



PARENT WORKBOOK

The Screen Time Reset

A flexible 28-day guide to reducing excessive screen use and rebuilding family routines

Values first. Then the limits.

When screens have taken over, simply announcing a new rule can create conflict without changing the underlying pattern. This workbook helps you understand what screens provide, introduce one safe, workable change, and build a life with more room for sleep, friendship, creativity, movement and connection.

For parents and carers of school-aged children and teenagers. Use the pages that fit your family; you don't need to complete every box. Four weeks give you time to try small changes across school days and weekends. If a stage needs longer, stay with it. Progress is more important than the calendar.

Our reset started on

Fill it in on screen or on paper. Type straight into the boxes in a PDF reader such as Adobe Acrobat Reader or Preview, then save. Or print it and write by hand.

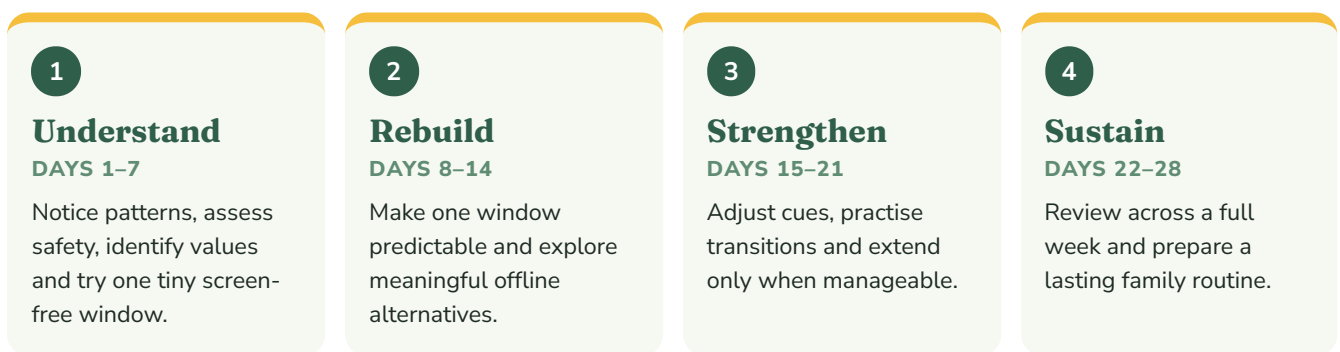
Important: If there are threats, physical violence, significant property damage, self-harm concerns or anyone feels unsafe, read *Safety first: choose your pathway* (page 3) before changing device access.

Your aim is steady progress, not a perfect month

- ✓ One predictable screen-free period that your family can maintain.
- ✓ More time spent in enjoyable, meaningful offline activities.
- ✓ Safer and more manageable transitions, including a plan for difficult moments.
- ✓ A realistic plan to keep progress going beyond Day 28.

Progress can look like a calmer transition, a shared screen-free meal, 20 minutes spent outdoors, better sleep, a new project or your child choosing an activity independently. A lower screen-time total is useful, but it isn't the only sign that your family is moving forward.

At a glance: your reset roadmap



How the reset works

Begin with one manageable change. Make the next offline activity easy to start, practise the routine regularly and recognise your child's effort.

Three boundaries for the adults

- 1 Protect safety before enforcing a device handover.
- 2 Protect necessary school, health, accessibility and safe social contact.
- 3 Avoid shame, criticism and negative labels, especially during an argument.

If your child is distressed or the new routine isn't working, stay on the same stage longer. The schedule is a guide, not a test.

Safety first: choose your pathway

Pathway A — Home reset may be appropriate

There may be complaints, bargaining or disappointment, but the child and family can remain safe. Try a small, predictable first step with adult support and review daily.

Pathway B — Get advice alongside or before a reset

Repeated severe meltdowns; threats; major school refusal; serious sleep or mood changes; continued inability to reduce gaming despite significant harm; or suspected neurodevelopmental, mental-health or safety difficulties warrant individual assessment. Start with your GP or an appropriately qualified clinician. Don't force a time-based reduction while serious risks remain unclear.

Pathway C — Immediate danger

If there are physical attacks, credible threats, weapons, serious property damage, self-harm threats or fear for safety: end the interaction, help others move to safety, don't wrestle for the device, and seek emergency assistance if needed. If safe access is the least dangerous option in the moment, defer the handover. This is a safety response, not permission to hurt anyone.

