

screen-  
**free**  
week



**ORGANiZER'S**  
**KiT**



presented by  
**Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood**  
[www.screenfree.org](http://www.screenfree.org)

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**WELCOME TO  
SCREEN-FREE WEEK**



*Dear Screen-Free Week Organizer,*

*Welcome to Screen-Free Week, brought to you by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. Since 1995, thousands of people like you have helped millions of children and families around the world turn off screens and turn on life.*

*When the Center for Screen-Time Awareness closed its doors and asked CCFC to become the new official home of what used to be called “TV-Turnoff,” we leaped at the chance. Reducing children’s screen time and advocating for screen-free, commercial-free time and space has always been essential to CCFC’s mission—helping parents raise healthy families by limiting corporate marketers’ access to children.*

*If you’ve chosen to be a Screen-Free Week organizer, you already know that children are spending way too much time with screens—a staggering 32 hours a week for preschoolers and even more for older kids. Miniaturized media technology, including cell phones featuring child-targeted apps, mp3 players, iPads, and other hand-held devices, mean that children are immersed in screens, and the things they sell, nearly every waking moment.*

*You know the costs, as well: poor school performance, childhood obesity, and problems with attention are just a few. Regardless of content, excessive screen time changes children’s fundamental connection to the world. It deprives them of hands-on creative play—the foundation of learning, creativity, constructive problem solving, and the capacity to wrestle with life to make it meaningful.*

*And you also know the vital importance of helping children and families find fun and engaging alternatives to screen time—opportunities to explore their own ideas and creations, enjoy each other, and take pleasure in the world around them.*

*The pages that follow are filled with lots of great suggestions and resources. They’re not a blueprint, but are meant to be a springboard for your own unique experience. Screen-Free Week belongs to you and the children and families in your community. It varies from family to family, school to school, and town to town—there is no right way to celebrate.*

*Thank you for being such an important part of Screen-Free Week. Together we can make this year’s the best one yet and help children, families, schools, and communities envision a different, more positive, and healthier future.*

*Have fun!*

*Susan Linn, Ed.D.*

*Director, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood*

# WHAT KIDS SAY ABOUT SCREEN-FREE WEEK

## 2ND GRADE STUDENTS AT CRESTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN MADISON, WISCONSIN

**Nathan Webber:** “I read more and had more quiet time; more time to do stuff and more time with my family.”

**Sally Herman:** “I have more time to play with friends and I am getting to bed on time. I also use my imagination more often. I went to the library and got a bunch of new good books.”

**P. Wyatt:** “More time to do my homework, more time for sports and I get to help grow more plants.”

**Kathy Krantz:** “I painted a picture, if it was not for [Screen-Free Week] I would have no time to paint a picture.”

## 7TH GRADERS FROM ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN SCHOOL IN BAY CITY, MICHIGAN

**Mackenzie Rothfuss:** “It’s amazing how much free time you have when you’re not in front of a screen...I never realized how much fun I missed by using screens instead of playing outside.”

**Caleb Schaewe:** “It helps kids do better in school because it helps them concentrate more...it also gives them more chances to read and expand their imagination.”

## 8TH GRADERS AT CORNWALL CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL CORNWALL, NEW YORK

**Samantha Pepe:** “Life has become so involuntary with all the technological advances in today’s

society that sometimes we forget how to do things ourselves...people have even forgot that going outside...is vital for good health”

**Luke Roth:** “We are losing focus on what kids should really be doing to develop themselves physically, socially and academically...technology can be a wonderful thing, however, we kids, the future of America, need to be careful that we allow technology to enhance our lives but not take over them.”

## 8TH GRADERS AT JOHN MUIR SCHOOL IN SAN DIEGO

**Paris Winter:** “When I power down and dream big I see a flashing screen with people on it. I feel bored. I taste nothing. I hear nothing. I hear the actors as they play their part. I see nature. I feel free, excited, the wind blows through my hair. I taste the wind as it blows against my face. I hear nature.”

**Isaac Wong:** “I just get addicted...and time flies by fast. I am not always having fun...sometimes I am just really bored.”

**Jimmy Nguyen:** “When I use the computer or watch TV I usually eat in my room...I lose track of time...I feel tired...lazy and just sit there and keep playing...” “When I am not...I have more time to study...eat healthy and spend time with my family. I play sports...get more active and feel less tired and lazy. I feel energized.”

# HISTORY OF SCREEN-FREE WEEK

In 1994 when Henry Labalme and Matt Pawa came up with the idea of a national organization to reduce the screen-time habit, few believed it was a problem at all. Television was considered harmless and a great babysitter. Perhaps improving some of the programs was a good idea, but reducing television time? Ridiculous! Others admitted that Americans could do with a little less TV. But TV is here to stay, they maintained, so why bother tilting at windmills?

But Henry, Matt and a few others ignored the skeptics. Now, many years later, Screen-Free Week (formerly TV-Turnoff) is continuing to have a deep and lasting impact around the world.

As preparations got underway for the very first Turnoff, no one could have guessed what would happen in the ensuing years. That first year, nine organizations lent their official support to the Week, and a couple thousand organizers around the nation brought the event to a million or so people. It might not have been an earth-shattering event, but it was a great start and prelude to the years to come.

Each successive Turnoff grew. New organizers signed up to help out. New organizations supported the event. Major health groups like the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Medical Association, education groups like the National Education Association, and civic groups like Big Brothers/Big Sisters lent their voices to the chorus. The media began to pay attention, and coverage in publications like *Parade Magazine* and on hundreds of radio stations spread the word even farther. Since that first year, the number of Turnoff Week organizers

grew more than eight-fold, with millions more participating annually.

Any way you look at it, it's clear that the skeptics were wrong. Reducing children's screen time has become a national concern, with regular stories in major news outlets and support from President Obama and the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity. Now, at Henry and Matt's request, Screen-Free Week has a new life as a program of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. Together, we can help children and adults "power down" their screens and rev up their involvement in life! We're looking forward to Screen-Free Weeks for years to come.

## KIDS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"...when my house had no TV, computer and video games, all I did was read. Until one day I dreamed big about becoming a writer... Loving to read gave me an idea to write my own book...it made me happy."*

- ANTHONY GREEN  
HYDE PARK, NY

# USING THE ORGANIZER'S KIT

**T**he Organizer's Kit is designed to simplify and enrich the process of organizing a Screen-Free Week.

Each section contains suggestions for steps you can take, as well as handouts for participants. As you read through, you'll be able to decide what works best for you. Feel free to mix and match from section to section. And remember, documents such as the parent letter and sample press release are available online at [www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm) so you can customize them as needed.

## Section 1: Why Screen-Free Week?

Facts about children's screen media use and why excessive screen time is harmful, as well as suggested answers to frequently asked questions about Screen-Free Week.

## Section 2: Building a Strong Foundation

Tips for best Screen-Free Week practices, pulling together a strong organizing team and securing community partners.

**TELL THE  
WORLD YOU'RE  
GOING SCREEN-FREE!**

List your Screen-Free Week at:  
**[WWW.SCREENFREE.ORG](http://WWW.SCREENFREE.ORG)**

## Section 3: Spreading the Word

Tools for publicizing Screen-Free Week activities.

## Section 4: Preparing for a Great Screen-Free Week

Great activities and pledge cards for the weeks leading up to Screen-Free Week to inspire kids and their parents to take on the challenge!

## Section 5: Screen-Free Week is Here!

Lots of ideas for a fun week, including tried and true suggestions from former Screen-Free Week organizers.

## Section 6: Making It Last

Suggestions for building on the Screen-Free Week experience to reduce children's screen time—and our own—all year round.

**KIDS**   
**SCREEN-FREE WEEK**

*"...Best of all, I camp out with my daddy...when I turn the TV off. It almost made me want to keep it off for good."*

—MADISON SCHAEFFLER  
1ST GRADER, HYDE PARK, NY



# SECTION I.

## WHY SCREEN-FREE WEEK?

The first step in organizing a Screen-Free Week is to make a commitment. And the first step in making a commitment is to understand why Screen-Free Week is important, and why it's crucial that we help children (and ourselves) reduce time with screens. If you understand the “whys” of Screen-Free Week, it will be easy to inspire others to join with you to make it happen.

In this section you will find:

- **Reproducible fact sheets about the impact of excessive screen time on children.\***
- **Short pieces on how screen media undermines literacy and learning, promotes materialism, and distracts children from hands-on creative play.\***
- **Answers to questions you're likely to be asked as you begin to organize your week.**

**\*Suggested handout**

# KIDS AND SCREENS

*The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under 2 and less than 2 hours per day for older children.*

## Excessive screen time puts young children at risk

- Forty percent of 3-month-old infants are regular viewers of screen media<sup>2</sup>, and 19% of babies 1 year and under have a TV in their bedroom.<sup>3</sup>
- Screen time can be habit-forming: the more time children engage with screens, the harder time they have turning them off as older children.<sup>4</sup>
- Screen time for children under 3 is linked to irregular sleep patterns<sup>5</sup> and delayed language acquisition.<sup>6</sup>
- The more time preschool children and babies spend with screens, the less time they spend interacting with their parents.<sup>7</sup> Even when parents co-view, they spend less time talking to their children than when they're engaged in other activities.<sup>8</sup>
- Toddler screen time is also associated with problems in later childhood, including lower math and school achievement, reduced physical activity, victimization by classmates,<sup>9</sup> and increased BMI.<sup>10</sup>

## SCREEN-FREE FACT

*On average, preschool children spend 32 hours a week with screen media.<sup>1</sup>*

- Direct exposure to TV and overall household viewing are associated with increased early childhood aggression.<sup>11</sup>
- The more time preschool children spend with screens, the less time they spend engaged in creative play<sup>7</sup> – the foundation of learning,<sup>12</sup> constructive problem solving,<sup>13</sup> and creativity.<sup>14</sup>
- On average, preschool children see nearly 25,000 television commercials, a figure that does not include product placement.<sup>15</sup>

## School-age children are also at risk from excessive screen time

- Including multitasking, children ages 8-18 spend an average of 4 ½ hours per day watching television, 1 ½ hours using computers, and more than an hour playing video games.<sup>16</sup>
- Black and Hispanic youth spend even more time with screen media than their white peers.<sup>16</sup>
- Time spent with screens is associated with:
  - childhood obesity<sup>17</sup>
  - sleep disturbances<sup>18</sup>
  - attention span issues<sup>19</sup>
- Children with 2 or more hours of daily screen time are more likely to have increased psychological difficulties, including hyperactivity, emotional and conduct problems, as well as difficulties with peers.<sup>20</sup>

## SCREEN-FREE FACT

*In a survey of youth ages 8-18, nearly 1 in 4 said they felt “addicted” to video games.<sup>25</sup>*

- Adolescents who watch 3 or more hours of television daily are at especially high risk for poor homework completion, negative attitudes toward school, poor grades, and long-term academic failure.<sup>21</sup>

- Adolescents with a television in their bedroom spend more time watching TV and report less physical activity, less healthy dietary habits, worse school performance, and fewer family meals.<sup>22</sup>

- Children with a television in their bedroom are more likely to be overweight.<sup>23</sup>

- Especially high rates of bedroom televisions (70-74%) have been seen among racial/ethnic minority children aged 2 to 13 years.<sup>24</sup>

### Research shows the benefits of reduced screen time.

- Reducing screen time can help prevent childhood obesity.<sup>26</sup>

- Children who spend less time watching television in early years tend to do better in school, have a healthier diet, be more physically active, and are better able to engage in schoolwork in later elementary school.<sup>9</sup>

- Television viewing at a young age is associated with later behavioral problems, but not if heavy viewing is discontinued before age six.<sup>27</sup>

- Limiting exposure to television during the first 4 years of life may decrease children’s interest in it in later years.<sup>4</sup>

*The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents create an electronic-media-free environment in children’s bedrooms.*

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# LESS SCREEN TIME OPENS DOORS TO LITERACY AND LEARNING

*There's one sure thing parents can do to help their kids learn, regardless of financial means: Forbid them from watching television on school nights.*

– PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

**C**hildren today are spending more time with screens than in any activity but sleeping. That's time away from all kinds of constructive activities, including reading and homework. The President has also urged limits on some kinds of entertainment screen media because of their impact on learning, urging parents to read to their children instead.<sup>1</sup>

Because television has been around much longer than other entertainment screen media, most of the research about the impact of screen time on children focuses on television.

