

OCTOBER – SCOUTING and SCREEN TIME

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BRYAN: From the BSA National Service Center in Texas to your ears, this is the October ScoutCast. I'm Bryan on Scouting blogger Bryan Wendell, alongside as always Lee Shaw, Team Lead of National Alliances. So, Lee, let's not keep our listeners in suspense any longer. Can you tell us what's on tap for this month?

LEE: We have a fascinating new book that came out a few months ago called *Saving Our Sons: A New Path for Raising Healthy and Resilient Boys*. This book features the latest research of how too much screen time with electronics and video games can affect male emotional intelligence, male motivation development, and the male brain. And I gotta tell you, as a father of two, I'm very interested in this important information.

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BRYAN: It's very modern topic that a lot of parents are probably interested in hearing about. So, we're going to be talking with the *New York Times* bestselling author of that book, Dr. Michael Gurian, Now, the Gurian Institute, which Michael co-founded, conducts research internationally, launches pilot programs, and trains professionals. A number of Dr. Gurian's books have sparked national debate, including *The Wonder of Boys*, *The Wonder of Girls*, and *Boys and Girls Learn Differently*. His work has been featured in professional journals and major media including the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time Magazine*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *CNN*, *PBS*, *NPR*. He has been everywhere. He has been called the "people's philosopher" for his ability to bring together

scientific principles in people's everyday lives, so it's a real treat to have you. Welcome to the ScoutCast, Dr. Gurian.

MICHAEL: Thank you so much – I'm honored.

BRYAN: All right. Well, Dr. Gurian, I'll start out with this. You break down gender into three parts – nature, nurture and culture – so can you give us a brief explanation of each one of those?

MICHAEL: Nature is X-Y chromosome, the chromosome markers, the genetics, which is what forms us into male and female, Then, nurture is how parents and educators and Scout leaders and everybody nurtures that nature. Culture is the third and it gives us signals about how our culture is going to raise boy and girls or our culture is not going to raise boys and girls and groups – schools, Scouting – they form their own cultures and send signals to nurture and nature.

LEE: So, do we tend to overemphasize any of those three?

MICHAEL: We tend to overemphasize culture and we underemphasize nature, and we just have to bring it in balance.

LEE: One of the things I really appreciate about you and your work with the Gurian Institute is that you're always on top of the latest trends and, sadly, one of the trends right now is too much screen time. Is this constant exposure to the iPads and the Xboxes having an effect on a boy's development?

MICHAEL: Absolutely. This is a brain issue we have to deal with. It's neurotoxic. Now, I like technology, but the problem is twofold; screen time is the issue, right? That's the baseline issue. It's also the video games, which are very

stimulating for the male brain, the way it's set up, however, they create the false dopamine rush. And part of how we develop the pathways is that the dopamine squirts through constantly and it develops pathways, like, "oh, that rewards me; I'm going to develop that pathway." But, at the same time, the brain is pruning away cells that it doesn't use. So, instead of the boy, let's say, riding his bike for that hour, which is multi-sensorial, multi-tactile, or going on a camping trip, and building things which is multi-sensorial, kinesthetic tactile, which is going to build much more of his brain, he sits in front of a screen and he plays this game, and every time he moves to another level the dopamine squirts through and says, "Look, I accomplished something." But he didn't accomplish anything and he's only building this one part of the brain. So, what we have to do is take control of it, like no video games on a school night; save it for the weekend, People think, well, if we get them on these screens early – computer, cell phones, iPads, etc. – they are going to go become Bill Gates. They're going to become really successful. The data shows that you can take a child who came from no technology at 12 and a child who started technology at one or two, and you can teach the one who had no technology at 12, and within two to three months he or she has caught up to the other; more important would be to protect them while those brains are young.

BRYAN: So, what other rules would you put on technology use at home?

MICHAEL: Well, like, for an hour before bed, no technology near where the kids are, because it's so negatively affecting sleep. They just look at that screen one time and then it messes with the sleep cycles. There is a good rule of thumb, until the kid is mid to late adolescence and is being pretty independent, all that technology should be in the house. Parents will say, "Well, but he wants to use the iPad and the laptop for his work," etc. They should feel free to look up through the search engines and browsers. I'm a

great believer that the parents own everything, so, until the kid is fully independent. If parents are worried at all, the kids isolating, spending time with that device in the room, just check everything and see where he's going, and just let him know that you don't have an inherent right to privacy if we're worried about you.

