**Episode #16**

**Speaker 1** [00:00:01] Welcome to the Cabrera Lab Podcast. Not much.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:07] I had an interesting thought that I wanted to look surprised. Uh, that came from a conversation we had the other day at our dinner table, actually, when, if you remember, we were talking to our beautiful teenage son about his love of his.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:28] No, yeah, that was on that couch.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:31] I was thinking about, and I was talking to somebody else today on a phone call who also has a teenage son, and she happens to be the head of curriculum and instruction for a large school district. And she said, yeah, she said you take what's happening in the home and you multiply it. Just getting students engaged and able to be present in any level of school is impossible. So I was speaking about electronics and phones and things and. Just seems like they're robbing, really. Are you trying to be funny? What'd you say? Are you try to be be funny.

**Speaker 3** [00:01:09] Sorry, I was on my phone. Yeah, I'm doom-scrolling over here.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:14] I was just thinking about, you know, we talk about up thinking, we talk about thinking the relationship between electronics, electronic use and stop.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:24] Dethinking.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:24] And de-thinking is a good way to think about it. And I bet a lot of people are sharing the struggle that we have personally and I see now professionally. And I was just thinking, what do we do about this de- thinking, as you say it? What do we do about pulling people back into the present and being more thoughtful in the world of constant destruction?

**Speaker 1** [00:01:49] One word, actually one word and a synonym, because the first word, maybe people want to know or it won't resonate. But the second word, which is a synonym for the first world, will. Okay. Metacognition, awareness.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:08] awareness.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:09] Yeah, I mean, I think I mean you know, so there's two things go on that you can there's the fact that these things are incredibly addicting on purpose for everybody, right? And then there's the whole parenting aspect of it, which is like you're trying to get a young person to, you know exist in the world without being completely tied to this thing. And so in both of those cases, awareness, simple awareness or metacognition is probably the most effective tool against it. Okay. In the case of the parenting, you know, I think a lot of it is like, we're gonna regulate it, we're going to turn it, we got all these, now the phone has all these things that you can do to regulate it. And yeah, those are all interesting, but what they're not doing is helping the person, right? because it If the kid is having an issue and at the same time, the parents are having the same issue, we see this, you know, you go to dinner and you see a whole family of people covering four generations and they're all on their phone, right? So this isn't just a kid issue, these things are addictive. And so if all we do as parents is regulate it, administrate it, the use, then you're basically raising somebody that as soon as that regulation disappears, they're going to be addicted to their fault. because they're not going to develop the metacognitive self-regulating abilities and awareness to be able to deal with it. And so, you know, as you know with our kids, probably the most effective thing that we've done with our kid is really have deep conversations about the fact that this thing isn't what it appears, this little.

**Speaker 3** [00:04:05] thing right here.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:07] What this is, is a window into your life, into your attention. It allows people to pass things through the window, through the doorway, whatever you want to think of it as. Think of it like a little doorway into you, into your attention, into your belief systems, into your mental models, into everything, into your purchasing, all of it. And when you turn this thing on, you're giving a bunch of people access to control what goes through that door. Now, the question is, who are those people? So on the other side of this thing, because you look at this and you go, oh, there's nothing untoward about this thing. But the fact is, you've got teams of some of the smartest, most educated people in the world, the multi-diverse, multi-educated, multi-disciplinary, you got psychologists, you got engineers. You've got business people, you've got marketing people, you've messaging people, you've linguists, you got every possible, anybody in the world who has a skill is on these teams and they're getting paid a lot of money.

**Speaker 2** [00:05:27] And they're getting paid a lot of money to get your time, your energy.

**Speaker 1** [00:05:30] And they're working together to get your attention, to get you money, to get your votes, to get your, mostly attention, mostly attention because they're getting paid because you're their product. Right. The more you pay attention, the more they can sell. Right. And so they're creating, they're understanding your brain and how it works at the chemical level. neuroscience and chemistry level of your brain. They're understanding what makes addiction happen. Right. And they're getting you addicted on purpose. So they are using you. So you think I'm going to buy this phone and I'm gonna use it as a tool. But the tool is using you, you're getting used. And I think if you, If kids understand that... Like no human wants to get used. You know, you don't have to be an adult not to wanna get used, nobody wants to be used. And once you open up the awareness a little bit that, wait a minute, like I'm not just, it's not just about me using this thing. It's about this thing is using me. Once you have that awareness, then you can start to be like, do I want that in my life? Do I want to be this thing's bitch? Do I want to be that to this thing? Do I wanna give this thing that much control?