Research demonstrates that hours spent with screens can have a negative impact on learning.

- **The amount of television viewing before age 3 has been associated with deficits in reading recognition, reading comprehension, and being able to remember sequences of numbers at age 6.**<sup>2</sup>
- **Children who spend less time watching television in early years tend to do better in school, have a healthier diet, be more physically active, and be better able to engage in schoolwork in later elementary school.**<sup>3</sup>
- **Adolescents who watch 3 or more hours of television daily are at especially high risk for poor homework completion, negative attitudes toward school, poor grades, and long-term academic failure.**<sup>4</sup>

- **Boys who spend more time playing video games spend less time on after-school academic materials, and have lower reading and writing scores.**<sup>5</sup>

One complicating factor for parents today is that many screen-media products are marketed as educational for young children, and that there are no standards for determining what “educational” means. It's been shown, despite promotional materials to the contrary, that DVDs for babies and toddlers are not an effective means of promoting language development,<sup>6</sup> and may even be detrimental.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, companies also market computer software for children that they claim promotes reading. Studies show, however, that these programs may also be problematic.

- **Operating the mouse while reading a story on the computer requires more executive functioning skills than turning pages of a book, which means that some children are not able to simultaneously operate the mouse and comprehend the story.**<sup>8</sup>
- **When parents and children interact with electronic console books, parents are less likely to use the kind of verbal interactions that promote literacy. They tend to talk more about behavior (e.g., “Can you click on this?”) than respond to the content (e.g., “What's the elephant going to next?”).**<sup>9</sup>

## 1. Why Screen-Free Week?

• **When children read from electronic console books, they spend more time pushing buttons than reading the story, which results in poorer character identification, less story comprehension, and more impoverished parent-child interactions than reading from traditional books.**<sup>10</sup>

There is some evidence that truly educational screen media, such as programs on PBS, actually can promote learning and literacy in children. There is also evidence that what content children are exposed to matters. Exposure to violent R-rated or PG-13 movies, and violent video games, can promote aggressive behaviors that can cause problems in the classroom<sup>11</sup> and is also linked to poor school performance.<sup>12</sup>

But it is important to remember that excessive time spent with screens, regardless of content, is a problem. Use Screen-Free Week as an opportunity to read aloud more to kids, to encourage their own

reading and creative writing projects—or just to engage more in conversation. All of those activities are fun—and promote literacy.

Literacy Action Steps for Screen-Free Week and All Year Round:

- **Books! Books! And more books!**
- **Visit the library or your local book store.**
- **Eat screen-free meals together and talk!**
- **Play word games.**
- **Tell stories.**
- **Draw pictures and tell stories about them.**
- **Encourage young children to dictate stories.**
- **Read poems out loud.**
- **Make up poems and rhymes.**
- **Make up songs.**

- 
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# LESS SCREEN TIME = LESS MARKETING TO CHILDREN = LESS FAMILY STRESS

**O**ne significant harm of excessive screen time is that it provides media and marketing companies direct access to children for hours each day. In fact, limiting screen time is the primary way that parents can safeguard children from being targets for corporate marketers. On average, kids see more than 25,000 commercials each year on television alone!<sup>1</sup> They are also bombarded with all sorts of other screen-based marketing, including:

- **Brand licensing:** Media characters appear as toys, as food, on clothing or on packaging designed to entice children to want a particular product.
- **Embedded advertising:** Products are often interwoven seamlessly into media programs as props or even part of a plot.
- **Advergaming:** Games built around brands so that kids spend lots of time “interacting” with products like candy and other junk food.
- **Behavioral targeting:** Companies track children’s online behavior in order to better understand what products to market to them.

Commercialism, enabled and delivered by electronic media, is a factor in lots of problems facing children today, including:

- **Childhood obesity.**<sup>2</sup> Children consume 167 more calories for each hour of television they watch.<sup>3</sup> One 30-second food commercial can influence the food preferences of children as young as 2.<sup>4</sup>
- **Eating disorders.**<sup>5</sup> When television was introduced in Fiji, within a few months

there was an epidemic of eating disorders among girls because the ultra-skinny women on television replaced indigenous standards of beauty. A pediatrician once said that for girls who watch a lot of television, bulimia becomes an adaptive behavior. It’s the only way that all of those models could consume the junk food they advertise and remain so thin.<sup>6</sup>

- **Precocious and irresponsible sexuality.**<sup>7</sup> Children turn to the media to learn about sex and sexuality and what it means to be male or female. Commercially-driven screen media and toys promote stereotypic gender roles and highly sexualized images of girls and women.
- **Youth violence.**<sup>9</sup> Violent screen media designed for teenagers and adults is heavily marketed to children as young as preschoolers.<sup>10</sup> Media violence can negatively influence children’s behavior, their perceptions of real life violence, and their empathy for victims of violence.<sup>11</sup>

Screen time, and the marketing it foists on children, also causes tension between parents and kids.<sup>12</sup> Companies routinely work closely with child psychologists to create campaigns irresistible to children.<sup>13</sup> Screens allow total strangers—well-financed and knowledgeable about children’s developmental vulnerabilities—to convince kids that toys and other products are essential to their happiness. Marketers purposely encourage children to nag their parents to buy the products they see advertised. And they are quite effective. One in 3 trips to a fast food restaurant comes about through nagging.<sup>14</sup> And, on average, older kids report nagging between 7 and 12 times for something that’s been

## 1. Why Screen-Free Week?

advertised to them. Some kids report nagging up to 50 times for a single product.<sup>15</sup>

The main reasons advertisers have so much access to children are lack of adequate regulatory policies and because, for the first time in history, children around the world spend most of their leisure time with screens.<sup>16</sup> One of the many wonderful

pleasures of screen-free activities is that so many of them—reading, playing outside, gardening, cooking, talking, dreaming—are commercial-free. Carving out more screen-free, commercial-free time and space for children will help them lead happier, healthier lives—and reduce family conflict. Screen-Free Week is a great way to begin!

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# LESS SCREEN TIME = MORE TIME FOR CREATIVE & ACTIVE PLAY TIME = MORE FUN, MORE LEARNING & BETTER HEALTH

*“My children get along so much better [during Screen-Free Week].  
They don’t fight as much. They practice their piano more. They read.  
But mostly, I notice the imaginative play.”*

– ANNE PURCELL, MINOT, ND IN THE MINOT DAILY NEWS

## Children need to play

**P**lay is so essential to children’s health and well-being—and so endangered—that the United Nations lists it as a guaranteed right in its Convention on the Rights of the Child. One of the most important reasons to limit children’s screen time is to ensure that they have more time and opportunities for hands-on creative play.<sup>1</sup>

Children play creatively to:

- **have fun.**
- **express their fantasies and feelings.**
- **gain a sense of competence.**
- **make meaning of their experience.**<sup>2</sup>

Hands-on, creative play promotes:

- **intellectual growth.**
- **critical thinking.**
- **constructive problem solving skills through opportunities to explore and experiment.**<sup>3</sup>
- **self-control.**<sup>4</sup>

As the amount of time children spend with screens is increasing, the amount of time children spend in hands-on creative play is decreasing.<sup>5</sup> Also, the more time young children spend with screens, the more time they are likely to spend engaging with

them as older children<sup>6</sup> and the harder time they have turning screens off.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the time it takes up, screen media is less conducive to creative play than other media such as books or radio.<sup>8</sup>

The best selling toys, marketed on TV and the Internet, often inhibit rather than promote creativity, because they are either linked to media programs, embedded with computer chips, or both. When children play with toys that are based on media products, they play less creatively because they are not spurred to make up their own world.<sup>9</sup> And toys that talk, chirp, beep, and move electronically mean that a child’s involvement is often limited to pushing a button—hardly a creative activity!

## Active play is important, too

According to the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, “Kids need at least 60 minutes of active and vigorous play each day, and one of the easiest and most enjoyable ways to meet this goal is by playing outside.”<sup>10</sup> Given that childhood obesity is a major public health concern, the amount of sedentary time that children spend with screens is a big problem. Children ages 10 to 16 now spend, on average, only 12.6 minutes per day in vigorous physical activity, yet they spend an average of 10.4 waking hours each day relatively motionless.<sup>11</sup> In addition, young children living in inner cities are failing to develop essential

## 1. Why Screen-Free Week?

large motor skills. One recent study found that 86% of disadvantaged preschoolers in two cities lacked basic motor skills like running, jumping, throwing, and catching.<sup>12</sup> While proponents of screen technology laud gaming systems like the Wii which promote movement, a recent study suggests that simulating activities by playing on a Wii does not burn as many calories as actually engaging in those activities.<sup>13</sup>

Screen-Free Week is a chance for children and families to experience the joys of play:

**Play with art supplies**

**Play with words**

**Play with music**

**Make up songs**

**Play with blocks**

**Play with nothing**

**Play cards and board games**

**Play indoors**

**Play outdoors**

**Play tag**

**Play sports**

**Play together**

**Play alone**

And when Screen-Free Week is over...keep on playing!

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# LESS SCREEN TIME = LESS MATERIALISTIC VALUES = MORE LIFE SATISFACTION & MORE CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

**The more time children and adults spend with screens, the more materialistic they are<sup>1</sup> – and that makes them more unhappy.**

Because so much screen media is rife with advertising and marketing, kids and adults immersed in screens are bombarded with the false message that the things they buy will make them happy. There is a growing body of evidence that the opposite is true. The pressure to spend and consume actually makes people less happy.<sup>2</sup>

**Materialistic values, and excessive consumption, have a negative impact on our health, well-being and the environment**

Children who have more materialistic values than their peers:

- have lower self-esteem and a lower opinion of their parents.<sup>3</sup>
- are less happy, more depressed, report more symptoms of anxiety and have more psychosomatic illnesses.<sup>4</sup>
- report less generosity and allocate less money to charity when they imagine receiving a windfall.<sup>5</sup>
- engage in fewer positive environmental behaviors such as reusing paper, and using less water while showering.<sup>6</sup>

According to psychologist Tim Kasser, who has extensively researched the links between materialism and well-being, “Psychologically healthy children will be made worse off if they become more enmeshed in the culture of getting and spending. Children with emotional problems will be helped

if they disengage from the worlds that corporations are constructing for them.”<sup>7</sup>

**The more time people spend with screens, the less concern they have for the environment – particularly because of the endless stream of commercial messages<sup>8</sup>**

Children, on average, see 25,000 commercials each year, a figure that does not include product placement or the fact that so many children’s media char-



acters are linked to extensive product lines.<sup>9</sup> Even if children aren't exposed to traditional television commercials, their screen time still sells them on a whole host of products. Many of the most popular screen media programs, films, and websites for children earn their money primarily through selling toys, clothes, food, and accessories to kids through licensing popular media characters. The message kids get

from screen media is that the media program itself isn't enough—they have to have all of the toys and branded paraphernalia in order to fully enjoy whatever they are watching. The pressure to own products featuring characters like Dora the Explorer or Shrek contributes to a must-have mentality where a seemingly endless slew of merchandise is collected – and then tossed away to make room for the next fad.

### Screen-Free Week is a perfect time to step outside of commercially-driven media culture

Go DIY.

Learn to knit.

Make presents for other people.

Enjoy nature.

Have a yard sale.

Make doll clothes.

Go hiking.

Garden!

Make a cake from scratch.

Have a pot luck dinner with neighbors.

Go on a picnic!

Donate things you don't use anymore to people who need them.

