker 2:

Thank you. Does anyone else want to share?

Parent 6:

Yes, actually, that really resonated with me. I can say some of the positives, but then I want to segue into what she was talking about because I found some of the same things. So Child 1 is my youngest of the six boys we have. So he was here by himself because he has health issues, so exposing him to COVID was a real concern. But one of the positives of the computer was that he could at least talk to people that were his age. He had something to fill the time, because filling all those hours was nerve-wracking for me. And sometimes you would hear him laugh and stuff, that would you bring joy.

But the thing that happened with Child 1 that we had never seen before was that he also became obsessed that there were vampires and that they were going to come get him. And all of the same things that, I forget the woman's name that was before me, I apologize. But we saw some of the same things and I was so scared. I took all the technology away from him and he got better. So I don't know what that is online. And I'm an older mom, so I don't know as much about technology and what they're doing, but it was really concerning for me and scary.

And then at the same time, you feel bad because then they're depressed that they don't have anybody, that they don't have anyone to talk to. So that was my input, but it was interesting that I heard somebody say the same things that we dealt with during COVID.

Speaker 2:

Does anyone else want to share quickly?

Parent 4:

I can share it. I'm going to make a connection to what both of them said, because my son didn't really have anything specific that he brought out, but he was having nightmares and was afraid to sleep alone. So I'm wondering if it may have been something that he came across online. But to give you his positive and negatives, which some of which the positives are actually negatives as well. So he's very savvy, technologically savvy. So that for me was good because I didn't need to help him too much. I didn't have to interfere too much with that. He's very creative. So sometimes when he gets online, he does really creative things. And I thought sometimes it was good for occupying him, just get him out of my hair. I'm trying to work remote and he's here. So that was good.

The negatives were he's a little too savvy that he can be a little sneaky and a little manipulative with it. And I wouldn't know, because I'm not as savvy as he is. He gets easily frustrated. So if he's playing a game and he's not winning or it's not going the way he wants, he'll start banging things and hitting the computer as if it's the computer's fault. And again, the other is too much time. Spent too much time on it.

Speaker 2:

All right. Moving on to some of our questions for today. In the first question, I would like you to think about the time prior to the pandemic and what your child's use of technology for education looked like then. Was it beneficial? Was it already problematic? Did you already have concerns? Did they not even use it?

Parent 2:

Well, I can start with that. Child 1’s problem was a problem. The only thing he's not very good at because of his cognitive disorder, he's unable to retain any information. So his worst subject was math. I think after a while, once he learned about the calculator, he was just cheating his way through math, which became more of a problem. Now, he's homeschooled and he just seems to use the modern tech, he Googles everything instead of learning. It becomes harder for me because unfortunately I'm in the medical fields. So I'm not able to work from home. I'm not home with him. So he's basically alone most of the day. But that's how it all started before the pandemic. Now with the pandemic, it just became worse because now he's again, Googling everything, using the computers. So he's not really learning much. That's all I have.

Speaker 2:

Does anyone else have thoughts or agree, disagree, different?

Parent 6:

I can tell you a little bit about technology that Child 1 is using.

Speaker 2:

Sure.

Parent 6:

So at Child 1's school, every student has an iPad that they take back and forth to school. And they use it pretty much exclusively. They don't really have books. So I found that that was really great, but to just have the computer to do all of the ... and I'm a retired teacher, so I do have some educational background, but to do all of his schoolwork through the computer screen and have a cognitive delay, it's not beneficial. He didn't learn what he needed to be. But I understand it's also the circumstances we're in. But I do believe that Child 1 and probably many other kids lost this year of educational growth. I don't know if that was your question, but that was my thought.

Speaker 2:

Is anyone else have feedback to that? Because the next question was, what was it like during the pandemic?

Parent 2:

Frustrating. Very frustrating. Child 1 withdrew a lot, lost friends. Child 1 is not very social. So the couple of friends that he did have, they just kind of separated. I started to see less and less of Child 1. I mean, we live in a really big house, three floors and there was days where I would come home from work and he wouldn't even come out of his room, not at all unless I went in. And when I did go in, he was very agitated. And I just came back from vacation and I guess a week away from me, past two days, we've been closer. I don't know how long that's going to last. But with the pandemic, he has definitely become very withdrawn.