**Speaker 2** [00:07:04] Right. I mean, I think part of the part of the issue is, especially with teenagers or even, I mean I see, I see young children out with actual, you know, phones with all the video and everything. Surprising to me. We were, we were, we waited until they were a certain age before they got phones. But I mean it's hard to, it's I think it's hard for younger people in particular to see that distinction you're making between. you being used and you using the phone, or you being the product versus the phone being the product, because they're watching cat videos. They're watching-

**Speaker 4** [00:07:40] Yeah, so it seems an option.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:41] They're texting their friends. They're taking selfies, you know, the whole selfie thing. They're take selfies everywhere they go and posting it. So I guess part of it is what you said, the deep conversation and making that relationship for people. People don't see that relationship the same way that we have talked about it. And I think, I mean, obviously, that's part of awareness, being aware of that relationship between what's being shown on your phone. and what people are trying to get from you by showing it to you. That's right. So I don't know. I mean, how do you help kids make that distinction?

**Speaker 1** [00:08:20] Well, I think first, you know, you don't want to, I think I think it's a mistake to let this phone be in between you and your child. And the way the fastest way to do that is, is to try to control it. What you want to do is try to help them control it, right, right. And with the younger ones, that's a little that's difficult because they don't even really have the metacognitive awareness. And so you got to work with them at a young age. If you're going to let your kid have a phone at a young age, you got to work on the metacognition at a young age and that metacongnition just means like having a little bit of an eyeball on what you're doing, right? It's just this little eyeball. That's all metac cognition is. It's take, you've got 90 billion neurons. Take up a handful of them and get them to Pay attention to you, like kind of rise up above and be like, oh, what's that monkey doing? Me, the monkey on my phone, what am I doing? Oh, I'm death scrolling. Oh, okay. Like, that's just a little bit of monkey, a metacognition on the monkey. And you kind of say, wait a minute, do I really want to be that monkey or do I want to a different monkey? Right? Right. And that is going to make all the difference. And so you've got to have that conversation with them and have them be invested in not being a monkey, not being used.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:49] Choosing how they want to be yeah, and who they want

**Speaker 1** [00:09:52] And I think that is effective because it appeals to their sense of agency, right? I mean, kids want to be independent. They want to have agency. They want have freedom. And if they realize, oh wow, you know, I don't want my parents control me, but I don' want this thing controlling me either. Right. And this thing's controlling my thoughts. It's controlling. My echo chambers. It's, controlling what I see, how I spend my time, all this kind of stuff.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:20] Well, part of it in the conversation that some of the conversations we've had is people often don't see the opportunity cost of things, right? And so part of is saying, you know, you just spent X number of hours on your phone, which on its surface seems fine to most people. But what was the cost of that? You didn't go outside, you didn't have a snack, you've neglected some other part. you weren't present. in a moment that you could have been present. So for example, if you're on a boat somewhere and you're looking at your phone and you are not seeing the scenery of the place you've traveled through. And I think a lot of people lose sight of that. You know, the opportunity cost, which is part of the things that we think about and talk about a lot, is what are you missing? What are you choosing not to see?