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Immediate danger

13 11 14

Lifeline, 24/7 crisis support

1800 55 1800

Kids Helpline, ages 5–25, 24/7

This workbook isn't crisis care. For urgent mental health support, contact local health services or the lines above.

My family's safety plan

Fill this in during a calm moment, ideally before you change anything. Keep it somewhere every adult in the house can find it.

Warning signs we recognise:

Where children and adults can go to stay safe:

Support person or service to contact:

What each adult will do if a transition becomes unsafe:

Understanding problematic use

Pay attention to the effect screen use is having on everyday life, including sleep, school, relationships and your child's ability to take part in other activities. Difficulties that are severe or persistent warrant professional advice.

What describes your situation?

- ☐ **Established habit:** lots of time, but reasonable capacity to change with support.
- ☐ **Problematic use:** clear interference with sleep, school, wellbeing or relationships; repeated conflict and limited ability to change.
- ☐ **Potential disorder or unsafe situation:** substantial impairment, persistent loss of control, threats or violence; seek assessment and an individual plan.

Check the pattern without diagnosing

Question	Yes	Unsure	No
Is sleep regularly being lost?	☐	☐	☐
Have friendships or interests narrowed considerably?	☐	☐	☐
Are school or daily responsibilities seriously affected?	☐	☐	☐
Are transitions repeatedly frightening or unsafe?	☐	☐	☐
Are there underlying distress, bullying, anxiety or isolation concerns?	☐	☐	☐

If several answers concern you, or the impact is severe, discuss a professional review. This is a conversation guide, not a validated screen or diagnostic tool.

Illustrative family example

An eleven-year-old spends around six hours a day gaming and streaming. **Week 1:** the family notices after-school transitions are hardest and trials 20 screen-free minutes after a snack. **Week 2:** the child tries basketball with a parent, then a friend. **Week 3:** the family extends the window where manageable and introduces device-free dinners. **Week 4:** they review sleep, conflict and daily routines before making a longer-term plan. This example illustrates one possible pathway, not a promised result.

Days 1–7: understand your starting point

This week, understand the pattern before trying to change everything. Notice what screens provide, protect safety and identify what you want more of in family life.

Days 1–2 Observe and record screen use.

Days 3–4 Listen to your child's perspective and identify what you want more of in family life.

Days 5–7 Agree on and trial one short screen-free period. Keep it manageable and change course if anyone's safety is at risk.

Observe two typical days where possible, including gaming, streaming, social apps and shows. Exclude required schoolwork from recreational totals, but notice how all device use fits around sleep and movement. During Days 3–7, discuss the change and gently practise a small daily window without recreational screens (even 10–20 minutes can be a starting point).

Day	Recreational hours	Hardest transition	Conflict 0–4	What got displaced?
Day 1				
Day 2				

Conflict scale

- 0** settled
- 1** brief complaint
- 2** prolonged argument
- 3** intense dysregulation
- 4** dangerous or threatening

At 4, stop enforcement and use the safety pathway on page 3.

What are screens doing for my child?

For some children, gaming or online activities provide genuine friendship, achievement, independence or a reliable way to unwind. Reducing access may feel like losing something important. Take these benefits seriously and work with your child to find ways to preserve them while restoring balance.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Friendship and belonging | ☐ Winning, progression and competence |
| ☐ Entertainment and novelty | ☐ Rest or decompression |
| ☐ Creativity and special interests | ☐ Predictability, sensory support or escape from stress |

My child most likely turns to screens for...

I suspect screens are crowding out...

Values first: what are we building?

Before you take away time, decide what you want to give more room to. Choose two or three priorities rather than attempting a complete family overhaul.

- ☐ Consistent sleep and calmer evenings
 - ☐ Friends and family connection
 - ☐ Schoolwork and household participation
 - ☐ Outdoor movement and skill-building
 - ☐ Creative or hands-on projects
 - ☐ Independence and tolerance for downtime

Our top three values

Start a conversation when everyone is calm

“Screens have taken up a lot of our free time, and we’re missing some other things we care about. I want us to make a manageable change, not take away everything you enjoy. Tell me what you most like about your screen time, and let’s plan what could work.”

Why these values matter to our family:

After the conversation

What my child wants me to understand:

What we agreed together:

Our one starting change:

When we will try it (Days 5–7):

Days 8–10: protect one screen-free period

Week 2 builds on the first small change from Week 1. Make one predictable screen-free period part of the routine, and prepare something your child might enjoy instead. Keep it achievable, especially if transitions have been difficult.