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# WHAT TO SAY WHEN PEOPLE ASK...

## ...WHY?

### **Q: Why turn off all the screens completely? Can we do it for just one day?**

A. Turning off the screens for seven days helps participants realize that life without screens is not impossible and may actually be more fun. A week-long turnoff allows sufficient time to explore a wide range of screen-free activities and to develop more productive and rewarding habits. A one-day turn-off is easier—but doesn't give people enough of a break from the noise to reassess the role screens play in their lives.

### **Q: Are all screens bad? What about PBS?**

A. One purpose of Screen-Free Week is to leave behind judgments about the quality of programming and focus instead on creating, discovering, building, participating and doing. Regardless of the quality of media, there is no denying that, for most children today, time spent with screens overwhelms all other leisure activities—and that too much screen time is harmful. Use Screen-Free Week as a catalyst for enjoying the world.

### **Q: Technology is here to stay. Why not just accept it and move on?**

A. Screens are here to stay, but that doesn't mean that our kids need to spend upwards of seven hours each day in front of a screen. Our kids will be healthier and happier if they spend less time with television, video games, and handheld devices. We

can help them do that, and participating in Screen-Free Week is an important start.

### **Q: Instead of taking screens away from kids, don't we need to teach kids media literacy?**

A. It's not either/or. In fact, Screen-Free Week is a fundamental part of media literacy. After all, rule one in media literacy is knowing when to turn it off. Kids (and adults) simply can't be truly "media literate" without stepping back from screens. Those who are most effectively media literate have broad interests and experiences that they can bring to bear in analyzing and interpreting what they see and hear. Instead of pretending that endless hours in front of a screen promote media literacy, giving children the chance to play actively, develop relationships, and learn to evaluate options will help them become more well-grounded people, better educated citizens, more alert consumers—and be far more media literate.

## ...WHO?

### **Q: Are you Luddites?**

A. Are you kidding? Not at all. We deeply appreciate the value of screen technology for work, entertainment, education—and organizing. In fact, CCFC's work is made possible by our online network and activities. But we know that screens are way too prevalent in all of our lives, that screen time is habituating, and that excessive screen time

is harmful, particularly for children. Childhood obesity, poor school performance and attention problems are all linked to too much screen time. Cutting out screen time for a week is a way of beginning to help wean children (and ourselves) off dependence on screens for stimulation and soothing. It's also a way to provide opportunities for engaging in the pleasures of the real world.

### **Q: You seem like the thought police. Are you trying to tell me what to do?**

A. No. Screen-Free Week is entirely voluntary and is meant to support families and build community. We are suggesting that instead of having screen media dictate your life ("stay tuned!...buy this...move to the next level...watch this next"), you can have fun reclaiming leisure time for your own pursuits.

## ...HOW?

### **Q: Do I need to turn off even my cell phone? What about my work computer?**

A: We're absolutely not asking you to stop using your computer for work, or to stop talking on your phone. The goal of Screen-Free Week is to refrain from using screens for entertainment in order to enjoy the rest of the world. Screens are so interwoven in the fabric of our lives that sorting out what's entertainment and what's work or communication may be difficult. In fact, figuring out the role of screens in our lives is an important component of Screen-Free Week. But if talking, texting, or checking your work email is interfering with screen-free family time (including meals), then you may want to think carefully about how you're using them.



**Q: My spouse won't participate. Now what?**

A. Screen-Free Week is voluntary and meant to be fun. Encourage your spouse to give it a try. Some people emphasize the short duration. Others strike a deal with reluctant spouses to, for instance, pledge to wash the car, cook dinner, do the yard work, etc. in exchange for participation. Honestly, it is best if Screen-Free Week is a family activity. But if that's not possible, encourage your spouse to respect the choices that you and your children are making by avoiding screen time in front of the kids during the Week.

**Q: I need some peace and quiet when I come home. How do I occupy the kids while I fix dinner or do things around the house?**

A. Have the children help with simple tasks or ask them to talk or read to you while you prepare dinner. Have art materials available in the kitchen so the kids can have your company while you're cooking. Developing a few regular pre-dinner activities for children is a worthwhile investment. Some parents find that playing with kids for a few minutes helps relax the kids as well as themselves. Brainstorm with other parents about what they do.

**Q: Our neighborhood is unsafe. Isn't it better that my kids sit in front of the screen at home rather than risk harm outside?**

A. It's tragic that all children do not have access to safe outdoor play areas. We should all be working to change that. Try joining with neighbors or a local community center to develop safe outdoor activities for participating families. Meanwhile, there are lots of indoor activities that are fun, productive and screen-free. You can read, play board games, bake, do art projects and more. See page 46 for lots of fun, screen-free things to do.

**Q: Do we have to plan an activity every night during Screen-Free Week?**

A. Some organizers favor scheduling many activities, while others feel that providing an activity ev-

ery night leads to a big let down after Screen-Free Week, so they plan just a few. Either approach can be effective. In-school activities are a possibility, and organizers agree it is good to have at least one family activity during the week.

**Q: How can we best appeal to teenagers?**

A. Make Screen-Free Week fun and provocative. Distribute materials on the environmental and social consequences of screens and have students debate opposing views. Use the lesson ideas to stimulate discussion on screen-time issues. Some teachers award extra credit to participating students who keep a journal and write about their experiences during the week. Screen-Free Week organizers have asked local businesses (bookstores, bowling alleys, etc.) to offer discounts to students, families and individuals who show a signed Screen-Free Week "Pledge Card." Contests and friendly competition can also motivate teens.



## PARENTS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"[Screen-Free Week] has gone from receiving no publicity to being a major effort by our local schools, libraries, and newspapers so it is one of the few campaigns that I have seen that really has worked and has made a difference to a lot of people."*

– FRANCES N.  
NEW MEXICO



# SECTION 2.

## BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

A little thoughtful planning before you jump into organizing will go a long way toward a great Screen-Free Week. Remember, you don't have to do it—it's easier and more fun to work with a team. In addition, over the years Screen-Free Week organizers have identified three essential components for a successful week: having fun, building partnerships, and making it last. If you keep these in mind, and build a strong organizing team, you've created a strong foundation for a fun and satisfying Screen-Free Week!

In this section you will find:

- **Three essential components for a successful Screen-Free Week.**
- **Tips for building an organizing team.**
- **Suggestions for identifying and inspiring participants.**

# 3 ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF SCREEN-FREE WEEK

**W**hile planning Screen-Free Week can seem daunting, it's important to know that you don't have to reinvent the wheel: the experiences of past organizers can inform the work you do. As you begin to plan, consider three essential components of a successful week that have evolved over the years: Have fun, build partnerships, and make it last.

## Have Fun!

Screen-Free Week is a celebration, not an exercise in deprivation. One goal for every organizer should be that planning and implementation is fun for you, other organizers, and the adults and children who participate. You don't have to entertain your community for a week – just remind them of all the resources they already have. Encourage them to enjoy their leisure time and to dream up their own screen-free activities.

Of course, just telling people to have fun isn't going to ensure that they'll have it. The best way to do that is to have fun yourself. Undoubtedly, working with kids will be fun, but the organizing, spreading the word, and teaming up with other adults can be fun too! If at any point your work starts to seem like drudgery, think about ways to spice it up. If you're feeling overwhelmed, perhaps you're trying to do too much; think about asking others you're working with for help and/or simplifying your plans.

## Build Partnerships

The more the merrier. Create partnerships to spread the work and to spread the word. Librarians, physical education teachers, astronomy clubs, chess clubs, restaurants, musicians, artists, churches, syn-

agogues, mosques, PTAs or PTOs, bookstores, craft stores and hardware stores can all have a role to play in organizing or supporting your Screen-Free Week activities. You don't have to do it all by yourself!

## Make It Last

What's the goal of Screen-Free Week? To get folks to turn off screens for a week? Nope. It's to encourage people to try living without screens for a week so that they'll reconsider the place of electronic entertainment media in their lives and make long-term changes for a healthier, more satisfying life.

Try to keep this long-term goal in mind as you plan. Find ways to highlight activities that kids and adults can do in the long term and urge people to explore different interests and activities.

Finally, think about what you will get out of Screen-Free Week in addition to a week without TV. Will it help you build a community of people who share your values? Can you build on the relationships you form with some of your partner organizations? Ask your partners to help you think of ways to keep the energy going after Screen-Free Week ends. A weekly neighborhood kickball game with rotating adult volunteers? A screen-free honor roll of students who refrain from using TV and video games on school nights for a whole semester? A different fact sheet or article on the effects of screens and commercialism sent home to parents once a month? (Check out [www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org) for the latest news and research.) How about a book club or discussion group about the impact of screens and commercialism on children (we've included a bibliography on page 68)? The possibilities are endless!

# BUILDING A TEAM

*It's easier – and more fun – to organize a Screen-Free Week  
when you're part of a team!*

**F**orm an informal Screen-Free Week planning committee in your community. Talk to friends, colleagues, family and neighbors to find out who is interested. Connect with your school principal, school and community librarians, physical education teachers, art and music teachers, school nurses, scout leaders, coaches, or religious leaders and ask for their support and participation. Your organizing team can be any size, but there is strength in numbers!

As the committee leader, you'll set the tone for your committee. Be prepared and be direct. Let people know that they can contribute in a variety of ways; different kinds of expertise and ability are always welcome. Also, ensure that people have a sense of the time commitments you're seeking; open-ended commitments can scare people off. Emphasize that their involvement will be fun, and that cutting back or giving up on entertainment screen media gives people more time and energy.

Give your group a name because when your group has a name, your community will know that you are organized and serious. If there are young people involved in your group, make sure your name reflects that – the press is always interested in what young people are doing! Some examples: "TGSF- Teens Going Screen Free"; "LimiTV"; or "POEM - Parents Opposed to Excessive Media." Use one of these, or take choosing a name as a first quick chance to be creative!

The goal of meeting is not to chat, brainstorm, or

plan other meetings – that can come later – it's to come up with specific tasks, responsibilities, and timelines. Make sure that, at the end of each meeting, people know who is responsible for what, and when it's due. This kind of planning saves a lot of headaches later on.

## TEACHERS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"I had students running across the playground to tell me that they had gone without TV. Kids would even come up to me in stores to tell me that they were not watching TV. Even teachers said they were going without TV. At the close of the week, I had a student come and ask me if we could do it next year. How could I turn that down?"*

– CHERYL ROWE  
ANTIGO, WI

# IDENTIFYING AND INSPIRING YOUR PARTICIPANTS

**T**here are so many natural partners for Screen-Free Week: schools, libraries, religious organizations, colleges and universities, bookstores, craft stores and other local businesses, pediatricians' offices, environmental groups, museums, cultural institutions and literacy and tutoring organizations are just some of the groups that have supported Screen-Free Week in the past. Once you've identified your target groups, consider printing or photocopying selections from this guide and assembling small information packets to hand out to prospective partners, fellow organizers and participants. There are no copyright restrictions as long as the materials are not sold.

## Schools

Local schools – especially elementary schools – are among the most important organizing hubs

## KIDS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*“During no tv/computer week,  
I didn't even miss it. I was so  
busy...and my parents thought  
I'd be bored!”*

– JAMES GRISSOM, KINDERGARTENER  
SILVER SPRING, MD

for Screen-Free Week. Thousands of schools around the world have participated since the first TV-Turnoff Week in 1996. Principals, teachers and school librarians traditionally support the Screen-Free Week concept and will often promote the Week in their class or institution. Organizing in elementary schools is also a good way to reach the community at large because young students often involve their parents and siblings. When approaching schools, be sure to cite the many education and health associations endorsing Screen-Free Week. Check [www.screenfree.org](http://www.screenfree.org) for an up-to-date list of Screen-Free Week endorsers.

Teachers tend to be particularly strong proponents of reducing children's screen time. Many see daily the cumulative effects of excessive screen time on their students and are all too familiar with shortened attention spans and the decline of reading skills. They are also great organizers! Getting teachers involved is a surefire way to increase participation among students and their families.