**Speaker 1** [00:11:08] Yeah, and your kids might not care about the seeing the scenery of the boat, you know, so that might not go over well. But what will go over. Well, is like, hey, you look at how much time you spend on your phone today, right? You can you can look it up on your phones and then calculate if you on average, if you spend that much time on your own every day for all of high school, that's four years. That's a lot. And then calculate. You know, let them see the big macro, right? Connect the micro behavior to the macro and ask them. You do the calculation, you figure it out. How many hours will you have spent on your phone from freshman to senior year? Right. How many ours is that? And what could you do with that number of hours? That puts it in a slightly different perspective, and it lets them see the macro properties of these micro-behaviors. Because when you're in it, you're just like, this is a funny cat video or there's not even cats anymore, it's like memes and things. I don't even know.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:20] You're not speaking a language, I understand right now. Like death scrolling, I don't know what that is.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:24] Death scrolling is like doom scrolling where you're just going and going and going and like Instagram is super addictive. Why is it called doom scrolling? Because it's like a certain cycle of doom. You're just like circling the bowl. You can't get out of it because it's so addictive. It's like eating potato chips.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:43] mindlessly.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:43] Right? Like the reason you pour potato chips. Well, I don't eat potato chips, but if you did, you put them in a bowl and then you get to the bottom of the bowl. The reason you don't sit with a bag is because you're going to eat any. If you're a human, you're gonna finish that bag. Well, Instagram is an infinitely large bag of potato chips

**Speaker 2** [00:13:03] Not nutritious, but tasty.

**Speaker 1** [00:13:04] It's yeah, zero nutrition. Yeah, and lots of salt and sure, you know, whatever and and and you're gonna scroll You're just gonna scroll I guarantee if you're human You're gonna get addicted to it if you do it along

**Speaker 2** [00:13:19] Yeah. Yeah, I mean, you remember we were traveling lately? Mm-hmm. You all laughed at me hysterically. I think something wasn't working on the plane, and I had nothing to do, so I started looking at videos. I didn't realize there were videos. I knew this was going to be embarrassing probably at the end. And I said to you all after we got off the plane. I said, oh, you know, those videos are really fun to watch. And you all laughed because I was like... Because it's true, once you start watching them, you keep going, because they're so varied, and they're are so quick, and they are visually interesting. There's puppies and cats, and then there's people jumping on bikes.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:03] Yeah, I think that is interesting. And there's no doubt that you're gonna get addicted to scrolling. Yeah. But now put in the idea that behind that video is like thousands of people whose job it is to find the next video that's gonna, has the highest probability of manipulating you to watch it. And as soon as you're watching that one, they're thinking about the next one and the next one and next one.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:36] and it's all an algorithm, right?

**Speaker 1** [00:14:37] And all these people, like people that study the mind, people that studied the body, people that's study engineering, people that have studied software, people that studying marketing, all these that are so good at their jobs, they're so knowledgeable, are all behind trying to figure out how to manipulate you not to shut it off, not to put it down.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:06] So then I guess the question is, you know, you were talking about helping people develop awareness, self, the ability to self-regulate control. How do we do that? Like people are listening or probably like, well, okay, that sounds great, but how do I actually do it?

**Speaker 1** [00:15:22] Yeah, I would just recommend that you have more conversations with your kid about it and less preachy, judgy conversations and more just like, hey, I have the same problem, I'm a full-blown adult and this stuff is addictive. And sometimes I find myself picking up my phone without even thinking about it. It's just like this action, this very addictive action, right? And so I get it, especially for a young brain. It's very addictive, and then we're sending them to possibly the most boring place on Earth, you know, in school, and so, and they're like, school, or this? Oh, okay, that's an easy, this is entertaining. School is like doldrums of boredom.

**Speaker 4** [00:16:16] Mm-hmm.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:16] Um You want to have that conversation that is designed to get them to self-regulate and to have the awareness that they're being manipulated. I used to come out, it's funny I'm wearing a logo shirt today. So I used to come ready for school and I'd be wearing some shirt. you know, because it's hard to some shirt, some shirt that had that was popular OP or something like that or Nike or whatever it was in the 80s. And I saw it or something, right? The rise of the alligator. They're coming back, you know. I saw I'd come out and my dad would be like, they paying you. And it was just that little moment of metacognition. That's all it was. It wasn't it was like a joke. He didn't it wasn't judge. He wasn't anything was just kind of a question. And it caused me to be aware of, oh, they pay me because I'm wearing the shirt, I'm advertising for them. Interesting, you know, that's interesting.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:27] Just a moment of pause.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:28] Yes, it's just like a moment of pause a moment It when you create those moments of pause you create the the inside that pause