Choose the easiest meaningful window, not the toughest battle. For some families this is a screen-free meal, 15–20 minutes outdoors after a snack, or a protected bedtime transition. The sample times are options, not treatment doses.

- 1 Tell your child the plan ahead of time, in a calm moment.
- 2 Choose an agreed start and end time, preferably outside a multiplayer match or live social event.
- 3 Prepare the next activity and the environment before switching off.
- 4 Provide reminders as useful; for some children, visual timers or a written schedule help.
- 5 Praise specific effort, even if the transition was imperfect.

Our first window

Screen-free period from

to

On these days

Who will do what during the window:

Keep this stage as long as needed. Don't lengthen the period while transitions are unsafe or repeatedly overwhelming.

Planning the window

What happens just before screen-free time?

What enjoyable alternative will be ready?

How will we end the period and recognise success?

Notes after the first few tries:

Days 11–14: replace what screens provide

During the second half of Week 2, build on the screen-free period by finding activities that meet your child's real interests. An older child who games to connect with friends may need offline social opportunities, rather than an activity chosen only because it avoids a screen. Allow several attempts before deciding an alternative doesn't work.

Screens offer...	Try a realistic alternative
Competition / achievement	Sport, timed challenges, strategic board games, skill practice
Building / creativity	Lego engineering, model making, baking, music, making something useful
Friends / belonging	Invite a friend, local activity, shared project, walking or sport together
Adventure / novelty	Bike exploration, geocaching, hiking, scavenger challenge
Calm / sensory regulation	Drawing, audiobooks, movement, nature time, sensory tools
Autonomy / choice	Give a genuine choice of two or three acceptable options

The activity match

My child's strongest screen interest:

What need or reward it gives them:

Two alternatives my child would actually consider:

Build a project that lasts longer than one afternoon

One-off activities are useful, but a meaningful project can give children something to return to. Think of projects involving a visible result, growing skill, social participation or increasing independence. Start with an easy first action.

Our project builder

Project title and why my child chose it:

What will the finished project look or feel like?

Materials, budget or help needed:

Our project builder *continued*

First 15-minute action:

When and where we will begin:

What progress will look like after a week:

Example projects

- Design and build a backyard obstacle course; photograph progress if helpful.
- Build a Lego bridge to hold weight; test and improve it.
- Plan and cook a meal for the family with an agreed budget.
- Learn three skateboard skills or basketball tricks and track progress.
- Organise a friend meet-up or neighbourhood adventure.

Parents may initially need to join in. Over time, aim to move towards the child independently starting and continuing activities.

When a screen transition goes badly

What you see	What to do
Ordinary complaints or bargaining	Acknowledge, restate the plan briefly, avoid endless debate; redirect to the next activity.
Escalating yelling or loss of control	Lower the demand and verbal intensity, give physical space, avoid arguing, revisit the plan later.
Threats, attacks, unsafe behaviour	Prioritise safety and separation; don't grab or wrestle for devices; seek support, and emergency help (000) if needed.

Simple scripts to practise

Before "You have about 15 minutes left. Is there a good point to finish the game?"

At transition "I know you wanted to keep going. We agreed to stop here. Would you like to take a walk with me or start the project?"

Later, when settled "That was hard. What made stopping difficult? What could we change next time?"

Avoid

- ✗ Humiliation, arguing during peak distress or repeatedly raising your voice.
- ✗ Confiscating a device by force or blocking a child's safe exit.
- ✗ Promising to remove all technology indefinitely in anger.
- ✗ Treating any access given during an immediate safety decision as a parenting failure.

Where aggression is recurrent, develop a specific safety and behaviour plan with appropriate professional help before further restrictions.

Our own calm words for the hardest moment:

Days 15–18: strengthen the environment

Week 3 is about making the new routine easier to repeat. Reduce tempting cues, make replacement activities accessible, and practise smoother transitions. Extend screen-free time only if the previous change feels manageable; if conflict rises, reduce the demand and review your supports.

Small environmental changes reduce the number of decisions a child must make. Invite older children to help design them. Explain parental controls transparently rather than installing covert surveillance.

- ☐ Choose a shared charging place outside bedrooms where suitable.
- ☐ Switch off autoplay and unnecessary notifications.
- ☐ Place devices away from the table during agreed family meals.
- ☐ Make bikes, games, creative materials or project equipment ready and visible.
- ☐ Plan a regular outing away from the house that the child can help choose.
- ☐ Protect the important online relationships and accessibility tools identified earlier.

