

12 tips for reducing your child's screen time

Screen time is just a fact of life these days. But most of us have days when we've struggled to tear our children away from their screens.

Tip 1: "It won't happen overnight, but it will happen"

The first thing you need to know when you want to "wean" your kids off their devices is that it can take a little patience.

Try to think of it like potty training – it takes time, ups and downs, team work, a sense of humour and lots of encouragement.

Tip 2: Keep them busy

If you've ever lost your phone, you'll know how strange it feels to suddenly be without it. Your child will be feeling the same thing when they're going from screen-life to real life.

The key is to distract, distract, distract. You need to swap out their device for something that's fun. Luckily, what kids love the most is spending time with you.

Tip 3: Put your phone away too

One of the best things to do is to lead by example. You're the main influence in your child's life, so if you put your phone away they might too.

You might be surprised at how nice it is to spend time together when you're not both scrolling through your phones all night!

Tip 4: Mix up their routines

If your kids are glued to the screen, a good idea to "wean" them off is to do fun things that take them completely away from their devices – like [running around at the park](#) or going on a treasure hunt to find everything in your neighbourhood that starts with "R".

If it's [raining outside](#), you can do things like asking if they can write a comic strip about their best day ever.

Tip 5: Keep them busy before dinner

Sometimes kids are on the screens because we need to get on with things around the house. A sneaky trick to kill two birds with one stone is to do things like getting them to help you put the dinner on.

Tip 6: Make meal times device-free zones

If you get a chance during the week, try to have a [meal together](#). It doesn't have to be a big deal – even a bowl of cereal or a sandwich is enough! Make your meals device-free zones and talk with each other about your day.

Ask questions such as: What did you learn about in Maths today? Who is the kindest person in your class? What games did you play at lunchtime? If you could have a special power, what power would you have?

Tip 7: Swap the iPad for a Play Bag

One way to keep them busy and happy when you're out and about is to swap out the iPad with a "special bag" of fun things they can play with. It might be stickers, paper, pens, small cars, Lego people, or card games for older kids. You can get them to help you choose what goes in it so it includes some of their favourite toys.

Tip 8: Make bedtime story time

Snuggling up to read a book together at night helps get them into a routine and gives you both some time to unwind.

It's a good idea to keep devices out of their room at night – it will only keep them awake and make them grumpy the next day.

Tip 9: Make family time fun

Put your tech away and have a family games night playing games such as 'Who am I?', 'Two truths and a lie' or 'animal alphabet'. These games are free and can create hours of fun and smiles!

The more fun they have without their devices, the less they'll keep nagging at you for them.

Tip 10: Work out your disaster zones

Does your child get grumpy if their screen-time goes on too long? Does their behaviour get better without screen time? Sometimes it is beneficial to see if you can just cut it out. You could not watch shows during the week, and they can catch-up at the weekend if they want to.

Tip 11: Set a countdown

1. One way to reduce the chances of your child going into monster mode when you take their device away is to set some family rules. That includes a time limit - e.g. 30 minutes.
2. Tell your kids how long they've had and count down until the time is up.
3. Try not to "give in" and let them spend longer. If they know that you won't budge in, eventually they'll stop kicking up a fuss.
4. Bonus tip: Focus on the activity that comes after the screentime so that your child isn't getting more and more wound up: e.g. 5 minutes until we're going to the park!

Tip 12: Keep your cool

We've all been there – they know their time is up, but they still have a strop when you try to take it away. It's okay to feel frustrated when that happens.

Sometimes it pays to take a big deep breath before you do anything. And try to look at it from their point of view, if someone came along and took your phone away, you might feel a bit grumpy too!

It's fine to give yourself 5 minutes for both of you to calm down a bit, and come back to it when you feel like you can deal with it.

When you feel calmer, let them know you understand they're upset. Give them a hug and move on to the next activity to distract them from "screen withdrawal".