Ask the PTA or PTO to endorse your local Screen-Free Week. Members of these organizations are typically active in school governance, and their support will be of enormous benefit. Ask for names of potential parent and teacher supporters and request time to address a PTA or PTO meeting.

Ask your school librarian to display Screen-Free Week posters in the library (available on the Screen-Free Week website). Your librarian may also want to assemble a book display with a Screen-Free Week theme.

Once you have identified school organizers (teachers or other adults at the school), ask them to attend a meeting with you and school officials.

Ask the principal, superintendent, or school board to issue a memorandum declaring Screen-Free Week in the school or district.

### Libraries

Visit or call your local public libraries to arrange a meeting with the head librarian or children's librarian. With the library staff, develop a schedule of special events during the Screen-Free Week, such as workshops, storytelling or readings. Provide the staff with copies of pledge cards, fact sheets, information about screens and literacy, suggestions for screen-free activities, and posters. Suggest that they distribute and create a special display of books highlighting alternative activities and the problems of excessive screen time, hang flyers to promote the Week, and offer pledge cards for participants.

### Religious Organizations

Religious organizations are often active participants in Screen-Free Week because commercialism and much of the content of screen media undermines spiritual values. Ask spiritual and religious leaders to help spread the word about Screen-Free Week to incorporate the theme of a "Screen Fast" into their sermons or readings. Encourage churches, synagogues, mosques and other congregations to promote Screen-Free Week to their members and organize activities. Publish an announcement in the organization's newsletters, calendar, and listserv. Display posters and make fact sheets available to the community. Because religious organizations usually meet only once or twice a week, stress the importance of publicizing Screen-Free Week early and often.

Some years, Screen-Free week falls during religious holidays. The coming together of family and community during these important holidays can be a wonderful springboard for screen-free activities. If, however, you would prefer not to celebrate Screen-Free Week during the holidays, remember that any week you choose can be screen-free!

## TEACHERS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"I have been running this program at our school for the last four years. I love doing it. The kids learn that there is so much more to life than 'the box.'"*

– DEBBIE ILLING  
HARRISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
CINCINNATI, OH

### Pediatricians and Other Health Professionals

Members of the medical and mental health communities are often acutely aware of the health problems associated with excessive screen time. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Medical Association, and American Academy of Family Physicians have all endorsed or supported Screen-Free Week over the years.

- **Ask a pediatrician and other local health professionals to serve on your organizing committee. Provide them with fact sheets to distribute to colleagues, and urge them to encourage colleagues to distribute pledge cards and tips on screen time to patients. Ask them to hang Screen-Free Week posters or flyers in their waiting room.**
- **Many medical waiting rooms have a TV set. Encourage pediatricians' offices to follow the AAP recommendation of limiting screen media in waiting rooms. Suggest that all of your healthcare partners make their waiting areas**

screen-free by permanently removing TVs from their offices and instead providing books, magazines, and/or basic art or building materials. (The Kenmore location of one HMO in Boston, Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates, replaced its TV screen with an aquarium.)

- Suggest that health centers arrange a presentation for staff and/or parents about the effects of screen media on children.
- Urge pediatricians and health professionals to incorporate a family media history into sessions with patients and to encourage parents to follow the AAP recommendations of no screen time for children under two and limited screen time for older kids.

### Environmental Groups

Call local chapters of the Sierra Club, Audubon Society or other environmental groups. Ask them to sponsor special hikes, nature walks and clean-ups. Screen-Free Week falls during Earth Day this year, so they may already have planned events that can be incorporated into your Week. Share the page in this Guide about the links between screen time, materialism, and the environment.

### Bookstores and Other Businesses

Call or meet with managers of bookstores, skating rinks, sporting goods stores, gyms, recreational centers, dance/martial arts studios, coffee shops, restaurants, theaters and art galleries. Ask them to support the local Screen-Free Week by offering discounts on special activities for those holding Screen-Free Week pledge cards. Also, be sure to ask any businesses that have televisions to turn them off for the week. As with libraries, request that bookstores offer story hours and create a special display of books or items that highlight the screen time problem. Give them a poster to hang and copies of fact sheets and articles to distribute.

### Museums and Cultural Institutions

Museums make terrific partners for Screen-Free Week. Each museum could offer special activities such as tours or lectures for kids or nature walks as part of the Week's official events. Meet with the director of education or community outreach and see if she/he would like to serve on the local Screen-Free Week Committee.

### Colleges and Universities

All colleges and universities have organizations, clubs and residence halls that may be enthusiastic participants in Screen-Free Week. Consider staging the event as a "dorm challenge." If the school has a campus radio station, ask the program manager to help publicize the event. Contact the campus newspaper and ask them to run a public service announcement (PSA). Organizers could also set up a table with literature and pledge cards in a central lobby or dining hall the week before and during Screen-Free Week.

## TEACHERS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"It encourages parents to limit media in their homes, so children can tap into their creativity and free play in their own way, not a commercial way television broadcasters promote."*

- FIRST GRADE TEACHER  
ANNSAGARIN  
GREAT BARRINGTON, MA

# SECTION 3.

## SPREADING THE WORD

Whether it's a letter to your local paper or posts to your Facebook page, publicizing your Screen-Free Week activities serves two important purposes. It lets a broader circle of people know what you are doing, and it helps a larger audience understand the importance of reducing children's screen time. And even if you've never done media outreach, with a little preparation you can help educate reporters and their readers about why you – and millions of others around the country – are going Screen-Free!

In this section, you will find:

- **Tips for reaching out to parents and a sample parent letter.**
- **Tips for using social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to promote your activities.**
- **Tips for media outreach and a sample press release.**
- **Tips for writing a letter to the editor.**

# HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR OWN SCREEN-FREE WEEK

## Parent Outreach

The first and most important group to reach out to is parents of children who are potential participants in Screen-Free Week. You'll want to explain what Screen-Free Week is, and why screen-free time is so important. If you're a teacher, school librarian, or an administrator, you'll want to send out a permission slip for parents to return. We've included a sample parent letter at the end of this section for you to reproduce; the letter is also available online as a Word document at [www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm) so you can easily edit the letter to fit your needs.

## School Newsletters

If your Screen-Free Week is school-based, you'll definitely want to include information about the week in your newsletter. Many libraries have newsletters as well. Newsletter articles are a great way to remind parents about Screen-Free Week, suggest and promote screen-free activities, and find volunteers to help you plan and execute events during the week.

## Social Networks

Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are great places to promote Screen-Free Week. You can use social networks to let others know that you're going screen-free, share strategies and tips for reducing screen time, and plan events during the week. (You'll want to be sure to do all your Facebooking and Tweeting before Screen-Free Week starts, since you'll be going screen-free that week.)

Here are some suggestions for using Facebook to promote Screen-Free Week.

- **Become a fan of national Screen-Free Week on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/screenfreeweek](http://www.facebook.com/screenfreeweek).** Here you can communicate with Screen-Free Week staff as well as other Screen-Free Week organizers. Share your plans for Screen-Free Week and learn what others around the country are doing.
- **Create your own fan page for your Screen-Free Week** (feel free to use or adapt our logo), and use it to organize events and activities and get others involved. Encourage parents, colleagues and other potential participants to "like" your page and become fans. Enlist others to help you spread the word by inviting them to be co-administrators of the page.
- **If you're holding special events during the week** (e.g. a treasure hunt, a read-a-thon at the library), create an event page for each one. Be sure to invite your Facebook friends and post the event links on your Screen-Free Week fan page. Ask your fans to RSVP and "share" the events with their friends.
- **Create a Facebook group and invite other Screen-Free Week organizers and participants in your area to join so you can trade ideas and coordinate activities on a local level.**

If you're on Twitter, let your followers know that you're going Screen-Free. You may want to use the hashtag #screenfreeweek so other Screen-Free Week organizers can follow your tweets.

## Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor of your local newspaper are a great way to raise awareness about Screen-Free Week. Most large, metropolitan-area newspapers generally only print letters that relate to a recent story that the paper has run, so try to link your letter to a current event. Your letter about Screen-Free Week could be in response to a story about children and the media, obesity, or getting kids out in nature. (“Your recent story highlighting the childhood obesity epidemic makes clear that kids today spend too much time watching television and playing video games. That’s why the students at Jonesville Elementary School will be celebrating Screen-Free Week...”)

All letters should be brief (less than 250 words) and include your name, address, and phone number and any relevant affiliations. Students writing a letter to the editor may wish to put their age or grade.

## Press Release and Follow-up

The best way to generate media coverage of your Screen-Free Week is by drafting a press release and sending it to local media outlets by fax or email. News stories about the week are most likely to run on Monday or Tuesday of Screen-Free Week, so you’ll want to make sure to draft and distribute your press release well in advance. We have included a sample press release at the end of this section. It is also available online as a Word document at [www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm) so you can easily edit it to fit your needs.

You’ll want to give your press release a strong title that makes clear what your release is about. (For example, “Jonesville students going screen-free to reclaim leisure time, boost physical activity.”) In addition, your press release should answer the following questions:

- **Who is promoting Screen-Free Week in the community?**
- **What is Screen-Free Week?**
- **Why is it important to go Screen-Free?**

- **When does Screen-Free Week take place?**
- **Where is Screen-Free Week taking place (libraries, schools, etc. . .)?**

Your release should include a phone number and the name of the contact person whom reporters may call for more information.

Send the press release to both the assignment desks and metro news editors of local newspapers and radio stations. Make follow-up phone calls to recipients of the release to encourage them to cover the story. When pitching your story to members of the media, it’s helpful to keep the following in mind:

- **Let the reporter know the purpose of your call. Do you want the reporter to write a story? Meet with you? Attend an event during Screen-Free Week?**
- **Be concise. Make your pitch clearly in no more than three sentences.**
- **Be prepared and helpful. Offer to send the fact sheet on screen time and children and other resources from your Organizer’s Kit. If there are experts on children or media working with you, offer to put the reporter in touch with them. If there are schoolchildren who are willing – and have their parents permission – to talk to the media, let the reporter know that as well.**
- **Be honest. If you’re asked something you aren’t sure of, don’t guess. Instead, refer the person to the Screen-Free Week website ([www.screenfree.org](http://www.screenfree.org)) or suggest he or she call the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood at (617) 896-9368.**

**TELL THE  
WORLD YOU’RE  
GOING SCREEN-FREE!**

List your Screen-Free Week at:

**[WWW.SCREENFREE.ORG](http://WWW.SCREENFREE.ORG)**

# SAMPLE PARENT LETTER & PERMISSION SLIP

Dear Parent,

On \_\_\_\_\_, your child's class will be participating in Screen-Free Week. Screen-Free Week is a nationwide event sponsored by Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood and celebrated by schools, families, and other civic and community groups each year. During Screen-Free Week, millions of children and adults pledge to spend seven days screen-free. Instead of watching TV or playing video games, they tend to read, play, think, create, get physically active, and spend more time with friends and family.

Studies show that children who watch less TV are more likely to read well and to be physically fit. Turning off screens also allows for more family time. Each week, American children spend more time in front of a screen than they do in school! Screen-Free Week is a great way to jump-start our kids into more reading, learning, and active play. It's also a lot of fun!

Many parents choose to join their children in forgoing screen-based entertainment all week long and engaging in other fun activities. This kind of support is the best thing you can do to ensure that your child will have a successful and beneficial experience.

Please ask me if you would like more information about the effects of excessive screen time for children and about Screen-Free Week. You can also learn more by visiting [www.screenfree.org](http://www.screenfree.org). Please return the permission slip below to let me know if your child will be participating.

Sincerely,

---

## Permission Slip Screen-Free Week

Student's Name:

Teacher's Name:

Please check the appropriate box(es):

\_\_\_ Our whole family will participate in Screen-Free Week, scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_ Let me know how I can support the group effort!

\_\_\_ Just our child will be participating. We will help him/her complete the program.

