
BACK ON TRACK

Community Action Plan



User's Guide

Concept credit goes to Victoria L. Dunckley, MD
Written and compiled by Sarah Sanchez





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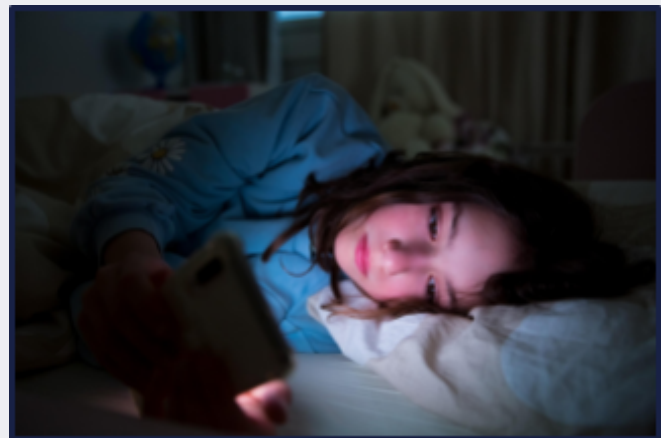
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Introduction

Modern technology is an integral part of daily life. We can't imagine where we'd be without it. It's not just useful, having access to our devices feels essential to our survival today. At the same time, there's a definite downside to screen use that makes it kind of a Jekyll-and-Hyde experience.

It's quite a dilemma we find ourselves in: we're far too enmeshed in our high-tech world to disentangle ourselves from it, and yet the Hyde side of tech seems to be extending its dark reach over us in ways that make us increasingly uncomfortable. What can be done to reap all the benefits without getting sucked into the addictive clutches of the online world?

The victims getting hit the hardest are our kids. Their brains aren't developed enough to handle the onslaught of unfiltered content coming at them in ways we can rarely control. But let's not kid ourselves. We get pulled into the Tech Trap just as quickly, getting lost and distracted more often than we care to admit. We pay a price for that too. No one is immune.



The hypnotic pull of the virtual world is leading to the defragmentation of society as a whole. It can feel like we're on a one-way freight train that's accumulating so much speed (5G! 6G!) we're no longer able to enjoy the view. It's all just passing by in a blur.

The thing is, as soon as we resign ourselves to the thought that it's too late, we've doomed ourselves to a steady decline as a society. That's not stating it too dramatically either! We really are facing a crossroads that will require brave action and bold steps if we're going to realign ourselves with a way of life that supports mental, physical and emotional well-being. This can only be done as everyday people, school administrators, and politicians take action to prevent this thundering Tech Train from going off the rails.

By uniting with other like-minded friends and family to run *Back on Track* in your neighborhood, you're taking the kind of bold action that will have lasting impact on all involved. Your participation in this screen fast could not only be life changing, it could be life saving.

This really is a time to suit up and send out a rallying call to action. It's a time to stand shoulder-to-shoulder on this surreal battlefield. There's so much at stake here that depends on

our next move; our kids' hearts and minds, and our own ability to remain fully present so we're awake enough to notice what's really going on!

The program presented in these pages has proven to be effective over and over. And that was *without* any community support! By collaborating with others, you're making this an all-but-fail-proof plan.

Once you've completed *Back on Track*, share your experience so we can add your hopeful voice to the hundreds of others who are also sending up a victory cry.

It is possible to counter the toxicity of tech! It really does work! All it takes is committed parents brave enough to reverse a dangerously subtle trend. Let's shine a light on what's happening and put up well-anchored guardrails to keep tech from hijacking our kids' childhoods. As we unite in this effort, the battle can be won.¹

¹ **Note:** The bulk of the content contained herein can be attributed to Victoria L. Dunckley and is extracted from her book, *Reset Your Child's Brain: A Four-Week Plan to End Meltdowns, Raise Grades, and Boost Social Skills by Reversing the Effects of Electronic Screen-Time*.