Speaker 2:

Okay. What are some of all of your concerns with returning to school, in person school and their use of technology? What are your feelings around that? What are you worried about?

Parent 1:

I'll say Child 3, he graduated from high school last June. So he started, it's kind of back to the other question and this one. He started college last fall, which he did. And then he signed up for this semester and he just got so overwhelmed with having to do the computer. He dropped out and he withdrew without us even knowing. And it was at a point where no refunds. He was also getting an excelsior scholarship, which now he will not be able to get anymore. So I don't really know what he's ... at this point, we're trying to figure out what he's going to do.

I have my daughter as well, she goes to college. She has a couple of classes in person. She does really well though, she loves school. My younger daughter, high school. They're the worst program there right now, because whether you're blended or virtual, everything is virtual. So the kids that go into class go in, but with their computer and a headset and teachers are at home. But I do believe even for my daughter who has no issues, she will be a junior next year and it will be very difficult. Anxiety is starting already to have to go back, even though she's sick of being home.

Parent 4:

And I feel like we haven't really finished with COVID. So even my son who goes to school two days a week, says that he sits in front of a computer at school with headphones. And some teachers who are there will come into the room. The technology has been both a blessing and a curse because yeah, it allowed them to go to school while they couldn't physically. But now that they're physically in school, I feel like technology is going to play an even more important role for them that I don't want. I think it's really important that they continue learning through a physical means like a teacher. I know technology is a big subject now too. Technology wasn't a subject when I was a kid, but it's huge now.

But I just hope that they can find a way to really use it to the best of the ability and not just have kids get on it and do what they need to do. Even here at home, you had mentioned the other thing about technology at home and the difference between going back in school and stuff. And I'm actually really shocked that he's able to view YouTube on his school computer. They don't really put too many firewalls up for a lot of things that I would've thought. So while he's in class, if I'm not monitoring, he's got another window open watching stupid YouTube videos, which I hope he's not doing at school.

Speaker 2:

I caught my boys doing that too. Not only that, but on their school laptop, they figured out a way to record and have a YouTube channel and make videos and post them. And I thought I was pretty tech savvy.

Well, moving on to their use of social media. And when I say social media, I don't only mean Instagram, Facebook, or probably the actual social media that kids use these days, because those are the two I know. I also mean YouTube, other chat apps, WhatsApp, things like that. So thinking about those kinds of programs and apps, how did your child use social media or those apps prior to the pandemic? And what were your thoughts around it? Was it beneficial then? And we're going to go through the same question. So I want to hear about prior to the pandemic, during the pandemic, and your concerns for them in returning to in-person school.

Parent 6:

I can speak to that. I don't know if you want certain people to speak at certain times.

Speaker 2:

Everyone. I want to hear everyone.

Parent 6:

So Child 1 has been vaccinated and at his school, all of the teachers who want to get vaccinated have been vaccinated and they are back in school. They've always had iPads, so they still use them. I think that being back in school has really helped him. I found during the pandemic, before the pandemic, he'd used social media, which the kids use TikTok a lot. At least that's what I see and Snapchat. And he was using it. But then when I saw during the pandemic, he was using it a lot and using it inappropriately at times, or with people that I didn't want him to be chatting with. So I just used every parent blocking mechanism and I monitored it and he only gets it for a limited amount of time now.

And on his iPad, he does do that same thing with the YouTube thing. I've kind of let it go because I just can't fight every fight. But I've seen him do that when he's talking to his teachers. I do think it's better that they're back in school. School's not exactly the same. They are wearing masks, of course, and they're trying to social distance, and they have a lot of restrictions. But maybe some of it just is that you get to see people. I know that when I got to see people again, it makes you happy. Being isolated at home with just your mom is not fun. Did that answer it? Sometimes I wonder if I'm not exactly answering your question.

Speaker 2:

You got it.

Parent 5:

I agree with what Child 1's mom said. I found that prior pandemic, my son would play just like video games with his friends. And then when the pandemic hit, it just exploded into like this world of social media and video games. And I didn't let my kids really reach out and use the WhatsApp or Messenger as much, because I was afraid that they might come in contact with people I don't know and I can't stop ... I have three of them, so I can't control all three of them. But I definitely agree with what Child 1's mom said that it's too much out of control. And even if I try to limit his time, it's like I can't tame the beast.