\_\_\_ Thanks, but we will not participate this year.

# SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

*Sample press release is available online at  
[www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm)  
 so you can customize it for your Screen-Free Week.*

Insert Today's Date

Contact: (Your name, phone # and email)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Name of your school, organization, etc.)

Going Screen-Free (dates)!

Millions Will Participate in Annual Turnoff

(NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL, ORGANIZATION, ETC.) will join thousands of schools, libraries, and community groups nationwide in a coordinated effort to encourage millions of Americans to turn off televisions, computers, and video games for seven days and turn on the world around them. Screen-Free Week is a chance for children to read, play, think, create, be more physically active, and to spend more time with friends and family.

"Screen-Free Week is a much needed respite from the screen media dominating the lives of so many children" said (INSERT YOUR NAME). "Now, more than ever, it's imperative that we help children discover the joys of life beyond screens."

On average, preschool children spend over four and a half hours a day consuming screen media, while older children spend over seven hours a day including multitasking. Excessive screen time is linked to a number of problems for children, including childhood obesity, poor school performance, and problems with attention span.

Screen-Free Week (formerly TV-Turnoff) is coordinated by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, a national advocacy organization devoted to reducing the impact of commercialism on children. Since the Week's founding in 1994, it has been celebrated by millions of children and their families worldwide. For more information, visit [www.screenfree.org](http://www.screenfree.org).



# SECTION 4.

## PREPARING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOR A GREAT SCREEN-FREE WEEK

**A** week without screens may seem strange or even scary to the children and families you're trying to reach. It's important to help them get ready for the week ahead of time. Some families may embrace the week happily and won't need much support. But many will. So share information with parents about why reducing screen time is so important. In schools, engage your classroom and school community in activities that will help them commit to the week. What you do will vary depending on the age of your students and how many other classrooms are involved.

We've organized our suggested activities by grade level – preschool and early elementary school, older elementary school, and middle school – but many of these activities may work across different age groups. Feel free to mix and match.

Media literacy activities are an important tool, especially for preparing upper-elementary and middle school kids. Helping students identify and reflect on the ways they are affected by media is a good way to help them embrace the idea of a week without screen entertainment.

Today, as more states make use of standardized testing, teachers may have less discretionary time with students. One solution is to brainstorm with other teachers about how to incorporate screen-free facts, and preparation for going screen-free, into math, reading, and other academic lessons.

We've also included reproducible pledge cards to help get students to commit to going screen-free.

In this section you will find:

- **Suggestions for preparation with preschool and early elementary school children.**
- **Suggestions for preparation with older elementary school children.**
- **Activities for middle school children.**
- **Ad tracking chart.\***
- **A family guide to a great Screen Free Week.**
- **Pledge cards for students.\***

**\*Suggested handout**

# PREPARING FOR THE WEEK: PRESCHOOL AND EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**W**hen our friend Geralyn Bywater McLaughlin, founder of Empowered by Play, was K-1 teacher, she organized Screen-Free Week every year. Here are her suggestions for getting kids excited about the week:

Start by brainstorming with kids what they can do instead of watching TV or playing video games or on the computer. Write down the suggestions.

- **Ask each child to write or draw about one screen-free activity.**
- **Make a class book of the pictures to share with other classes.**
- **Hang a big list of screen-free activities outside your classroom.**

The pledge cards (see page 44 of the Organizer's Kit) are a great way to get younger kids excited about the week.

Read aloud the book *Fix-It*, by David McPhail. It's about a family of bears whose TV breaks.

Read *Gilberto and the Wind* by Marie Hall Ets. It is full of outdoor imaginative play ideas and can help kids who are really plugged in to see the fun of going outside.

At school assemblies, have teachers perform skits, sing songs (e.g. "Instead of Watching my TV" by Brady Rymer), or read poems (e.g. Shel Silverstein's "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set") about turning off screens.

Before Screen-Free Week begins, have a family game night at school to help families get excited about playing games during the Week.

Send home newsletters to parents with a countdown to Screen-Free Week. Include suggestions for

things they can do at home and ideas for local activities families can participate in.

Let children know you'll be celebrating with a party and/or assembly after Screen-Free Week is over!



# “PRIME TIME” MEDIA LITERACY ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

**A**lexis Ladd, from Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children’s Entertainment ([www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org)) teaches media literacy. She’s shared these suggestions for helping kids get ready for Screen-Free Week.

Before the big week arrives, spend some time with your elementary school-age children, or students, to help them learn more about who’s behind what’s on the screens they watch. These activities can lead to engaging and important discussions with your kids. Please feel free to modify these ideas and let us know what worked for you.

## LESSON 1: Is it a Need or a Want?

Make a quick list of the things that you need to survive. Now, make a list of the things that you want. Write down a few ideas about how you first found out about the items on your “want” list.

Over one day, count how many ads you see on the screens that you’re watching. How many of these ads are trying to get you to buy things that you really need?

Have a chat:

- **Why is it that after you see some advertisements, you start wanting whatever is being sold? Maybe it took a few times seeing the same ad, or maybe your friends started talking about it, but what was it that got all of you interested in the first place?**
- **Of the commercials that you see every day, how many of them are trying to get you to buy things that you really need?**
- **Which ads are better at grabbing your**

**attention? What are the people who made those ads doing to get you to buy their product?**

“Languages of persuasion” are ways that ads get you to want to buy what is being sold in advertisements. You can read more about them with your parents at [www.nmmlp.org/media-literacy/language\\_persuasion.html](http://www.nmmlp.org/media-literacy/language_persuasion.html). Try and make up a few of your own languages of persuasion.

*Vocabulary words:*

**Needs:** Items necessary for survival.

**Wants:** Items that may make your life easier, but you can live without.

## KIDS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*“When I power down  
and dream big...I  
can touch the sky. I  
blink again and fly up  
through the sky with  
wings attached to my  
back.”*

– MITCHELL HARRISON,  
5TH GRADER  
DES MOINES, WA

## LESSON 2: Be a Detective

You've been asked to solve the mystery of how many ads are hidden inside television programs and computer games. The next time you're watching a TV show, or playing a game on the computer, watch carefully. Are there products with labels facing the camera? Are the actresses and actors using products or eating things in a way that directs you to notice what they are? Count how many hidden ads there are inside the program or game and talk about what you noticed.

## LESSON 3: What Happens to All the Stuff We Don't Want Anymore?

Have you ever bought something that you really wanted and then were disappointed when you got it home? Write a story or draw a picture that tells what happened. Was the item different from what you saw in the ad, or did it break quickly? What do

you think happens to all the stuff that people don't want anymore?

Do some research to find out what happens to all of that trash. You can start by watching Annie Leonard's "The Story of Stuff" at [www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com). Check out her stories about bottled water and other things, too. Take a field trip to your local dump or transfer station. You can learn a lot about what people throw away and what happens to it. Write a story or draw a picture that tells how all the stuff that people don't want any more is affecting the environment.

### *Vocabulary words*

**Environment:** Our natural surroundings, which affect how people, plants and animals live.

**Sustainability:** Living within natural limitations; not using things up before they have time to replenish themselves.



# “PRIME TIME” MEDIA LITERACY ACTIVITIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

**A**lexis Ladd, a media literacy specialist from Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children’s Entertainment (TRUCE), suggests these activities for older kids. Before Screen-Free Week arrives, spend some time with your students to learn more about who’s behind the screen. We hope that these activities will lead you to interesting discussions with your kids. Please feel free to modify these ideas and let us know what worked for you.

## LESSON 1: Be a Message Detective

You have just been assigned a special case. You have to figure out: what are the messages behind some of the ads that you’re seeing? Sometimes they’re really obvious, and other times they’re not.

Pick an advertisement. It may be easier to start with one that is on the computer and doesn’t go by as quickly as an ad on television. Often times ads are posted on YouTube if you’re looking for one in particular.

Answer the following questions to deconstruct the ad (modified from The New Mexico Media Literacy Project):

1. Who paid for it and why?
2. Who is being targeted? (Specifically look to see if and how the following groups are targeted – age, ethnicity/race, socioeconomic status/class, and gender.)
3. Note what you’re seeing and hearing – the images, dialogue, music, etc. Now explain what messages are being presented. (For example, how are the women and the men presented? What is the ad trying to get us to believe? What values are being expressed?)

4. What tools of persuasion are being used to attract your attention? (Go to [www.nmmplp.org/media\\_literacy/language\\_persuasion.html](http://www.nmmplp.org/media_literacy/language_persuasion.html) for a complete list of tools of persuasion.)

5. How is this a healthy or unhealthy media example? Why?

6. What stories are not being told? (Consider the environmental impact of what is being sold; are any stereotypes reinforced?)

Once you deconstruct several ads, start applying these questions to television programs, music videos, video games, and other programming. What trends are you finding?

### Vocabulary words:

**Stereotype:** When assumptions are applied to people, often based on oversimplified opinions, which can be used by a dominant group to maintain power.

**Values:** Beliefs that provide direction to live by.

## LESSON 2: Datahead

Take a minute or two to estimate and then write down how many hours you spend in front of a screen and how many ads you see in one day. Then, over one, two, or three days, count how many advertisements you actually see during your screen time. You can be creative and come up with your own tracking system using our example below, or you can use the blank Ad Tracking chart in this section. Leave a copy next to the screens that aren’t portable and carry one with you for the rest of them. Don’t forget

to monitor the number of hours of screen time you spent during each day.

Total the number of hours you were in front of a screen and then total the number of minutes for the length of the ads. You'll need to convert your hours into minutes or vice versa. Now calculate the percentage of time you spent looking at ads by dividing the advertising time by the screen time.

Have a chat:

- What did you discover?
- What did you notice about how many commercials are shown during a 30-minute television program and a one hour program?
- Where did you see the most ads?

- Where did you find ads that you didn't expect to see them?
- What did the ads do to get your attention?

Vocabulary words:

**Fill:** The programming used to keep people watching television that is placed in between the commercials.

**Product placement:** When products are put into the set and/or included in the script so viewers see the characters or avatars using them and/or talking about them. This applies to all screen programming, from television to video games. Companies usually pay for their products to be featured.

# AD TRACKING

<b>Name</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>What kind of ad?</b>	<b>What was it for?</b>	<b>Where did you see it?</b>	<b>How long was it?</b>
TV Commercial	Shampoo	Glee	30 sec.
Facebook Ad	clothes	MY Facebook Page	2 minutes
<b>Total Ad Time</b>			
<b>Total Screen Time</b>			

# AD TRACKING

<b>Name</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>What kind of ad?</b>	<b>What was it for?</b>	<b>Where did you see it?</b>	<b>How long was it?</b>

**Total  
Ad Time**

**Total  
Screen Time**



### LESSON 3: What's Your Reality?

Take a moment to write down your own reality. What are the things in your life that are important to you? What makes you happy and why? What do you think will be important to you in a few years? What's important to your friends? Now compare your thoughts to "reality" television programming. Are there any similarities?

Read the following article and discuss the different perspectives. You may want to "chunk" the reading depending on reading levels, focusing on different sections over a few weeks.

[www.realitybitesbackbook.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/CQResearcher\\_RealityTV.pdf](http://www.realitybitesbackbook.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/CQResearcher_RealityTV.pdf)

Reality Bites Back is a book written by Jennifer Posner that focuses on reality TV. Here's a fun way to analyze reality TV that Jennifer created using a Mad Lib format. You can also submit your version to her website at [www.RealityBitesBackBook.com](http://www.RealityBitesBackBook.com) if you want to share it with others.

Here's how:

1. Record your favorite reality show.
2. Transcribe a particularly outrageous, regressive, offensive, or amusing monologue, outburst, argument, or conversation, making very sure that your

transcript is word-for-word accurate.

3. Remove key parts of speech, leave blank spots, and label them with the parts of speech required to fill in the blank.

4. Have a family member complete the Mad Lib and compare the transcript with your own. Are they far off? Discuss the content of the original script. What stereotypes, if any, are presented?