The term *Back on Track* belongs to Tame Your Tech, LLC.

The Power of “We”

Because overuse of screens is a collective problem, it takes collective action to reverse. By working together for a cause we all care about, we become a mighty force to be reckoned with.

Jonathan Haidt says, “New technologies are going to be disrupting our lives at a faster rate every year. [It’s important to know] what it’s doing to us, and how to raise flourishing children amid the confusion (*Anxious Generation*, 295).”

“Each time you consciously act to reduce screen influences, you send a message to others—even if you don’t share information verbally. Each time you approach another parent about doing an electronic fast together, he or she may mention the idea to someone else. Each teacher you speak to has influence over dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of children over time. Just as changing your child’s screen habits now will affect his or her life trajectory, so do small efforts to raise awareness extend beyond your initial action. It’s a law of nature (*Reset*, 286)!”

There are so many peripheral benefits to having a whole group on board as you give this reset a try. For one, you’ll build rapport with other concerned parents and be able to relate to each other on deeper levels. The connections and friendships that come as a result might even improve your own well being. By extending validation and support to one another, you’re creating just the pivot point needed to make this audacious undertaking possible. The kids will look forward to getting together so you can enjoy a break a few nights a week, and the whole group will begin to thrive in this collaborative, win-win atmosphere.

This effort between parents means kids can’t resent you for doing the reset when so many other families are doing the exact same thing. You’ve heard there’s strength in numbers and that’s absolutely the case here. The best part is, all who jump on board get to enjoy the experience as kids look forward to regularly planned activities with other kids, and parents have ongoing support to draw upon.

Will it Really Be Worth It?

These quotes will help remind you why you’ve chosen to do this. They’re great references as you consider what your personal mission statement will be and will help propel you forward.

“The risks of trying an electronic fast are virtually nonexistent. The Reset Program involves no real expenses, no medicine, and has no side effects. It’s safe, widely

applicable, and is shown to be highly effective across multiple domains. Yes, there are inconveniences, but what are they next to the difficulties your child is experiencing? Which, ultimately, is more inconvenient, losing screen-time status quo or having a child who rages, who can't focus enough to learn, or who drives others away because of behaviors (Reset, 27-28)?"

"In the short term, screen media imprisons our child's brain and impacts functioning in all areas of life. In the long term, observation and research suggests that screen media creates drag on development itself, causing stunted growth, plateaus, or even regression. Conversely, removing screens is like reinvesting the dividends in a good stock: the



gains compound over time, so much so that a child who grows up with little-to-no interactive screen-time may eventually surpass a brighter child with 'typical' screen exposure in terms of emotional-cognitive development and level of functioning (Reset, 110)."

"Every parent must do the reset despite any doubts they have about whether ESS is affecting their child and what benefits a fast will bring. Some cases are clearer than others, some parents more willing than others, and some kids more amenable than others. But it's only in retrospect, once the fast is complete, that you can say with certainty what impacts screen-time is having and what improvements removing it will bring. As we've seen, impacts and benefits are both direct and indirect and depend as much on what naturally replaces the missing screen-time as on removing screens themselves (Reset, 201)."

"In the end, if the Reset isn't very effective...or isn't worth the cost, then you move on and try something else. Yet if the Reset works and you realize many of the most important benefits, then the anticipated costs often pale in comparison...If you treat the fast as a three-week 'experiment,' you limit costs as you confirm the benefits for your child, making it one of the cheapest investments with one of the longest potential returns you might ever make (Reset, 204-205)."

“The Reset Program improves frontal lobe functioning, which enhances the ability to self-initiate activities, tolerate frustration, lose oneself in imaginary play, read quietly, daydream, cooperate with siblings, and find wonder in nature. Don’t get overwhelmed by imagining a life of parenting without screens. Focus on the fast, and if it works, many of the inconveniences that seem so daunting right now may resolve themselves naturally (Reset, 205).”