Choose only one next step

- ☐ Extend the first screen-free period by 10–20 minutes when manageable.
- ☐ Add a second predictable window without increasing the first.
- ☐ Protect the hour before bedtime.
- ☐ Create one enjoyable out-of-home activity each week.
- ☐ Maintain the current routine until it feels easier.

Notes on the changes we've made at home:

Our next adjustment

Our next adjustment, and why we think it's manageable:

What we'll watch for to know it's working:

What we'll do if conflict rises:

Days 19–21: practise independence

In the second half of Week 3, help your child practise managing the agreed routine with gradually less prompting. Give responsibility in amounts they can handle, and adjust expectations to age and needs. Keep support available while encouraging initiative.

- 1 Adult gives a reminder and stays nearby for the transition.
- 2 Child chooses an agreed stopping point, with a reminder.
- 3 Child sets their own reminder or timer and checks in afterwards.
- 4 Child plans an entire screen-free block and chooses an activity.
- 5 Parent and child review the plan rather than negotiating each moment.

A teenager may need more genuine choice and privacy; a younger child may need more predictable co-regulation. Avoid making access contingent on perfection.

One responsibility my child is ready to try:

Practise independence *continued*

Support I will give without taking over:

How we will recognise effort and learning:

WORKED EXAMPLES

Troubleshooting: when the plan stalls

Problem	Try this
"Everything else is boring."	Offer two matched choices; join briefly; aim for a 10-minute start rather than instant enthusiasm.
Child waits for the screen-free period to end	Keep the boundary, add optional activity prompts, allow some downtime; don't supply constant entertainment.
Endless negotiation	Agree rules outside the transition; write down the next review date; repeat one calm response.

Troubleshooting *continued*

Problem	Try this
Secretive or late-night use	Explore why, rebuild trust, protect sleep, use transparent device settings and collaborative supervision.
Screen-free time increases agitation	Consider sensory or anxiety needs, timing and the size of the change; reduce demands and seek advice if severe.
No interest in leaving the house	Begin with the doorstep, garden or a walk to the shop; invite a friend or connect to existing interests.

If something repeatedly fails, change one variable: timing, duration, replacement, adult support or expectation. If danger appears, switch to the safety pathway.

What has stalled for us, and the one thing we'll change:

Daily reset tracker — Week 1

Tick when the window happened. Mark “—” if an item wasn’t attempted. Ratings are for reflection, not clinical scoring.

Day	Window done?	Replacement activity	Conflict 0–4	One small win
1	☐			
2	☐			
3	☐			
4	☐			
5	☐			
6	☐			
7	☐			

The easiest time to succeed was...

One thing we need to adjust is...

Daily reset tracker — Week 2

A short note each day is enough. If a window was unsafe or unsuitable, record that and adjust the plan.

Day	Window done?	Replacement activity	Conflict 0–4	One small win
8	☐			
9	☐			
10	☐			
11	☐			
12	☐			
13	☐			
14	☐			

Week 2 — what got easier?

What will we change for Week 3?

Daily reset tracker — Week 3

A short note each day is enough. If a window was unsafe or unsuitable, record that and adjust the plan.

Day	Window done?	Replacement activity	Conflict 0–4	One small win
15	☐			
16	☐			
17	☐			
18	☐			
19	☐			
20	☐			
21	☐			

Week 3 — what got easier?

What will we change for Week 4?

Days 22–28: review and sustain

Use Week 4 to practise the routines across another full school-and-weekend cycle. Look at what has improved and what's still difficult. Review sleep, conflict, outdoor time, offline interests and how independently your child now handles transitions. Create a plan your family can sustain when routines change.

You don't need to reach a particular recreational screen-time number by Day 28. Look for a healthier, safer pattern and more room for activities your family values. If little has changed, identify what got in the way and consider whether more tailored support would help.

Area	At the start	Now / next step
Recreational screen time		
Sleep / bedtime		
Physical or outdoor activity		
Offline interests / connection		
Transition conflict		

Daily reset tracker — Week 4

A short note each day is enough. If a window was unsafe or unsuitable, record that and adjust the plan.

Day	Window done?	Replacement activity	Conflict 0–4	One small win
22	☐			
23	☐			
24	☐			
25	☐			
26	☐			
27	☐			
28	☐			

Week 4 — what got easier?

What will we keep beyond Day 28?