5. If you want to share your Mad Lib with others, title your ready-to-play Mad Lib, and submit it to [www.RealityBitesBackBook.com](http://www.RealityBitesBackBook.com) along with the original transcript on which it was based.

#### Vocabulary words:

**Stereotype:** When assumptions are applied to people, often based on oversimplified opinions, which can be used by a dominant group to maintain power.

**Screen time critical thinking:** Being aware of the messages, stereotypes, and ways that companies are trying to sell their products while watching TV, playing video games, using a social network, or spending any time in front of a screen.

## TEACHERS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"It gives you a whole different perspective on life. . . The parents really support us. It's amazing how many kids have gotten on board."*

- PRINCIPAL THERESA DOVI  
P.S. 102, BROOKLYN, NY

# THE FAMILY GUIDE TO A GREAT SCREEN-FREE WEEK

- It's helpful if everyone in your family makes a commitment to try to make Screen-Free Week work for all of you. If adults are fully committed, children feel everyone is sharing the experience and is taking it seriously.

- Decide what “screen-free” means for your family. Does it include email and text messaging? Are you still going to Skype with family members in another state or country? Will the older kids have homework to do on a computer? There's no “right” way to do this, but make sure that you're all clear about what your commitment will be.

- Make plans together for the week. Start planning in early April (or sooner) so that by the time Screen-Free Week rolls around, everything is in place and ready to go. Make sure that everyone (who can) has a specific responsibility and an equal vote on key decisions.

- Set a calendar of activities and events for the week. One goal of Screen-Free Week is to allow kids unstructured time to generate their own screen-free play and activities. But, especially if this is your first time participating as a family, you'll want to make sure that you are not left twiddling your thumbs. It is most important to schedule some family activities in the early part of the week so that everyone can adjust to being screen-free. Play board games or cards together at night, make a family collage, work on individual art projects, or go on a nighttime walk together. Use “101 Screen-Free Activities” (see page 46) as a springboard. Make a list of all the businesses and organizations in your community that offer activities that your family would enjoy. Do you have a local bookstore? Will they be hosting a reading that

week? What about an event at the local library or museum, historic center or school? You don't have to recreate the wheel; take advantage of all your community has to offer!

- Reclaim the family meal as a time for talking together and/or sharing stories. Plan your meals ahead of time and include the entire family (when possible) in the preparation and presentation of the meal. Get creative with napkin folding. Are you going to use candles one night to make that dinner special? Think of different ways to spice up the evening...maybe a discussion about a book everyone in the family has agreed to read?

- Include friends, relatives and neighbors in what you are doing, even if for just one day or evening. Get together with other families at a park, play organized games or just hang out. Is there a “toy library” in your community? If so, borrow games for the week. Decks of cards are inexpensive and can offer endless opportunities for fun. Find the rules of card games you remember from your childhood online before the week begins and print them out or find a book of card game rules from the library.

- At the end of the week, talk about how you feel, what all of you have accomplished, and what aspects of the week you would like to keep going. Is it worth it to make one night a week screen-free, with meals together and a game following dinner instead? Would it be a good idea to get together with extended family or friends one day or evening a week and do something different? The key is to find out how everyone feels, and share the pluses and minuses—both to figure out how to make Screen-Free Week even better next year and to reduce your dependence on screens all year round.

# PLEDGE CARD

I, \_\_\_\_\_,  
pledge that during the week of \_\_\_\_\_,  
I will: **1)** watch no TV or DVDs, play no video  
games, and only use the computer if it's required  
for a homework assignment; **2)** encourage my  
friends and family to go screen-free; **3)** explore new  
screen-free activities; and **4)** HAVE FUN!

Instead of spending time with screens, I will:

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Presented by Campaign for a  
Commercial-Free Childhood  
[www.screenfree.org](http://www.screenfree.org)

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# SECTION 5.

## SCREEN-FREE WEEK IS HERE!

Finally, after your planning, outreach, and preparation, Screen-Free Week has arrived! It's time for you, and the children and families participating, to relax and enjoy the myriad fun, exciting, and rewarding riches a screen-free world has to offer.

We've included a page for kids to draw or write about their favorite screen-free activity from the week. Mail, email or fax them to us for a chance to be published on our web site. And once the week has ended, don't forget to celebrate your accomplishments!

In this section you will find:

- **Screen-Free Activities\***
- **Screen-Free Activity Log\***
- **Your Favorite Screen-Free Activity\***
- **Certificate of Achievement\***
- **Tips for Celebrating**

**\*Suggested handout**

# 101 SCREEN-FREE ACTIVITIES

## At Home

1. Listen to the radio.
2. Write an article or story.
3. Paint a picture, a mural or a room.
4. Write to the President, your Representative, or Senators.
5. Read a book.  
Read to someone else.
6. Learn to change the oil or tire on a car.  
Fix something.
7. Write a letter to a friend or relative.
8. Make cookies, bread or jam and share with a neighbor.
9. Read magazines or newspapers. Swap them with friends.
10. Go through your closets and donate items to Goodwill, the Salvation Army, or a local rummage sale. Have a garage sale.
11. Start a diary/journal.
12. Play cards.
13. Make crafts to give as gifts. Try a new craft.
14. Do a crossword puzzle or play Sudoku.
15. Save money: cancel your cable TV!
16. Learn about a different culture. Have an international dinner.
17. Teach a child some of your favorite childhood games.
18. Study sign language.
19. Write a letter to your favorite author.
20. Cook dinner with friends or family.
21. Make cards for holidays or birthdays.
22. Play chess, bridge, or checkers.
23. Play charades.
24. Have a cup of coffee and a conversation.
25. Repair or refinish a piece of furniture.
26. Make a wooden flower box.
27. Wake up early and make pancakes.
28. Read a favorite poem.  
Read poems by poets new to you.

## Outdoors

29. Learn about native trees and flowers in your area.
30. Plan a picnic or barbecue.
31. Go bird watching. Learn the names of local birds.
32. Walk the dog.  
Wash the dog.
33. Plant a garden. Work in your garden.
34. Take a nature hike.
35. Feed fish or birds.
36. Watch the night sky through binoculars and identify different constellations.  
Observe the moon.
37. Learn to use a compass.
38. Take photographs and then organize them into an album.
39. Do yard work.
40. Go camping.
41. Take an early morning walk.
42. Climb a tree.
43. Watch a sunset; watch the sunrise with a friend.

## Around Town

44. Attend a community concert. Listen to a local band.
45. Visit the library. Borrow some books.
46. Visit a local bookstore.
47. Visit the zoo.
48. Visit the countryside or town. Travel by bus or train.
49. Attend a religious service.
50. Walk to work or school.
51. Attend a live sports event.
52. Look for treasures at a yard sale.
53. Try out for a play. Attend a play.
54. Collect recycling and drop it off at a recycling center.
55. Learn to play a musical instrument.
56. Go to a museum.

## On the Move

57. Go roller skating or ice skating.
58. Go swimming. Join a community swim team.
59. Start a community group that walks, runs or bikes.
60. Organize a game of touch football, baseball, or softball in the local park.
61. Go for a bicycle ride.
62. Learn yoga.
63. Play soccer, softball or volleyball.

64. Play Frisbee.
65. Workout.
66. Go dancing. Take a dance class.

## In Your Community

67. Organize a community clean-up or volunteer for charity.
68. Become a tutor.
69. Join a choir. Sing!
70. Start a bowling team.
71. Visit and get to know your neighbors.
72. Start a fiction or public policy book group.

## With the Kids

73. Make paper bag costumes and have a parade.
74. Design a poster for Screen-Free Week.
75. Discover your community center or local park activities.
76. Blow bubbles.
77. Draw family portraits.
78. Build a fort in the living room and camp out.
79. Research your family history. Make a family tree.
80. Invent a new game and teach it to your friends.
81. Make a sign to tape across the TV during Screen-Free Week.
82. Play hopscotch, hide & seek, or freeze-tag.

83. Organize a neighborhood scavenger hunt.
84. Play board games with family and friends.
85. Clean up or redecorate your room.
86. Make puppets out of old socks and have a puppet show.
87. Write a play with friends. Perform it at a nursing home.
88. Construct a kite. Fly it.
89. Go on a family trip or historical excursion.
90. If it's snowing, go sledding or make a snowman.
91. Create a collage out of old magazine pictures.
92. Shoot hoops with friends. Play a round of H.O.R.S.E.
93. Make a friendship bracelet.
94. Create a cookbook with all your favorite recipes.
95. Tell stories around a campfire.
96. Plan a slumber party.
97. Bake cakes or cookies and invite friends for a tea party.
98. Construct a miniature boat and float it on water.
99. Write a letter to your grandparents. Make a special card.
100. Create sidewalk art with chalk.
101. Everyone! Have a huge party to celebrate a Screen-Free Week!

# MORE SCREEN-FREE IDEAS FOR HOME AND SCHOOL

*Many of these activities can be adapted for older or younger children*

## Make Your Own Playdough:

### PLAYDOUGH RECIPE

1 cup flour

1 tbsp. oil

1 cup water

1/2 cup salt

2 tsp. cream of tartar

food coloring

- Mix ingredients in saucepan.
- Cook on low heat. Stir constantly until playdough pulls away from sides of pan.
- Scoop playdough onto wax paper. Knead until smooth.
- Store in airtight container.

**Block Building Party:** Host a block party and build with your friends using blocks, boxes, or other materials. You can even choose a theme for everyone to contribute to: build a city, an amusement park, an airport, etc...

**Marching Band:** Use recycled materials to make your own drums, shakers, horns and more. Have a parade around your house, yard or neighborhood.

**Put on a Play:** Act out your favorite folk and fairy tales, or make up stories of your own to present.

**Have a Puppet Show:** Make sock puppets, finger puppets or stick puppets and create your own puppet show. Invite friends to help you or to be your audience for a performance.

**Start a Garden:** Plant seeds to start indoors if it is too cold to plant outside where you live.

**Paint the Town:** Fun for all ages! Use Sidewalk Chalk to write Screen-Free Week messages on your sidewalk, play hopscotch, or just draw to your heart's content.

**Enjoy Free Books:** Visit your public library and stock up on books (remember, many libraries also have free museum passes available for loan). Or, host a book swap party for your friends.

**Be a Poet:** Celebrate poetry during Screen-Free Week by reading, writing, and reciting poetry with friends. Many people know Shel Silverstein and Jack Perlusky, but there are lots of great poetry books for kids. Talk to your local librarians and people at your local bookstore for suggestions. Make up your own poems and have a poetry slam.

**Host a Potluck:** Involve children in planning and making one course for a potluck dinner for your school or neighborhood. For variety, have an international potluck where guests bring food celebrating their heritage.

# BEST SCREEN-FREE WEEK PRACTICES

*A roundup of tried and true ideas from organizers around the country*

**T**here are at least as many fun things to do during Screen-Free Week as there are people to think them up. Part of the fun is coming together as a community. There are activities you can design and pull together at the last minute, or events that you can plan and carry out all year long. Whichever course you take, you'll build relationships with other area teachers, parents, children, business community members and local officials as you explore the world beyond the screen!

The following are highlights from activities undertaken over the years when the week was just focused on television. TV is still the primary screen medium for children, so many of these will work as is. Others can be expanded to include video games, computers, and other screen media as well.

## **Give Teachers a Real Break**

For several years, Debbie Brunson, from Arkansas, organized Family Walk Night at a local park with walking trails. To boost participation from teachers, Debbie challenged classes to generate a list of alternatives to watching TV. The class with the longest list would win an hour with Debbie while the teacher would enjoy a one-hour break from the classroom. In addition, every teacher who attended Family Walk Night with at least one student from his or her class won a 15-minute break from the classroom the following week!

The response was overwhelming, and three classes turned in lists of over 1,000 things to do instead of watching TV.