“By removing any possibility of interactive screen-time as entertainment during the school week, you’ll effectively eliminate the lion’s share of arguments and endless negotiations, plus you’ll avoid setting your child up to rush sloppily through homework in order to get device time. As much as that though, after a long day at school, children need to move and interact physically with their environment...it’s even more critical for them to interact in the real, three-dimensional world as much as possible during the week (Reset, 232).”

“Children and adolescents who do not grow up closely attached to technology tend not to be as drawn to electronics as adults, and in part it’s because strictly limiting screen-time protects and strengthens the very parts of the brain that determine self-discipline and resiliency. In other words, protecting the brain now makes the brain less vulnerable later, and it raises the odds that children will use technology in a productive way rather than in a compulsive or coping way (Reset, 316-317).”

“Kids need several hours of unstructured physical play daily to adequately stimulate and integrate sensory pathways; they need secure attachment (bonding) to caregivers, plenty of touch, and varying levels of environmental stimulation...conversation with adults, contact with nature, and creative outlets (Reset, 103).”

“When screen-time is removed, brain chemistry rebalances and circadian rhythms resynchronize. Overstimulated networks are quieted, stress hormones ebb, and blood flow is redirected back to the frontal lobe... When screen-time is eliminated, it most often gets replaced with the very activities and interactions children need for healthy development: families bond, and children engage and play in the natural world around them (Reset, 111).”

What Benefits Can I Expect to See?

WITHIN DAYS

- The child's initial negative reaction to the plan subsides
- The child's mood, attitude, and compliance begin to improve
- The child begins to sleep better
- Play begins to become more creative and more physical
- The child's initial preoccupation with restoring screen-time diminishes, though negotiations over this may linger

WITHIN WEEKS

- Meltdowns become less frequent, less severe, or both
- The child's mood becomes brighter and more stable
- The child's attention improves, sometimes dramatically, and the child stays on task more easily
- Sleep deepens and becomes more restorative, promoting the healing process and allowing the brain to reset biochemically
- The child's body clock resynchronizes to daylight hours, which helps normalize the sleep-wake cycle, stress hormones, the immune system, and serotonin levels
- The brain reclaims lost cellular energy due to decreased inflammation
- The blood flow in the brain shifts from survival areas to higher learning centers, including the frontal lobe
- More homework is completed in less time, and doing homework becomes less tortuous for both parent and child
- In interactions, the child's eye contact improves, conversations are longer, and the child listens better
- The child exhibits better sportsmanship and better manners in general
- Sensory processing often improves, such that the child becomes less sensitive to environmental stimuli and is less likely to become overstimulated

WITHIN MONTHS

- Meltdowns diminish further and may resolve completely, and mood stabilizes further
- Grades may markedly improve
- The child progresses more quickly when learning attention-sensitive subjects, such as math and reading
- Learning new information solidifies or sticks better

- Signs of social improvements become more apparent, such as enhanced empathy, increased tolerance for sustained eye contact, and a stronger social network
- Self-reflection improves, particularly in teens and young adults
- The child's ability to accurately read others' emotions and actions improve, and the child is less likely to inappropriately attribute hostile motives to others
- The child becomes more self-aware; some (but not all) will attribute feeling or functioning better to being screen-free, or will realize gaming makes them feel bad
- The child may prompt friends to engage in screen-free activities or may prefer friends who rarely use screens
- Coordination may improve as motor-sensory-vestibular systems integrate