Weekly check-in

At the end of each week, compare your estimated recreational screen time with your starting point. Record whether sleep, offline participation and transitions are better, about the same or worse. Estimates are enough; the aim is to notice a pattern, not to achieve perfect measurement.

Check-in	Start	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Estimated recreational hours per day				
Sleep better / same / worse				
Offline activities better / same / worse				
Transitions better / same / worse				

Look beyond hours

- ☐ Has sleep improved or become more consistent?
- ☐ Are outdoor, social or creative activities returning?
- ☐ Are transitions safer or more predictable?
- ☐ Is the child showing increased initiative or self-management?

The improvement we most want to keep:

Looking back on the month

What helped most?

What did we learn about our child's needs?

What is still difficult or unsafe?

Keeping it going after Day 28

Week	Focus	Our decision
1	Continue the easiest successful screen-free period	
2	Support a project, outing or recurring offline activity	
3	Increase responsibility or add a boundary if appropriate	
4	Review family routines and decide what to maintain	

Plan for disruptions

Holidays, illness, family travel and exams can change routines. Agree in advance how to pause and restart. Try to return to predictable rhythms without treating one difficult day as failure.

Our non-negotiable safety and sleep priorities:

Plan for disruptions *continued*

How we will handle weekends, holidays or exceptions:

Review date and who will be involved:

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Adapting for your child and household

ADHD, autism, disability or additional support needs

Screens may support regulation, predictable interests, communication, access or learning. Use visual schedules, gradual transitions, sensory alternatives and the child's strengths. Protect essential accessibility supports. Seek individual advice when a general plan causes marked distress.

Older children and teenagers

Respect legitimate privacy, independence and online friendships. Consider participation in decisions, live multiplayer commitments and meaningful alternatives involving peers, projects, work, sport or interests. Avoid turning all social access into a bargaining chip.

Adapting *continued*

Children living across households

Begin with routines you can establish in your own home; don't place children in the middle of adult disagreement. Maintain important communication arrangements and aim for consistency where cooperation is possible.

Very high screen use or suspected gaming disorder

If screens dominate most waking hours, school or sleep is seriously affected, or repeated attempts to reduce use lead to dangerous reactions, seek assessment and coordinated support. A self-directed workbook may be insufficient.

Adjustments our family needs to make to this plan:

Your Family Decision

1 Our values

What do we want more of in our child's days, relationships and development?

2 Our limits

What one or two realistic boundaries can we sustain without compromising safety, essential communication or accessibility?

3 Our connection

How will we listen, support difficult transitions, include the child and repair after conflict?

4 Our next review

Date

People involved

Small changes, repeated consistently, can create room for bigger changes over time. Keep the routines that help, and review them as your child grows. The direction is more important than the deadline.

Evidence, limits and further help

This is a practical, research-informed home guide, not a validated 28-day clinical protocol or a treatment for gaming disorder. Research suggests family-based changes can reduce screen use, but it hasn't established an ideal duration or pace of reduction. Four weeks give families repeated opportunities to practise changes, including weekends; some will need longer.

eSafety recommends looking at sleep, exercise, friendships, quality of activities and family routines, and encourages collaborative plans, warnings and manageable reductions. A randomised Danish family study reported short-term improvements in some child wellbeing outcomes after a substantially more intensive, supported screen reduction. Its findings don't prove this staged workbook has the same effects or that benefits persist.

Selected sources

- eSafety Commissioner. Screen time: How much is too much?
esafety.gov.au/parents/issues-and-advice/screen-time
- eSafety Commissioner. Parents and Carers Handout: Screen Time (2026).
esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-03/Parents_carers_screen-time_03_2026.pdf
- World Health Organization. Gaming disorder (ICD-11).
who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/gaming-disorder
- Schmidt-Persson J et al. (2024). Screen media use and mental health of children and adolescents. JAMA Network Open.
doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.19881

Where to find support

Speak with a GP, psychologist or appropriate child and adolescent mental health service if there's major functional impairment, possible gaming disorder, serious mood changes or escalating aggression.

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Immediate danger

13 11 14

Lifeline, 24/7

1800 55 1800

Kids Helpline, 24/7

Make your everyday family plan

For longer-term routines, including screens-off and lights-out times worked out from your child's wake-up time, use the free Family Screen Time Planner at familydecisions.com.au/screen-time-planner.

Prepared by Barry Morris, Registered Psychologist, for Family Decisions, October 2026. General parent education only; not individual assessment, therapy or emergency advice.