**Speaker 4** [00:17:37] Okay.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:38] You can put awareness, you can put thought, you can metacognition, just that meta, thought on thought. And so if you just do things to create that moment of pause, like, wow, how many people right now are getting paid, how much money to manipulate your brain to keep that phone scrolling? Right. I mean, just those are astronomical numbers. If you think about how many are getting paid how much just to get you to keep scrolling. It's a lot of money, and it's a lotta people, and it has a lotta effort, and little ol' you on the other side of that phone is getting manipulated by all of that. Right. And who wants to be a part of that? Who wants to the article of focus of that manipulation? I don't think, I mean, maybe I'm wrong, but for me, that's almost repulsive to me. Like, I have a repulsion to that. It makes me feel kind of like icky I don't know if other people feel that way, but if you can get that ick feeling, then the self-regulation will happen because you'll get that ick feeling.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:00] Right, and so you'll choose to not be the agent of others, you'll be your own agent. You said at the very beginning you were joking, you said de-thinking, right? And I guess what I would think about with that is you're thinking about things, but you're think about things that people want you to think about when you're on that, when you are involved in the, what you call it, doom scrolling and all those things. So when you say de- thinking, what did you mean by that?

**Speaker 1** [00:19:29] Well, it's just very passive, right? I mean, it just, you're just, it's all stuff coming at you. It's very passive.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:41] It's designed to be.

**Speaker 1** [00:19:41] It's design, it's not really designed to do, you're not doing a lot of thinking. Right. It's kind of, it filling the space so that you don't have to do much thinking. It makes it so that rather than just sitting with your thoughts, you are sitting with stimulus.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:00] I don't have to do anything about it.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:01] I mean, there was a study that I just read, just came out that said like the more toys kids have, the less they play.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:09] Oh, yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:10] And I think that's very similar to de-thinking. It's like the more stimulus you have, the less you're gonna think. The more information that's coming at you passively, the less, you need to think because you have something to entertain you. You know, when we were kids. Long time ago. I mean, we were just bored out of our minds. There was nothing to do. So we were always figuring out new ways to make things interesting. We would make basketball nets out of grocery carts and things like that. That's right.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:40] Kick the can down the road.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:41] kick the cam down the road and we would just invent games.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:45] Remember mud pies? Well, girls used to make mud pies.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:49] I don't.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:49] We used to make, we used to make bakeries out of dirt, mud. Like we'd make different things and pretend we're in it.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:55] Like a kitchen or something like that.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:57] Yeah, something girls did. We made like things out of mud.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:02] We used to throw cow patties. I never touched a cow patty. It was like a mud pie.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:09] That's a boy thing.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:13] But that's what I mean, when you have less toys, you do more play.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:17] Cause you're more

**Speaker 1** [00:21:19] Because yeah, you're more generative. You're more, you have to interact with the world, right? So in a sense, this is deep. Now, I don't want to say that this thing is all bad. That's not the point. And I don' think that's the point we want to make with our kids. Cause we don't, you know, I think the idea is you use it, don't let it use you. That's the critical metacognitive sort of distinction that we have to make is. Yes, this is a powerful tool. It's got the world at your fingertips. It's amazing. It makes it so that you can travel and work and do all these other things, right? And it makes it, so you can find out things really fast and order things and all kinds of, and it's entertaining. And all of that is wonderful if you're using it. Yes. When it becomes un-wonderful is when it's using you. And that's the critical distinction that we want to make ourselves, but we also want our young people to make, is like, don't be a tool, literally. Don't be A tool.

**Speaker 4** [00:22:26] It's not a good thing.

**Speaker 1** [00:22:27] Never be a tool, right? Use tools, but don't become a tool. It's a simple idea. It's not easy to do. It involves, you're not going to have one conversation. You're going to a conversation every week, every couple of times a week maybe. But I probably wouldn't, you know, I would avoid making it judgy, avoid making a- Confrontational. confrontational, just make it conversational, make it like isn't this interesting that so many people have assembled so many talents and so many resources just to mess around with the the neurochemistry of your brain to get it so that you will go like this. Right, over and over and over and over and

**Speaker 2** [00:23:16] But the conversation should happen fairly frequently and in the moment, because that's how that person is going to develop that awareness. They're going to learn it in that moment. Oh, I have been sitting here for two hours. I didn't realize that. Now I need to be reflective of that. And I'll think about why. Like, what was it that caused me to sit here when I didn't actually intend to sit there? I had other plans or whatever. So I think that's good.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:41] Yeah, like if you're sitting and let's say you're hanging out together and it's this this you this like autonomic pick up, right? There's this automaticity, right. Just say, Hey, you know, were you aware that you just did that?

