

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