And then a basic rule would be and there's no tip for this because it's developmental, but develop a grid where this is the amount of technology for a one-year-old brain, this the amount for two, three, four, five, six, all the way through, and talking as a family, develop the grid and then stick to the grid. Whatever you all have decided, stick to it even if the kids complain, because I say this from personal experience, they will complain and then a month or two later they are outside more, they're in nature more, they're riding bikes more, they're having more fun with their friends and all that. And about two months later, this kind of mild depression that these screen-addicted kids get, that mild depression lifts and their lives change, so we just have to battle it for two or three months.

LEE: So, speaking of one of the battles we face in Scouting right now is embracing technology on camping trips, because there ways that it can enhance a camping trip, like if you have a GPS-enabled device, for example, you can find your way when you're hiking but is there a risk of integrating technology into such a heavy outdoors activity like camping or hiking?

MICHAEL: I've been asked this a lot by Scout leaders over the last probably 15 years and I have to say that my answer 15 years was a little different than now. Fifteen years ago, I was like, yeah, great. We want these boys to be in Scouting and if, devices help with that for them to love Scouting, great, right? That may still be correct. But now we've got 15 more years of this data and the fact that these kids are doing iPad and laptop at school, they're doing, four to five hours of it there at school and/or their homework. So, it's certainly not bad for Scouting to embrace technology, it's good, but...

LEE: Because they do indeed benefit from the time away from the screens, and spending the times outdoors too. The “nature” part of your research is seeing that, right?

MICHAEL: The brain does not need a screen. It has never needed a screen. The brain needs nature. It has always needed nature. That’s where it comes from. So absolutely, if we think of it that way, our priority should be give the brain nature and it’s going to do its naturally templated brain development. Certainly, screens are fine but the brain doesn’t need the screen.

BRYAN: So, Dr. Gurian, I wanted to close with asking you to give me a real-life example of someone that you’ve worked with who maybe because his parents did the right thing, some of the things you recommend in your book and at the Gurian Institute, they were able to kind of pull him back from the brink and, raise a healthy young man.

MICHAEL: He was 10 when they came in to see me, and he had his cell phone. He would keep playing with the cell phone. You could just see how connected he was to the technology but he was having some mild depression and he was falling behind in school. So, I kind of laid out with them the three primary markers for studying this, which any parent can use: physical, cognitive, social-emotional. So, how is he doing? Cognitively, he’s having trouble in school, so he’s not achieving at the level he should be. How is he physical? He’s 10. He ought to be two to three hours a day moving around somewhere. No, he’s sitting around a lot. Okay, so that’s two, and then social-emotional. Well, when he related to his mom, he was ordering her around. So, I just said to her, “Okay, based on what you’ve said, it really seems like you’ve got to totally change

the way you do technology.” So, the family got involved and they took the cell phone away and they cut back on screen time. This kid was really angry at everybody, but a month down the line, the grades started going up, he was getting much more physical exercise which made him healthier, and And a couple months later it’s that feeling that the kid himself has where he now, goes, “Oh, yeah. I wasn’t feeling very good a few months ago but I really didn’t know I wasn’t feeling very good,” because the technology is constantly stimulating you so you don’t realize you’re kind of mildly depressed. Six months later when we did a check-in, he was in it. (*Snaps fingers.*) He was moving around, he was making friends, he wasn’t ordering his parents around so I think that’s an example of a success story that takes time.

LEE: I’m sure the parents would say it was worth making that drastic move.

MICHAEL: Yep, absolutely.

BRYAN: That’s terrific. So, ok. Can you tell us about boys and motivation? Because that’s something that is currently a hot issue and that you’ve written about.