**Speaker 2** [00:23:58] Isn't there a thing on your phone that it'll tell you how many times you've picked up your phone in a day? I'm sure there is, yeah. Or something like that?

**Speaker 1** [00:24:04] But it's just that, right? It's like, have the awareness that you're picking it up. Because I notice, myself, I study metacognition and I pick it up and then I'm like, why am I doing that? I don't even know why I'm picking it out.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:25] Right, but that's the moment we want to build for people, that why am I doing this?

**Speaker 1** [00:24:29] Why am I doing that?

**Speaker 2** [00:24:30] I just did something, I'm paying attention to my own behavior, why, what caused me to do that? Because I didn't actually intend to do that, it just sort of happened subconsciously.

**Speaker 1** [00:24:38] I didn't do it for a reason. It's not like I'm answering my phone or like, oh, I need to look something up. I just did it out of like, I had a brief moment of nothingness and so I wanted to fill the nothingness. Right. And that automatic, that automaticity is the one we wanna try to have metacognition against.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:01] Well, one could argue that those moments of nothingness help us stay sane. Yes. Help us be more reflective, help us have a little bit of, I mean, there's so much stimulus in a daily life. Having those moments where your brain almost gets to take a breath. That's right. And pause and be clean and clear. I mean I think, I think that's why I, to be honest, I talk to people and everyone is overwhelmed, exhausted, overloaded. And I think it's because it's my theory. or my hypothesis, sorry, my hypothesis is that people are so stimulated so constantly and they're not aware of it that it's actually exhausting. It's mentally exhausting.

**Speaker 1** [00:25:41] Absolutely.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:42] But we're not we're, not thinking about it

**Speaker 1** [00:25:44] Well, us neurodiverse folks, we know this, right? This is why, like, for me, I need downtime in my day, or I will be insane by the end of the day. So I build downtime into my day in the same way that an atom, you know, an atom is mostly empty. The physical matter of the universe in an atom. Most of it is emptiness, right. Emptiness is important. And so if you don't build a little bit of emptiness, a little of breathing room into your day, I mean, that's why I wake up early in the morning to have breathing room in my day and get and kind of think about what's important and get some things done like working out and all that kind of stuff that's important. You know, you got to have that space in your day. If you're scheduling meetings back to back to back to

**Speaker 2** [00:26:38] It's crazy making. But what I'm saying is the meetings back to back to back to for a teenager are video to video to video to video to video to video to video. Like there's no space there.

**Speaker 1** [00:26:48] Or class to class to class to class to class to class. Yes. I mean, it's it's it's crazy making.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:54] Yeah, so we have to be more purposeful and more thoughtful about taking care of needing that ebb and that flow and being aware when we're autonomically doing things. Because like you said, there's people back there with clip bars trying to manipulate us to get us to pick it up every minute instead of every three minutes and things like that. So it's good. It's interesting. I think that might be a wrap.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:19] Okay.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:20] What do you think? Do you think it's a wrap?

**Speaker 1** [00:27:24] Like and subscribe, and then put your phone down.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:27] and do something else.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:28] and do something else. Go make get like a extra outside.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:33] Go outside, take a nap, hug your mother, do something else.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:39] That was like a mother, a shameless mother plug.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:42] I'm just saying, hug your mother. Your mother misses you throughout the whole time. What about your father? Hug your father and your mother

**Speaker 3** [00:27:49] Okay, hug your mother.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:50] hug people you love.

**Speaker 3** [00:27:51] Yeah, hug somebody.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:52] Alright, now we should probably wrap.