

Let's go
**SCREEN
FREE**

How to Swap
Screen Time
for a Richer
Home Life



A family's guide to transitioning away from screens
and discovering deeper connection



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In our hyper-connected world, screens have become the default solution for entertainment, education, and even comfort. But what if there was a way to reclaim your family time and create richer, more meaningful experiences together? Many families are discovering that stepping back from screens — even temporarily — can transform their home life in surprising and wonderful ways.

Have you been wondering whether your family might benefit from less screen time? Transitioning to a more screen-conscious lifestyle doesn't have to be overwhelming. With the right approach, preparation, and mindset, you can create positive change that brings your family closer together.



≡ Motivate Yourself with Knowledge ≡

Before diving into any major family change, it helps to understand why you're making the shift. The research on children and screen-use provides compelling motivation for families considering this journey.

What the Studies Tell Us

Recent studies reveal concerning patterns about excessive screen use in children. A 2020 article by the American College of Pediatricians titled **"Media Use and Screen Time - Its Impact on Children, Adolescents, and Families"** reveals some sobering statistics around this. Research shows that high levels of screen time are associated with attention difficulties, sleep disruption, and decreased physical activity. Children who spend more than two hours daily on recreational screen time often show lower scores on language and thinking tests.

Perhaps more importantly, studies consistently demonstrate what truly nurtures developing brains: face-to-face interaction, unstructured play, time in nature, creative activities, and meaningful conversations with caring adults. These activities build neural pathways that screens simply cannot replicate.

Real Families, Real Results

Families who have experimented with screen-free periods often report remarkable changes. Parents describe children who become more creative, play more independently, engage in deeper conversations, and show improved sleep patterns. Siblings who previously fought over screen time begin collaborating on imaginative games. Families discover they actually enjoy each other's company more when they're not competing with digital distractions.

"Sparkle Stories cultivated imagination for our kids and inspired our parenting. It was an obvious alternative to screens and one that was so rich."

- Amber



Plan for the Experiment

Think of your screen reduction as an experiment rather than a permanent lifestyle overhaul. This mindset reduces pressure and allows your family to explore what works best for you.

You can also roll this out in a tiered way. Try setting a day each week (or an hour each day) to ease into the rhythm as a family. Maybe even starting with lowering to an hour each day for week 1, then an hour every other day for week 2, then reserve Saturdays for screen day only, etc. Together, you can experiment to figure out what will work best for you and your family.

Define Your Intention

Start by asking yourself: What do you want more of in your family life? More connection? More creativity? More outdoor time? More meaningful conversations? Having a clear intention will guide your decisions and help you stay motivated when challenges arise.

Common family intentions include:

- Deeper connections between family members
- More creative and imaginative play
- Increased physical activity and outdoor time
- Better sleep routines
- More face-to-face conversations
- Reduced conflict over screen time

Choose Your Timeline

Decide on a specific timeframe for your experiment. Some families start with a weekend, others try a full week, and some ambitious families commit to a month. Choose what feels challenging but achievable for your family's current situation.

Evaluate Current Screen Use

Take an honest inventory of where screens appear in your daily routine. Consider:

- Morning routines
- After-school wind-down time
- Dinner and family time
- Car rides
- Weekend activities
- Bedtime routines



Plan Your Replacements

The key to successful screen reduction is having engaging alternatives ready. Check out this article that suggests **77 Things to Do Instead of Screens!** Then together as a family, start brainstorming activities for different times of day and energy levels.

High-energy options: Dance parties, obstacle courses, nature walks, bike rides, playground visits

Quiet-time options: Puzzles, coloring, audiobooks, building with blocks, board games

Creative activities: Art supplies, dress-up clothes, musical instruments, craft projects, cooking together

Outdoor adventures: Scavenger hunts, gardening, sidewalk chalk, water play, ball games

Travel activities: Finger puppets, picture books, magnetic board with magnets (letters, numbers, or pictures), a travel lap desk, colored pencils and coloring books, or make your own art box. You can check out the Sparkle Stories blog post on **Tips for Screen Free Travel with Kids** here.

Hold a Family Meeting

If your children are old enough to have an opinion about screen time, they're old enough to include in the planning process. Explain that you want to try something new as a family to have more fun together. Ask for their ideas and suggestions. When children feel heard and involved, they're much more likely to participate willingly.

Try saying something like: "We want to try something new as a family. We'd like to have more time for playing together, being creative, and having adventures. What kinds of things would you like to do more of?"

Create a Family Agreement

Work together to create a visual reminder of your family's screen-free experiment. Post it somewhere everyone can see it. Include your family's intentions, the timeline, and some of the activities you're excited to try.

Plan Your Tracking Method

Decide how you'll document your experience. Some families take daily photos, others keep a simple journal, and some create a chart to track mood and activities. Having a way to notice changes will help you appreciate progress and make adjustments.



Launch Your Screen-Free Adventure

Take a Before Picture

Capture a photo of your family before you begin. This photo will document the beginning of your exciting journey!

Jump In with Flexibility

Begin your screen-free period with enthusiasm, but stay flexible. If something isn't working, pivot to a different activity or approach. The goal is connection and joy, not perfection.



Embrace the Adjustment Period

Expect some resistance, boredom, and complaints — this is completely normal! Children (and adults) may feel unsettled when their usual routines change. Boredom is actually valuable; it's often the precursor to creativity and independent thinking. There is science to support the idea that "boredom is good." What do these studies show?