MICHAEL: We’ve got a number of elements going on over a 50-year period. We’ve kind of pulled things away from what naturally motivates boys, like we’ve cut competition out of schools but competition naturally motivate boys. It stimulates testosterone, dopamine, etc., which motivates them. Parts of the brain, get stimulated by the competition and if they don’t have the competition males are less likely to self-motivate. So, there’s a lot of brain stuff involved here and we’ve just gradually cut these things away and we need to bring them back. Under-motivated males need two or three older guys to be motivating them so mentors motivate. But another hidden thing we don’t realize about motivation in this generation is the testosterone depletion. So, the estrogen receptors in the food, etc., it’s depleting the amount of testosterone in cells, and testosterone is our motivation

chemical. This issue of motivation, I treat it as a mild form of depression, this under-motivation of our males, and it would fit under that category. It's a mild form of depression and in *Saving Our Sons* I call it "male anhedonia" where they're just a little bit depressed but it's not depressed enough to be called clinical depression. So, if parents are seeing under-motivated boys, get on it as soon as possible because it's, since it's a mild form of depression, if you're that way for a few years depression rewires the brain, so we want to get on that fast.

LEE: That's great. But now with virtual reality they're entering a completely different world. Some might say that's just as good as the real world because they're experiencing some of the same things that they could see in the real world. So, I'm thinking it's not the same as actually getting out there in nature. Does your research back that up?

MICHAEL: Absolutely. That is correct. Virtual reality can be wonderful, sure, but we have to be moderate about it and remember that the brain doesn't need it. But the brain does need nature, so the brain needs reality and virtual reality isn't – it's an entertainment. It stimulates parts of imagination, which are really valuable, they can do building in virtual reality and, even pilot an airplane in virtual reality. Those are all really neat things, they're really good, but it has to be moderate. It cannot replace social-emotionals. It cannot replace sitting with someone and talking with someone or walking and talking with someone. Ride a bike versus, versus anything that's virtual reality or technology oriented, and see how much more of the brain has to get used to ride the bike because the bike is five senses, right, and virtual reality is not.

BRYAN: Dr. Gurian, thank you so much for lending us some of your wisdom and wit. [Saving Our Sons](#) is the new book, and listeners can get it at michaelgurian.com and find out more about Dr. Gurian. We really appreciate this discussion on ScoutCast.

MICHAEL: Thanks for having me.

LEE: Stay tuned. We'll be back with Reminders and Tips, right after this brief Safety Moment.

(Safety Moment – First Aid Kits)

LEE: Now for Reminders and Tips. Let's start with Council Roundtables. Check with your local Scouting professional, the Council Service Center or website, or the Scout calendar to locate meeting sites and times.

BRYAN: There's really no better way to have a great unit than to experience the idea sharing that goes on at those meetings. And here's a question you should be asking yourselves: Are your committee positions filled? If not, check out the September 2016 ScoutCast for everything you need to know about the troop committee, including ways to fill those positions that aren't filled.

LEE: Just to review, you should have a committee chair, secretary/treasurer, advancement chair, outdoor chair, membership chair and a finance or fundraising chair. The committee chair is responsible for filling all the slots, but leaders can help out by remaining on the lookout for good candidates at their work, church, neighborhood, or even the gym.

BRYAN: Now, you might be saying to yourself, "I have no idea who qualifies as an advancement chair." Well, guess what? There's a ScoutCast for that, too. So, go download the July ScoutCast to find out just how easy it is to identify and cultivate those non-unit volunteers. Also, make sure all new

leaders complete their Boy Scout Leader Specific Training and of course Youth Protection Training.

LEE: Be sure to check out this month's *Boys' Life* Magazine to read about how a Texas Scout troop has made a Palo Duro Canyon their own. And check out an Arrow of Light camporee in Alabama, where Webelos Scouts participate under the direction of Boy Scouts.

BRYAN: Those are great articles, and speaking of great articles, in the September-October issue of *Scouting* Magazine, you can get details on how to put together the perfect campfire program. Campfires, Lee, of course, the greatest way I can think of to end your Scouting day. Everybody is sitting around the campfires during skits and stories, and we've got information on how to make that really great in that issue of *Scouting* Magazine.

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BRYAN: That's it for us with the October ScoutCast. We want to thank our guest, Dr. Michael Gurian.

LEE: And thank you for listening. Are there topics we should be discussing? Don't be shy. Just send us an email to Scout Don't be shy. Just send us an email to Scoutcast@Scouting.org, or tweet to @ BS – or tweet to @ BSAScoutCast. We read them, I promise! With that, I'm Lee Shaw.

BRYAN: And I'm Bryan Wendell. We look forward to hearing from you.

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