## **Bury the Tube**

Wendy Musson, Youth Fitness and Wellness Coordinator for the military community at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, planned for the Week in 2004 by requesting a representative from each of the eight elementary and middle schools she works with. She encouraged each of them to send an email about the Week to all of the teachers at his or her school. She also worked with Air Force Base facilities to offer special screen-free activities. Elementary school students kicked off the week by having a mock funeral for a television set as they lay it to rest in a hole in the ground. AFN, the military broadcasting network, showed the event on its news. Throughout the week, children participated in the base's special events, including a drawing in which students with a Screen-Free Week pledge card entered to win a new scooter! NOTE: If you bury a TV or other screen device, don't forget to dig it up afterwards and dispose of it in an environmentally responsible way.

## **Make Morning Announcements**

Helen Rebull, School Nurse at Congressional Schools of Virginia, asked students to make morning announcements each day about what they did

instead of watching TV the previous evening. The students were excited to help give announcements over the public address system.

### Proclaim Screen-Freedom

Students at Congressional Schools in Falls Church, Virginia, decided to write a proclamation celebrating Screen-Free Week in their school. Student leaders wrote the proclamation, and then presented it to the principal and head of school, asking for their signatures. The framed proclamation was displayed on an easel in the front lobby for the week, and the proclamation was read to the school in the morning announcements.

### Coordinate Media Coverage

In Colombia, Missouri, Lib Couper's students at Mill Creek, Parkade and New Haven elementary schools wrote up a list of ideas on how to spend time during Screen-Free Week. Their ideas were featured in a full-page spread with color photos in the *Columbia Daily Tribune*. They coordinated efforts with a local radio station (KFRU 1400) as well.

### Have a Scavenger Hunt

At Nikiski Elementary School in Kenai, Alaska, teacher Margaret Jones celebrated the school's first year doing Screen-Free Week by organizing a scavenger hunt, with prizes for the winners.

### Hold a Debate

St. Bartholomew Catholic School in Columbus, Indiana, started advertising its Screen-Free Week events a month in advance. A faculty committee decided to emphasize reading, physical activity, and a healthy lifestyle—all of which are displaced by excessive screen viewing—for their first Screen-Free Week. Highlights of their week included a reading contest with free book exchanges and liberal library hours; a school poster contest in which the winner's class got to play kickball with the school priest; and a competition where the class with the

most Screen-Free Week participation won an extra recess! In addition, middle school students held a debate on the pros and cons of watching TV, which was followed by class discussions on the topic.

### Expand Your Horizons

Sandi Araiza, of Longview, Texas, organized a community-wide Screen-Free Week. She recruited a local library, several businesses, three school districts, and a tae kwon do studio. The library hosted a pajama party with stations where people could learn to knit, do origami, or learn about quilt-making. College students led a sing-along, and the tae kwon do instructor got lots of kids involved.

### Throw a Party for Kids Who Participate

At Harrison Elementary School in Cincinnati, Ohio, organizers contacted the local newspapers to let them know all that they were planning for the Week. Organizers were offering incentives to help kids succeed, including gift certificates, savings bonds, and tickets to the Cincinnati Reds. The group also announced a sports night, a family game night, a take-a-walk night and a cook-together night. Teachers held a party for students who turned in their pledge cards and completed the week, which 200 kids attended. The event was a huge success, and a local newspaper reported on their activities!

## PARENTS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"We have played together more.  
Built things together. Just sat  
and talked together more. The  
talking is the greatest. This has  
been a wonderful week."*

— SHERYL



# ACTIVITY LOG

Keep a log of what you did during Screen-Free Week. At the end of each day, write down or draw what you did that day by yourself, with your friends, and with your family. You'll be amazed how much more you can do when you go Screen-Free!

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
By Myself	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
With Friends	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
With Family	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>



# ACTIVITY LOG

Keep a log of what you did during Screen-Free Week. At the end of each day, write down or draw what you did that day by yourself, with your friends, and with your family. You'll be amazed how much more you can do when you go Screen-Free!

**Saturday**

--

**By Myself**

--

**With Friends**

--

**With Family**

**Sunday**

--

--

--



**Draw a picture or write a story about the most fun thing you did during Screen-Free Week**

Mail or email your art or story to CCFC for a chance to be published on our website.  
SFW Art and Stories, CCFC, 89 South Street Suite 403, Boston, MA 02111 • Email: [ccfc@commercialfreedom.org](mailto:ccfc@commercialfreedom.org)



# CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

This certifies that

\_\_\_\_\_

**has successfully completed Screen-Free Week!**

Organizer's Signature

Year

Susan Linn  
Susan Linn, Director CCFC

**Screen-Free Week is a program of Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood**  
[www.screenfree.org](http://www.screenfree.org)

# CELEBRATE!

**W**hen Screen-Free Week is over, celebrate! It's important to acknowledge the commitment it takes to forgo screens for an entire week. Celebrating children's accomplishments will help motivate them to extend their screen time reduction beyond the week and increase participation in next year's Screen-Free Week!

Your Organizer's Kit includes a certificate of achievement for you to reproduce and give to students who successfully complete the week. Here are a few suggestions for other things you can do to celebrate.

If you participated in Screen-Free Week with your family, make a special meal, have a picnic, or take a day trip to a local park or amusement park together.

If you did Screen-Free Week in school:

- **Have a class party.**
- **Hold a school assembly and acknowledge all of the participants. (Don't forget to hand out the certificates of achievement!)**
- **Have a school-wide picnic or pot-luck.**
- **Prizes aren't essential, but they can be fun. Sometimes teachers hand out pencils or bookmarks to children who participate. Some schools offer the teacher of the class with the most participants a gift certificate to a local bookstore.**
- **Sometimes principals of schools that participate do silly things, like shave their heads, or dye their hair green.**

If you did Screen-Free Week in your library, have a celebration for kids who participated. Invite local storytellers or puppeteers to give a performance.

And don't forget to celebrate with your Screen-Free Week organizing committee:

- **Get together for tea, coffee, or a meal.**
- **Congratulate each other for doing a terrific job.**
- **Set a time to meet for planning for next year's Screen-Free Week!**



**TO CHECK THE DATE  
FOR NEXT YEAR'S  
SCREEN-FREE WEEK,  
VISIT OUR WEBSITE:**

**screen-  
free  
week**



**SCREENFREE.ORG**

# SECTION 6.

## MAKING IT LAST

**C**ongratulations! You've done it. You've had a great Screen-Free Week and you've demonstrated – to yourself, to your children, or to your community – how wonderfully liberating screen-free time can be. It's our hope Screen-Free Week will serve as a jumping-off point for reducing screen time all year round.

For over forty years, researchers have studied the impact of electronic media. Television has had the greatest impact to date, but recent research clearly shows that electronic devices, personal computers, and hand-held gadgets are significantly transforming us, our children, and our culture. The effect of a growing arsenal of personal electronics is that people are more materialistic, more solitary, and more sedentary. A lifestyle of all-screens-all-the-time is also, not surprisingly, having negative effects on our physical health, including the startling rise in obesity rates.

Electronic games, television and computers are designed to hold our attention—and they do. In fact they can be so engrossing, there is growing concern

around the world about screen addiction. Too much screen time isn't good for children or adults. As individuals, and as a society, we need to find alternatives to screens that get us both physically and mentally active, and more engaged with each other and in the world around us. If we work together—enlisting the support of friends and family, as well as the support of government, business, schools, nonprofits and other community partners—we can make sure that all kinds of screen-free alternatives are available to everyone.

In this section you will find:

- **Suggestions for reducing screen time at home,\* including information about screen-free family meals and the Family Green Hour.**
- **Suggestions for working with schools to reduce screen time, including an example of a highly successful school-based screen-reduction program.**
- **Suggestions for reducing screen time in your community.**

**\*Suggested handout**

# 10 STEPS TO SCREEN-PROOF OUR HOMES

**1** Rearrange the furniture. Turn your living room and family room into places for interaction, games and conversation, not mini-theaters. Put the screens away, cover them, or at least make them less central to the room and your life. Make sure that the furniture is facing away from the screen, so if you want to watch, you have to make an effort.

2. Make children's bedrooms—and your own—screen-free.

3. After Screen-Free Week, set consistent limits about children's screen time. Here are some categories of commitment that have worked for lots of other people:

- **No more than 2 hours per day of recreational screens 7 days per week. This includes all screens, so use of television, computer and video games has to be planned beforehand, since time can pass very quickly.**
- **No more than 2 hours per day on weekends of recreational screens and only an hour per day during the work/school week.**
- **No more than 2 hours per day on weekends and no recreational screens during the school/work week.**

The above categories are not set in stone; the key is to find the balance that works for you and your family. And remember, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for babies and toddlers under age 2.

4. Set limits on your own screen time. The example you set is as important as your rules.

5. Keep the remote in a drawer.

6. Institute screen-free (and phone-free) meals. Talk, laugh, tell stories, and enjoy your food. (For more, see Family Meals: Let's Bring Them Back in this section.)

7. Try not to rely on screens as a babysitter.

8. Involve children in household chores, projects, and meal preparation.

9. Carve out a block of screen-free time for the whole family every day (see, for example, the Family Green Hour in this section).

10. Designate at least one day each week as Family Screen-Free Day. Have fun with any or all of the activities described in Section Five—or think up your own!



# FAMILY MEALS: LET'S BRING THEM BACK

**W**e can't overstate the importance of screen-free family meals. Eating together and engaging in conversation builds strong family bonds. It's an opportunity to help kids get in the habit of reflecting on their day, sharing stories, telling jokes, and talking about what's going on in the world. It's often during family meal conversations that family stories and family history get passed down from generation to generation.

Family meals can ensure healthier eating,<sup>1</sup> especially when they are screen-free.<sup>2</sup> They are linked to healthier behavior and closer child-parent bonds, particularly among adolescents.<sup>3</sup> The more family meals teenagers have, the less likely it is that they will engage in substance abuse and other anti-social behaviors.<sup>4</sup> The meals also contribute to a closer, more honest, and more authentic bond between parents and kids. Three out of four teenagers report that they talk to their parents about what's going on in their life during family meals.<sup>5</sup> And eight out of ten parents report that they find out more about what's going on in their children's lives when they eat together.<sup>6</sup>

It's easier to maintain family meals throughout adolescence when they are an enjoyable tradition early on. If, however, you've drifted away from family meals and want to embrace them again, try to plan ahead so that eating together is not overly stressful for anyone. For single parent families, or when two parents are in the workplace, meal preparation, and cleaning up afterwards, can feel burdensome. It makes a big difference if everyone—even the youngest members—has a role to play. Distribute tasks like meal preparation, serving, setting and clearing the table, and washing dishes among all members of the family. Or work together—it's more fun that way. Try to agree on the menu beforehand, so that there's no tension about likes and dislikes of the food being served. For many families these days, work and school schedules make it impossible to eat together every day. If you can only manage to do it one, two, or three nights per week, aim for the same day(s) of the week and at the same times. Creating a regular schedule will make it easier to turn family meals into a lasting tradition.

And remember—concentrate on the food and each other. Avoid electronic distractions!

1. Woodruff, S. J., et al. (2010), Healthy eating index-C is positively associated with family dinner frequency among students in grades 6-8 from Southern Ontario, Canada. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 64(5), pp. 454-460.
2. Fitzpatrick, E. et al., (2007). Positive effects of family dinner are undone by television viewing *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 107, pp. 666-671.
3. Survey from the Center for Alcohol and Substance Abuse (2010). The Importance of Family Dinners IV. New York: Columbia University; Sen, B. (2010). The relationship between frequency of family dinner and adolescent problem behaviors after adjusting for other family characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence*, 33(1), pp. 187-196.
4. Ibid.
5. Sen, B. (2010). The relationship between frequency of family dinner and adolescent problem behaviors after adjusting for other family characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence*, 33(1), pp. 187-196.
6. Ibid.