Parent 2:

Thing is that you feel kind of guilty and we try to tame it because what other activities do they have? They're not going outside. I have not been able to vaccinate Child 1 yet. So I'm kind of iffy with him going out and being around other kids. It's like a no-win situation. You take it away from them, what else are they going to do?

Parent 6:

Yeah, I understand.

Parent 4:

My son knows all of the social media things out there, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, all of these, YouTube. He's asked for a Facebook account, which we won't let him have. The good thing about him is that he actually gets easily bored with them after a while. And then he doesn't want to do them anymore. And he'll move on to the next one, try that one out for a little bit, and then move on to the next one.

Before school, before COVID, he had a lot more activities going on. So he didn't have as much time on his devices. Now, even he goes to school, but he's home by 2:30 and back on his a devices now. And just playing video games and mostly watching YouTube. He wants to create a YouTube channel. So with that, I'm making him take a YouTube class about what's good about what you can do on YouTube and what's good and what you shouldn't be doing. So it's sort of like YouTube etiquette. So, I'm trying to compromise with him but also still [inaudible 00:23:46] be aware that he needs to still behave. Because he has gotten in trouble at school because of technology. So I just want to make sure that we armed them with the right tools to use technology properly if he's going to use it, which I can't stop him from doing.

Speaker 2:

What are some of your other thoughts around it?

Parent 2:

Sorry, guys.

Speaker 2:

It's okay.

Parent 2:

Were you speaking to me? I don't know what the question was.

Speaker 2:

I just wanted to know what anyone else's thoughts were around your child's use of social media.

Parent 2:

It's way too much. It's just a lot.

Speaker 2:

Prior to, and during, and after. That was my question.

Parent 4:

I think my son was like excited about it at first. And then it just kind of lost the novelty. Now he does other things. I mean, he's still on devices, but he just finds new things all the time to kind of get obsessed with.

Speaker 2:

What part of that feels problematic for you?

Parent 4:

It's hard for me to keep up with what he's doing. We've also put a lot of parental controls on it. My husband's a software engineer, so he's a lot better about it than I am. That takes up more of my time now because I do try and check their phones every night after they've gone to bed, make sure there's nothing horrible on there. And part of that is also monitoring what their friends say too in their messages and in their chats and stuff. So it's a lot of work on us as well that we didn't have before.

Speaker 2:

Wait, can you guys hear me? Sorry. I'm on two different devices at once, but I did have a quick question. And my question was ... sorry. I'm just going to lower myself on the second device. My other question was for parents whose children have just different disorders that they may be facing, how has the problematic internet usage or the problematic social media usage influenced that? For example, we've heard from other parents whose children have anxiety, how looking at pictures of people on Instagram, the way that they are living, social media influencers, like on YouTube and things like that, how that has increased the amount of anxiety that the child may be facing.

Parent 1:

I don't really understand what you mean.

Speaker 2:

Your child has been diagnosed with a specific disorder. How do you think that disorder has impacted their use of devices during the pandemic?

Parent 6:

I can speak to that.

Speaker 2:

[crosstalk 00:26:56] things helpful. Some people found it more harmful. So for example, a child with ADHD might struggle more with 10,000 apps being able to be open on their device. And someone with anxiety might struggle less because they are able to, I don't know, use the coloring book app to relax.

Parent 2:

I'm sorry. I don't know what it is. I've seen that no matter what disorder they have, for some reason they are geniuses that can handle whatever the internet throws their way. I swear because Child 1 cannot remember his left from his right sometimes, but he sure can remember every app, every song. It's crazy. I don't understand it.

Parent 4:

True. It's true.

Speaker 2:

That's very funny.

Parent 1:

I mean, I'll say, I think with both of my boys, my one son he's autistic. He has sensory disorder. I mean, he's high functioning. He has anxiety, he has auditory processing, a whole bunch of different stuff. But he manages. And before the pandemic, he had his routine of what he did and it was good. He always has to have a schedule and know what he's doing. He'll do anything but as long as he knows it's something coming up, if not, he gets thrown by that. So the whole COVID, the restrictions just made it more difficult for him to figure out what to do with his time. They had all kinds of Zoom classes or sessions. He goes to the [program]. He does Respite Hab. And at that point, that was all he was doing.

And he doesn't like Zoom. He's very overwhelmed by Zoom. You know how people, even you can see when you go on these meetings. Even me, for instance, I was on another meeting yesterday and I couldn't figure out how to mute myself and my dog wouldn't stop barking. So there are things in the background that he just really won't do any of them.

