

## Tips for Reducing Your Child's Screen Time

1. **Remove the technology or make it otherwise unavailable.** This is what we were able to do in our family when I hid our television in a closet one day without any real planning or strategy. It has worked beautifully for us. I know another family who had good luck with this, when their TV unexpectedly broke and they just... didn't fix it. Consider whether you can create a circumstance where the screen device is no longer available for a few days, and see what your family does in response. If you hide it in the closet, you know it can come back out if you find you really need it.
2. **Take a 48-hour screen-time break.** Decide with your partner to go screen-free for 48 hours and see what happens. Maybe you can keep going! Maybe you have to scale it back.
3. **Establish screen-free zones in your house.** Pick a few places of the house and designate them as screen free. Consider bedrooms especially.
4. **Establish off-limit times for screens.** The hours between 3pm and 7pm, encompassing dinner time and bed time, is a good place to start. Look at your children's screen use during the day and notice the times of heaviest screen use. Considering shaving off 30 minutes every few weeks.
5. **Consider your own screen time habits.** Children at this age learn through imitation. If they see you using a screen, they will want, if possible, to use the same screen as you. And if not possible, they will want to imitate what they see you doing. Consider setting designated times for using your screen devices while your children are asleep or out of the house.

## When You Use a Screen, How to Keep Control of It

1. **Use a device your children can't operate.** Create a viewing situation where you have complete control over when, how, and what they watch. For us this was a wall-mounted television that they couldn't reach; that they had to sit far away from; with a hidden remote control; and a computer to play media that only my partner and I could reach and have the dexterity to use. Give your child options of (mom-approved!) movies to watch. Once they select something and you start it, don't change it. If they get bored, they are free to play with something else!
2. **Use movies or videos instead of television shows or YouTube.** A movie is finite. It ends when it ends. Television shows, especially ones on streaming, are very easy to binge watch and children get into the habit of wanting and expecting just one more. As for YouTube, we all know its perils, both from seeing the jaw dropping things our children are unwittingly able to find on it when left to their own direction, and the way we are equally prone to find ourselves watching a few too many 7-minute long snippets on things straying increasingly far from our originally intended topic. Asking your child to stop screen time in the middle of a Paw Patrol or YouTube binge is asking for a tantrum. Putting on the Winnie the Pooh movie and then when it ends, not putting on anything new tends to have gentler consequences.

## When You Use a Screen, How to Keep Control of It (continued)

3. **Choose quality programs.** Older and slower is better. The newer shows are designed to be brightly colored, rapid fire, and fuel childrens' adrenaline. Slower shows like Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, Dora the Explorer, Sesame Street, and movies like Mary Poppins are a better choice.
4. **Watch with them.** Whenever possible, sit with your children and watch the movie or television show. This will infuse human connection and interaction back into the screen time experience.
5. **Consider your phone use.** Consider how you use your phone in front of your children, and where you leave it when you set it down. On days when I check my messages a few too many times in front of them, I can guarantee that at some point I will find my phone in my two year old daughter's hand, and she will have navigated to YouTube. If you send them signals that your screen technology is important to you, it will be important to them too.

## What To Do Instead of Screen Time

1. **Remove some toys.** This seems counterintuitive. But many children have so many toys they cannot decide how to play with them! Help your child by hiding a number of toys in the closet so they can focus on quality play with just a few toys at a time.
2. **Go outside.** This is a difficult thing to do in Phnom Penh! But if possible, try to find a way to take a walk every day, or take a family field trip to somewhere that is green and filled with nature.
3. **Nap.** You may find your child replaces screen time with sleep. That is great news! Young children under the age of nine need at least 12 hours or sleep to support their continuing growth and development.
4. **Art, crafts, hobbies.** There are a number of ways that children can create beautiful artwork. Getting high quality art supplies and engaging in your own hobby will be relaxing for you, and interactive for them. Gecko Garden has lots of ideas to support this and will do workshops in the coming months!
5. **Cooking and housework.** Children really love helping you in meaningful ways. If you are looking for something to do with them, get out the tool kit and finally tighten that screw that is loose on the bathroom door knob that you have been meaning forever to fix. You will have more help than you know what to do with. Some things that children love to cook and can learn very quickly to competently cook "on their own" (with your oversight of course!) include scrambled eggs, boiled eggs, oatmeal, rice, cut fruit, sandwiches, toast, etc.