Boredom inspires creative thinking. It can lead to daydreaming in which your mind is free to make new connections. Boredom is good for mental health. Most of us live lives of constant stimulation, which can be true for kids as well. Unplugging and allowing ourselves to be bored can be restful for the mind.

It helps to hold the belief that "boredom is good" — and then find some clear ways to respond to your children and yourself, such as:

- *"Yes, you feel bored! I can see that. I can see it's making you feel all wiggly and squiggly."*
- *"You'll find something. Keep exploring."*
- *"Wonderful! I have so many ways you can help today! Plop down right here and let's fold laundry together."*

Prepare for Challenging Moments

Have strategies ready for difficult moments:

- Take deep breaths together when tensions rise
- Suggest a change of scenery (go outside, move to a different room)
- Use physical activity to help everyone reset
- Remember that adjustment takes time
- Consider the pros and cons of creating a reward system
- Using audio stories
- Play music and have a dance party
- Create an area in your house that's a fun zone with lots of fun activities and games for the family to engage in together
- Go out for ice cream (or another treat) as a family



Celebrate the Wins

Notice and celebrate positive moments! Did your children play together peacefully? Did someone try a new creative activity? Did your family have a meaningful conversation? Acknowledging these wins helps everyone appreciate the benefits of your experiment.

Document the Journey

Take an "after" picture at the end of your experiment. You might be surprised by the differences you notice — more smiles, more eye contact, or simply a sense of presence that wasn't there before.

Regroup and Integrate

Hold a Family Reflection Meeting

Gather everyone together to discuss the experience. Ask open-ended questions:

- What did you enjoy most about our screen-free time?
- What was challenging?
- What activities do you want to keep doing?
- How did you feel different during this time?
- What did you miss about screens?
- What surprised you?



Make Sustainable Changes

Based on your family's feedback, decide what elements you want to keep as permanent changes. Maybe you discovered that screen-free mornings work well, or that Sunday afternoons are perfect for family adventures. Perhaps you found that limiting screens during dinner creates better conversation.

The goal isn't to eliminate all screens forever (unless that's what your family chooses), but to be more intentional about when and how you use them.

Consider Ongoing Experiments

Many families find that regular screen-free periods become a treasured tradition. Some do screen-free Sundays, others take a week off screens every few months, and some create daily screen-free zones around meals and bedtime.

Your Family's Unique Journey

Remember that every family is different. What works beautifully for one family might not suit another, and that's perfectly okay. The value lies in the experiment itself — in taking time to notice how your family functions, what brings you joy, and what kind of home environment you want to create.

By swapping screen time for intentional family time, you're not just changing what your family does — you're discovering more of who you are together. And that discovery might just be the beginning of a beautiful transformation in your home.

Ready to start your own family experiment?

Remember: start small, stay flexible, and focus on connection over perfection. Your family's screen-free adventure awaits!





Now for the most official part of our journey: the Sparkle Stories Family Screen-Free Contract!

This is a super special, pinky-promise-level agreement between you and your kids to cheer each other on and keep everyone accountable as you explore a screen-free world full of stories, imagination, and adventure. Grab your favorite pen (or crayons — we don't judge), sign your names, and make it official. You've got each other to stay on track — and the magic starts the moment you do!

≡ Family Screen-Free Contract ≡

I understand that the rules below are for my safety and that my parents love me more than anyone in the world. I understand that my parents want to give me freedom while also giving me enough security to make smart choices. Initial here: _____

I promise that my parents will always know my phone and computer passwords. I understand that my parents have a right to look at my phone and computer whenever there's a need for them to do so, even without my permission. Initial here: _____

I will hand the phone to one of my parents or put it on the cell phone charging spot by _____ pm every school night and every weekend night by _____ pm. I will get it back after breakfast the following morning. Initial here: _____

My cell phone is primarily a tool for use out in the world to communicate with my family, as well as with my friends. At home, I will use my cell phone in public spaces only. My cell phone will not be used in my bedroom. Initial here: _____

My computer is primarily a tool for use on schoolwork or other educational projects. At home, I will use my computer in public spaces only. My computer will not be used in my bedroom. Initial here: _____

I understand that my behavior on my phone and computer can impact my future reputation, even in ways that I am not able to predict or see. Initial here: _____

I promise I will tell my parents when I receive suspicious or alarming phone calls, text messages, or emails from people I don't know. I will also tell my parents if I am being harassed by someone through my cell phone. Initial here: _____

I will make an effort to learn phone and internet etiquette. I understand this is an extension of normal manners. I will turn off, silence, and put my phone away in public. I will be sure to do this in restaurants, at the movies, or while speaking with another human being. I am not a rude person. I will not allow the phone to change this important part of who I am. Initial here: _____

I will never use my phone, computer, or social media to bully or tease anyone, even if my friends think it's funny.
Initial here: _____

I will not lie about where I have been or how I am using the phone or computer. I promise to answer questions openly, honestly, and directly.
Initial here: _____

If these rules are not followed, I understand that my cell phone privileges and/or computer will be revoked and I may lose use of my phone and/or computer for a period of time to be determined by my parents.
Initial here: _____

Addendum for Teens

I will never search for pornography or anything else that I wouldn't want my grandparents finding.
Initial here: _____

I will not send or receive naked photos. Ever. I understand that there could be serious legal consequences that could put my and my parents' future at risk.
Initial here: _____

When I am old enough, I won't text and drive. I understand it's very dangerous and pretty stupid.
Initial here: _____

(parents)

(child)

(date)