# GREEN HOUR

*Something to do during Screen-Free Week and ever after!*

**T**he National Wildlife Federation recommends that you make time every day for a Family “Green Hour,” a daily dose of unstructured play and discovery in the outdoors.

Visit [www.greenhour.org](http://www.greenhour.org) for weekly activities, tips, and inspiration to help you trade screen time for green time! Once there, you can type in your zip code to find new parks, paths, and green spaces, as well as events in your community by using the Nature Find tool. You can also find specific activities on the site, such as stargazing and exploring the night sky.

Getting outside into nature is good for all of us and is one of the best ways to reduce stress and bring families together. Find a local park or playground, a garden or stream, and make it your special place. Try putting up a birdfeeder and watching for visitors. Start a nature journal, build a fort or go on an adventure hike. You won’t regret making Green Hour a daily family activity.

**KIDS**  **SCREEN-FREE WEEK**

*“I can make a change. I can change the world or I can change me...”*

– GRACE OH

PARKSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
DES MOINES, WA



# WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL TO REDUCE SCREEN TIME

**Step One:** Find other parents, teachers and administrators who are concerned about excessive screen time.

**Step Two:** Persuade your school, or your local school board, to make screen-time reduction (and Screen-Free Week) a plank in your school system's official wellness plan, and encourage all schools in your district to fully participate in the annual Screen-Free Week program.

**Step Three:** Take a look at how screens are used in your school. Are they being overused? Urge your school to adopt a policy on when and how screens will be used in classrooms.

Are video games and DVDs being promoted through Scholastic "Book" Clubs and Fairs? Then urge your school to consider alternatives to Scholastic ([www.commercialfreechildhood.org/bookfairs/home.htm](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/bookfairs/home.htm)). And while you're at it, tell Scholastic to Shape Up! [http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/621/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=5354](http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/621/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=5354).

Is your school compelling students to watch Channel One each day? Join parents and teachers around the country who have successfully stopped this controversial in-school marketer. For tips on evicting Channel One from your school, visit [www.obligation.org/removing-channel-one](http://www.obligation.org/removing-channel-one).

**Step Four:** Consider making screen-time reduction an ongoing part of your school year. There are lots of ways to accomplish this. On page 62, we've included a successful program that the Maplewood/South Orange school district in New Jersey has been using for ten years.

## And if your child is in preschool or daycare:

Urge your preschool or daycare to go screen-free. Videos, computers and other screens take away critical time from what young children need the most: spending time in hands-on and active play, as well as engaging with other children and caring adults! (For more on why preschools should be screen-free, visit [www.commercialfreechildhood.org/actions/naeyctechandchildren.html](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/actions/naeyctechandchildren.html)). Also urge teachers to put away toys and books that feature media characters like Dora or Elmo. These toys promote screen time—and research suggests that children play less creatively with toys based on media characters.

## KIDS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*"I could have a water balloon fight...I could pretend I went to London to see Big Ben, Paris to see the Eiffel Tower, to Mount Rainer and to India to see the Taj Mahal. That's what I would do."*

— AIDALYN ALBERTO NORIA

# THE ULTIMATE SCREEN-FREE CHALLENGE

**A**fter completing a very successful Screen-Free Week, students in the South Orange/Maplewood, NJ school district decided they wanted to keep going! So school librarians designed the Ultimate Screen-Free Week Challenge. Now every elementary school in the district participates—and so do a majority of students. The Challenge was designed to be administered during weekly library class, but it could also be led by teachers. And for the families interested in reducing screen time, the Gold/Silver/Bronze model described below can easily be adapted.

The Ultimate Screen-Free Challenge encourages students to turn off TV, movies, online videos, and electronic games during the school week for the entire school year. Computer use for email, word processing and research is permitted. The Challenge is in effect Sunday starting at suppertime and ends Friday after school. It is not in effect from after school on Friday until Sunday at dinner, nor is the Challenge in effect during vacations, holidays, snow days, or when a student is home sick.

At the beginning of the school year, students decide if they want to participate in the Challenge and if so, at which level:

**Gold:** No TV, videos, or electronic games Sunday evening to Friday afternoon (many children say this is actually the easiest because participants simply keep the screens turned off).

**Silver:** Only 30 minutes total per day of TV, videos or electronic games Sunday evening to Friday afternoon.

**Bronze:** Only 60 minutes per day total of TV, videos or electronic games Sunday evening to Friday afternoon.

Student pledge cards are displayed in the library by grade level on a colorful chart. Participating students are allowed to borrow one extra book per library visit (since they have more time to read!). At the end of the year, a school-wide celebration takes place and participating students are given a Gold, Silver, or Bronze certificate and trophy.

Going screen-free during the school week is a big challenge, but in the end the Maplewood students report that it was worth the effort.

The Ultimate Screen-Free Challenge helps students develop the following traits:

- **Determination:** “I can do this.”
- **Self-regulation:** “I can control my impulses and change my habits.”
- **Commitment:** “I care about my learning and want to be a better student.”
- **Creativity:** “So now what shall I do?”
- **Perseverance:** “This lasts the entire school year and I can do it.”
- **Cooperation:** “Family members, friends, and teachers will support me.”
- **Honesty:** “Did I really achieve my goals?”
- **Self-esteem:** “I’m satisfied from sticking to and achieving my goals.”

And the best reward of all? Students take a lot of pride in accomplishing such a challenging task over an extended period of time. Those who participate show a real commitment to learning and education.

# REDUCING SCREEN TIME IN YOUR COMMUNITY

## Organize a local or regional Committee on Screen Time

Start with people you know: the local PTA, museum director, garden center owner, supermarket manager, sporting goods store owner, bookstore operator, teachers, healthcare providers, government officials and anyone else you can think of. The more diverse the membership in the group, the better the group will function. The more people on the committee whose businesses and organizations offer an alternative to screens (the local tennis court, golf course, bowling alley, parks and recreation director, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, library, yoga center...and the list goes on and on), the better equipped you will be when you start on this journey.

## Plan screen-free community activities

In warm weather, organize community gatherings in a local park. Work with local businesses as well. Many local bookstores have readings or guest authors. Let the bookstore know what you like and what your social group is interested in. This will draw more people to the store and will provide the community with an engaging activity, one with real people in real time. If you can demonstrate there's a real demand for screen-free activities, other businesses will take their cue from the businesses you persuade.

## Promote your screen-free activities

Hang flyers. Send announcements to local newspapers. Set up an online calendar that lists your ac-

tivities. You may also want to set up a listserv or Yahoo group where you can send announcements and where members can let each other know about their screen-free plans and even host impromptu gatherings.

## Work with pediatricians

They are your natural allies. Promoting Screen-Free Week in the doctor's office—with posters, giveaways, and best of all, with advice—is a great way to get parents on board. Most importantly, pediatricians can work with parents all year long to limit children's screen time. They can suggest that parents adhere to the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendation of no screen time for children under two and no more than one to two hours a day for older kids. They can also explain that excessive screen time is linked to childhood

## KIDS SCREEN-FREE WEEK

*“Over the [Screen-Free] Week I had lots of fun. I never thought I would survive one week without TV, radio, computer, or my DS games. I was wrong.”*

– ROSE SRISHORD  
4TH GRADER

obesity and other public health problems. Additionally, the AAP recommends that pediatricians talk with parents about family media habits during every well-child visit. In the 21st century, promoting healthy living has to include spending less time with screens and more time out in the world, and pediatricians are uniquely positioned to relay this message to parents and families.

### Work for screen-free waiting rooms

Given the AAP's strong position on limiting screen time, the presence of screens in many pediatric offices is troubling. The good news is that the trend may be reversing. In Boston, for instance, the pediatric waiting rooms of Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates are screen-free. The Kenmore practice exchanged its television for an aquarium. Encourage your pediatrician to remove the TV and offer games, magazines, and art supplies instead. Find pediatricians who share your concerns and ask them to encourage colleagues to go screen-free.

### Get adults who work with kids on board

Some of the most powerfully positive influences on children's lives are adults who lead after-school programs and extra-curricular activities such as scout leaders, youth workers, and coaches. Talk with them about celebrating Screen-Free Week, but also about making sure that their time with kids provides an alternative to watching screens.

### Eat out screen-free

Many restaurants reflexively use television to provide background noise, but others don't. Urge your local restaurants to remove their screens, and let the restaurants that are screen-free know how much you appreciate their decision. Let them know that the television actually interferes with your enjoyment of an establishment, that you're there because you appreciate the food and service, and because you want to spend time chatting with your fellow diners. If other patrons are clearly not watching the television, you can ask the manager respectfully to turn it off.



# APPENDIX

# ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FOR A COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD

**T**he Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood's mission is to support parents' efforts to raise healthy families by limiting commercial access to children and ending the exploitive practice of child-targeted marketing. In working for the rights of children to grow up – and the freedom for parents to raise them – without being undermined by corporate interests, CCFC advocates for a healthier childhood and a more democratic, sustainable world.

CCFC was founded in 2000 by a group of health-care professionals, educators, and parents concerned about the escalating commercialism in the lives of children. Over the years, CCFC has successfully persuaded some of the biggest corporations in the world to change their marketing practices and is responsible for raising national awareness about the harms of marketing to children.

Because it is primarily through screen media that marketers target children, helping families find alternatives to screen-based entertainment has always been essential to CCFC's work. Most notably, CCFC persuaded the Walt Disney Company to give refunds on Baby Einstein videos – a front page story in the *New York Times* called the refunds “a tacit acknowledgement” that baby videos are not educational. In 2010, CCFC became the home to Screen-Free Week (formerly TV-Turnoff).

Today, our newsletters and calls to action reach over 40,000 people in all fifty states. In addition to working for screen-time reduction, CCFC's goal is to limit children's exposure to harmful marketing by creating and preserving commercial-free spaces for children, holding corporations accountable for egregious marketing practices, and working for policies that limit marketers' access to children.

*For more information about CCFC, please visit  
[www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org)*

# SCREEN-FREE WEEK EVALUATION

*We need your input. Please help us make next year even better. If you'd prefer to complete this evaluation online, please visit [www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screenfreeweek/downloads.htm).*

1. How did you hear about Screen-Free Week?

2. Your involvement in Screen-Free Week is primarily as a (please circle one):

Educator    Parent    Librarian

Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where did your Screen-Free Week take place? (Circle all that apply.)

At home    School    Library    Place of Worship

Community Center    Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Approximately how many children participated in your Screen-Free Week?

5. What was most helpful about the Screen-Free Week Organizer's Kit?

6. What would you like included in future Kits?

7. Are you interested in working with us to reduce children's screen time all year round? If so, please provide your email address:

8. Would you be a Screen-Free Week Organizer again? Why or why not?

9. Would you be willing to talk with us about your experience? If so, please include your name and the best way to contact you.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact info \_\_\_\_\_

10. Please share your thoughts about the Week including what worked exceptionally well, suggestions for improvement for next year, and advice for future Screen-Free Week organizers:

Please return this evaluation by...

MAIL: CCFC, NonProfit Center, 89 South St.,  
Suite 403, Boston, MA 02111

FAX: (617) 896-9397

EMAIL: [screenfree@commercialfreechildhood.org](mailto:screenfree@commercialfreechildhood.org)

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\* A young adult novel

\*\* Picture books for younger children

# SUPPORT CCFC AND SCREEN-FREE WEEK!

Did you enjoy Screen-Free Week? Help us continue our important work carving out screen-free, commercial-free time and space for children and families. Your tax-deductible donation will help us:

- Launch Screen-Free Week next year and beyond.
- Build the movement to reduce children's screen time all year round.
- Support parents' efforts to raise healthy families by limiting corporate marketers' access to children.

To donate online, please visit [www.commercialfreechildhood.org/donate](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/donate).

To make a credit card donation by phone, please call: 617-896-9368.

Checks should be made out to:

**Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood**

NonProfit Center

89 South St., #403

Boston, MA 02111

We rely on people like you because we will not compromise our commitment to children by accepting corporate funding.



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