His dayhab, thank God, it's a small one. He went back at the end of August. And except for a few days here and there closing down, they've been open the whole time. So for him, that's great. And then my son, Child 3, who has his other issues, being on social media, I mean, he's always been on it a lot before. And during it just became his only thing. He didn't see any friends in person because he was afraid. And I think that's what made him constantly watching these things that were scary and made him afraid. Like Child 1's mom. I mean, not that it's good to hear that about someone else, but it at least kind of makes you feel like he wasn't the only one because it was the scariest thing ever to just watch him go through that. He didn't sleep, he didn't eat. He just was panicked all the time, saying "I just can't take it anymore."

And I think that's what did it to him, going on these sites that he just became addicted to. And moving forward, now he goes out a little bit, he gets together. He's not an overly friendly person, doesn't have that many friends to begin with. So, I'm hopeful that the summer, he'll be out more. And I don't know, will move more to the outdoors than the indoors.

Parent 5:

I kind of agree with all the other parents. Prior to COVID, I kept my son Child 1, very sheltered. I feel like social media has made him aware and very angry, with all the new technology, because like I said, he's eight going on 40. His mind's like a sponge. So it's made him very aware of the world that I've sheltered him from. And very angry and scared and very worried and panicky. I don't know if that's a thing, because I'm still learning everything that he's being diagnosed with. So it makes him very panicky.

Speaker 2:

Does anyone else have any thoughts?

Parent 4:

I think to answer the question a little more directly, she was talking about the influencers and watching these YouTube videos or TikTok things. And both my children were a little obsessed with them to the point they were trying things out like these people do. And that's what TikTok's about really is you watch someone dance something, and then you dance it and then post it and wait for people to like it. And that sort of anxiety you get waiting for, "Oh my gosh, how many likes did I get? How many dislikes did I get?" And my kids were even joking around about it to each other or not joking around, but kind of competing, like "I got 10 likes, I got 20 likes." And it's a little disconcerting. It's like, "Guys, this isn't reality. This is just stuff that's happening online."

Parent 2:

They try to look for validation.

Parent 4:

Yeah. And my son wants to be like this YouTuber, thinks he's going to make tons of money. I'm like, "No, you're living in my basement if you think you're going to be a YouTuber for the rest of your life." So it's just like, I really feel like it doesn't give them a sense of what's real. And that's scary.

Parent 6:

My son tried to ask me if I would find a way to buy likes for him.

Speaker 2:

Oh my God. Is that a thing?

Parent 6:

Is that a thing? I don't know. But he was like ...

Parent 6:

Yeah. He wanted me to buy likes for whatever he was doing so that he could as well be a famous YouTuber. I mean, I really just find that, I understand the whole feeling about like, what else can you give them to do? Because we do, we feel guilty. They're sitting in this house, they have a disability. And my son is by himself. He has lots of brothers, but they're not here. So it's just really, really hard. But yeah, he wanted me to buy him likes. I don't know how much it costs, but I wasn't buying likes.

Speaker 2:

Does anyone else have any closing thoughts or we can wrap up and Administrator can take us through that. All right, Administrator?

Administrator:

Can you guys hear me?

Speaker 2:

Yeah, we can hear you.

Administrator:

Awesome. Awesome. Yeah. So thank you guys so much for your participation today and the information that you guys gave us. It's just ... don't do that. It's just very consistent with the information that we got from other parents as well. So we really appreciate just all the information that you guys are giving us. We're just collecting it to host a town hall meeting either like in late May, early June, where we'll share the information, but also hopefully give tips on how to navigate internet usage with your children throughout the pandemic. So that's why we're running these groups. So once again, thank you guys so much.

In regards to compensation. As soon as this is over, I'll be sending your information to our administrator so that way she's able to email you guys your $50 Amazon gift card. So today's Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. I would say by Thursday, if you don't receive the gift card, please do not hesitate to either email me or give me a phone call and we will get that sorted out.

Speaker 2:

All right. Well, thank you, everyone. Thank you so much for sharing today.

Parent 2:

Thank you. And good luck, ladies.

Parent 6:

You too.

Parent 2:

Bye.

Speaker 2:

Bye.

Parent 3:

Bye-bye.