



Top Ten Tips to Limit Your Child's Screen Time without Scream Time!

By Judy Arnall

Eight year old Kyle received no less than nine new computer and video games for the holidays and his parents are wondering how to keep him under the health professionals' recommended screen time limit of one and a half hours a day without Kyle throwing a fit.

It can be difficult to impose rules on time spent in front of the TV, video machine, DVD and handheld players, but it's not impossible. Here are the top ten ways to help your child manage screen time and not destroy your valuable parenting relationship.

1. **Redirect to other stimulation.** Have board games set up, sports equipment ready to go, or recipe ingredients laid out ready for a baking session.
2. **Be involved and knowledgeable** of where they travel on the Internet and whom they play games with. Spend time building the parent-child relationship by taking an interest in their on-line gaming and chatting pursuits. It's easier to direct them to your activities after you connect for a while in their playground.
3. **Don't punish – problem solve!** It's not a battle of you against them. It's you and your child against the problem. You are both on the same team! Work the problem out together to everyone's satisfaction and enjoy the new rules and increased connection.
4. **Model a balanced life that includes seven keys to health and happiness.** Invite your child to participate with you in your pursuit of the seven keys of a balanced life. Many children will get active if the parents or the whole family is involved:

7 Keys to a Balanced Life:

Social time - time spent with friends

Physical activity time - exercise, sports, active play

Mental exercise time - educational activities, games, puzzles, homework, reading

Spiritual time – volunteering, meditating, solitude, unstructured play, church

Family time – doing projects

Financial time – job

Hobby Time – leisure pursuits and projects

5. **Negotiate!** Make good use of Family Conferences, “parent concern” Consulting, and negotiation sessions to discuss time limits that meet everyone’s needs.
6. **Issue time tokens.** Each hour of physical activity will garner a child an hour of screen time.
7. **Get it in writing.** Draw up a daily schedule and discuss where screen time fits in with the day’s already scheduled activities. Children can sign into time slots.
8. **Contract.** Draw up a weekly or monthly agreement that has limits decided by both the parent and child together. Display in a prominent place. Point to it when the complaining occurs. Discuss when the contract is up for renewal.
9. **Change the environment.** Sometimes, it’s easier to move around the setting than to change the other person. Seriously consider whether adding more equipment and hardware will add to the screen time and decide to not bring it into the house. Move the computer and gaming systems into the main family area. Having one unit for the children to share means more fighting over screen time, but can also mean more time spent in learning the valuable skill of negotiating and less individual screen time.
10. **Teach your child the fine art of Haggling!** “Hey, Eric, Wow, you made another level! Good for you! Now, I need you to do the dishes. What time would you like to get at them?” Insist they give you a time and haggle when they give you an outrageous one. Choice from your child makes it easier for them to abide by it.

Remember that you have the most power to negotiate rules and limits before the power button goes on! Go for it!

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