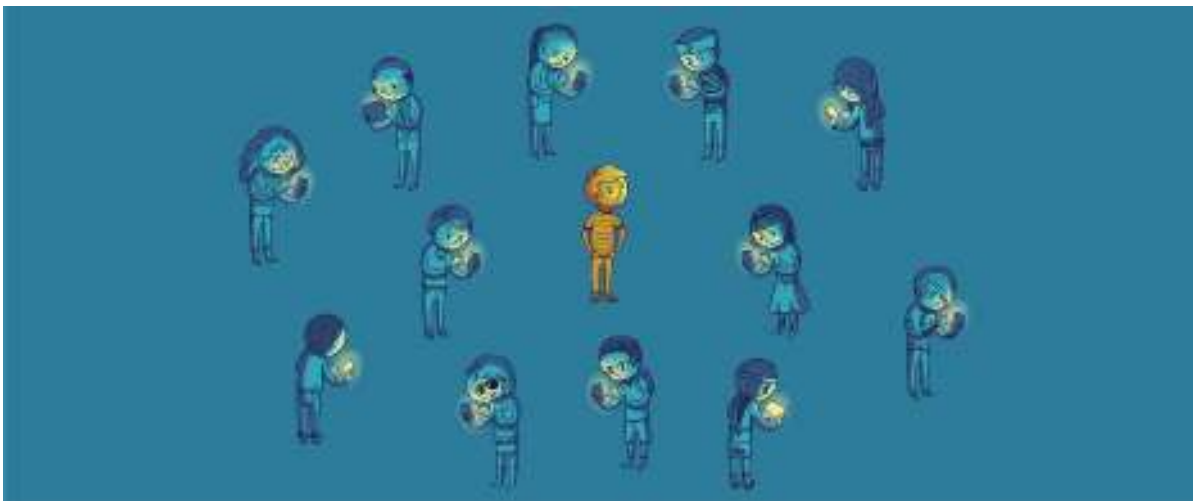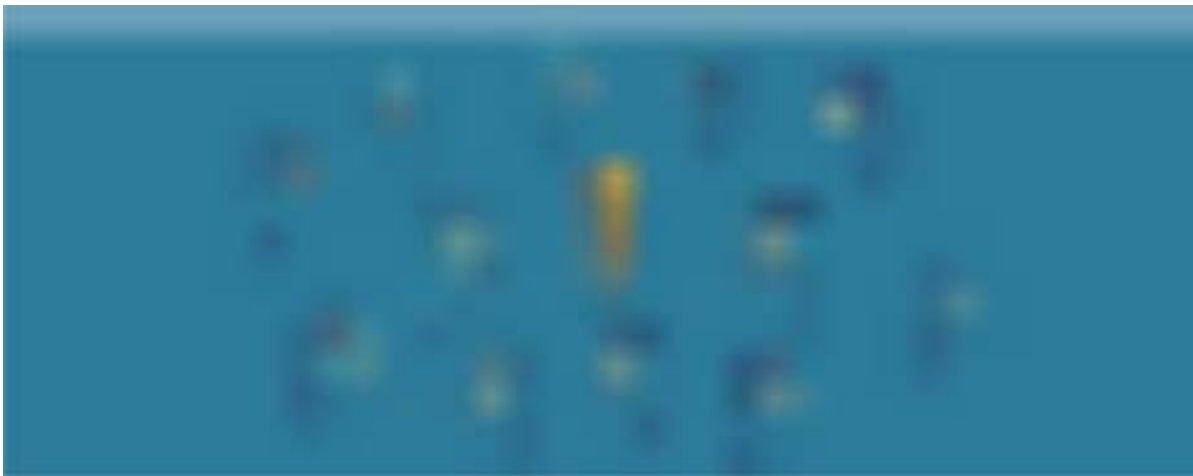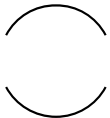medium.com

Our Kids Are Losing Their Empathy & Technology Has A Lot to Do With It

Alon Shwartz

4-5 minutes

We have a crisis of empathy in America.

It was shocking for me to discover that our kids are growing up to be far less caring and compassionate that any previous generation. And while you can't place the blame entirely on technology, it's undeniably a major factor in American society's documented decline in empathy.

How did we get here? How can we fix it?

Dr. Michele Borba offers some critical insights and answers in her remarkable new book, *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*. I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Borba last week for the upcoming unGlue podcast launching soon.

Among the compelling evidence that she presents is University of Michigan research that suggests today's college students are 40 percent less empathetic compared to their peers 30 years ago. Meanwhile, the level of narcissism has increased by 58 percent. An educational psychologist and parenting expert, Borba sees these damning trends in the rise of bullying in schools and the massive popularity of the selfie, among other cultural phenomena.

I asked her how much of this can be traced to children and young adults becoming hooked on smartphones and other forms of screen time. Her answer won't come as a shock to many parents and certainly not to users of unGlue.

"*Our children became very plugged in around the year 2000,*" Borda told me during our podcast interview. "*It's very hard to be empathetic and feel for another human being if you can't read another person's emotions. You don't learn emotional literacy facing a screen. You don't learn emotional literacy with emojis.*"

Besides the effects of pervasive, addictive technology, Borda talked about other trends driving the Selfie Syndrome, including:

- The rise of celebrity culture

- Hyper-competitive parenting

- Overemphasis on testing in schools

- An increasingly materialistic ethos

- The disappearance of playtime

How can parents encourage more empathy? When it comes to technology, parents should be setting the right boundaries, teaching kids how to self-regulate their online habits, and talking to them about being good digital citizens.

Find ways to get kids off their gadgets and have real-life human interaction. Instead of emailing or texting a friend or a relative, how about jumping on Skype or, even better, making an actual phone call or chatting in person?

"*Kids are so used to looking down, instead of looking up,*" Borba said. "*You don't learn empathy and face-to-face connection if you're looking down and texting.*"

Why is empathy so important? Well, for one, it's the right thing to do. We should all be more caring and compassionate to our fellow human beings. Also, kids who are more empathetic are shown to be happier and have less conflict in their lives.

In fact, Borba and other experts say empathy may be the single most important skill for young adults to learn to thrive and get ahead in the 21st century.

Thankfully, human beings seem hardwired for empathy. It's a trait

that sets us apart from animals and it's one that can be nurtured in children and young adults. That's where parenting can be hugely rewarding, and, yes, exhausting at times. It takes a ton of work to raise good kids who care about other people.

Just as there's no shortcut for parenting, there's no quick solution for building up empathy. It takes a lot of conversation and role modeling and working on emotional skills. It takes commitment and intention. I would suggest that finding a good balance with technology and screen time is great place to start, we've built unGlue for exactly this purpose.

To learn more about *UnSelfie* and what people are saying about this book, click here.

By Alon Shwartz,
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http://www.unGlue.com
unGlue is the world's first collaborative technology that empowers people to manage their digital distraction and screen "addiction"