OVER THE YEARS

- The child's self-direction increases; that is, he or she thinks of the future, makes plans, and acts accordingly
- Empathy and compassion are noticeably enhanced; that is, he or she shows more concern and consideration for others' welfare and can imagine how others feel
- The child's sense of self becomes more rounded, and the child demonstrates a rich variety of interests and activities
- The child is more likely to seek out mentorship or ask others for help and guidance
- The child's ability to process negative events and emotions, like loss, grief, and disappointment, is more developed, and negative emotions are less likely to cause setbacks
- The child is better able to learn from mistakes and is less likely to blame others
- The child prefers and chooses healthier peer groups, with similar attributes and interests, and may drop friends who are excessive screen users
- The child may recognize screen-related dysfunction in those who are heavy screen users
- The child completes household chores with less resistance and with better attention to detail
- The child has a stronger sense of responsibility and more respect for authority figures
- The child continues to develop self-awareness, including strengths, weaknesses, hopes, fears, and areas for improvement
- When interacting socially, the child becomes increasingly capable of having extended conversations and making sustained eye contact, and demonstrates an ability to reflect on what's been said
- The child reads more and processes material more readily and deeply

- The child often becomes more health conscious and self-disciplined, and he or she may be more likely to follow through on efforts to eat right or exercise more often

Adults Benefit Too!

“Screen-time affects an adult’s frontal lobe, too, so it can cause a parent to become disorganized, exhibit poor impulse control, lack self-discipline, and have trouble following through on goals, including establishing healthy screen management. Screen-time also affects an adult’s body clock, melatonin levels, and physical health. Just as with children, these effects are more likely to occur if a parent is stressed, not sleeping well, or has difficulty in those areas to begin with. Thus, there are numerous reasons to cut back. In fact, doing the electronic fast with your child can be a powerful healing experience for everyone (Reset, 149).”

“Adults with mental health issues should appreciate the effects of electronic use and light-at-night on depression, social isolation, attention, intimacy, motivation, and organization. Screen-time also impacts one’s in-the-moment awareness and ability to problem-solve. Adults with addiction tendencies, social deficits, or psychiatric or neurological disorders are more likely to develop pathological screen-time habits (Reset, 317).”

7 BENEFITS YOU’LL ENJOY

1. You’ll feel good knowing you’re modeling healthy screen habits for your kids and those around you.
2. You’ll be more aware of how your children are doing and how others use screens. Screen time is distracting for all of us and it diminishes how present we can be.
3. Your executive functioning will be improved so planning and problem-solving will come more easily.
4. You’ll be more likely to finish the reset program because your focus improves by decreasing screen time, allowing you to exercise greater self-discipline.
5. You’ll be more emotionally attuned which means stronger emotional connection with others.
6. You’ll feel more rested because with less screen time, your sleep will be more restorative.
7. You’ll be able to tolerate frustrations better and be less reactionary.

The Screen Liberated Family

- Parents are less worried about the child's future, and they have more trust that the child will achieve milestones like going to college, getting a job, and living independently.
- The family members spend more quality time together, both one-on-one and as a unit, and tend to talk more.
- The children are less likely to complain that their parents don't spend time with them, or that a parent is "on the computer all the time" or "always on the phone."
- The parents are less stressed and are less likely to avoid family time through overwork or other activities.
- The parents are less likely to undermine each other's authority, and they are better at communicating with each other when parenting styles differ.
- Family members are less likely to mock one another or put one another down.
- The children are more likely to tell their parents if they're worried about something or if something bad happened (and less likely to broadcast problems on social media).
- The children are less likely to report feeling as though parents have "no idea what I do" or "no control over me."
- The parents don't "walk on eggshells" around their children, they aren't afraid to discipline, and they aren't afraid to say no.
- The parents are (or become) unconcerned with "keeping up with the Jones's" regarding technology.
- The children expect to earn privileges rather than feeling entitled to them.
- The children have a better sense of how money works, and the parents are more likely to implement "earning" money or allowances rather than just giving it regardless of behavior, or giving it whenever they need it.
- The siblings are more likely to look out for one another's well-being and are more aware of and in tune with their siblings' inner emotional lives.



The Back on Track Method

Easy Does It: The Slow Start Option

During the next ten days, you'll be ramping up for the Full Reset through a kind of wake-up period. The idea is to first pay more attention to your screen habits and recognize how often and for what reasons you turn to your devices. You'll assess your value system and have time to think about where your life is headed and whether or not your screen time aligns with what you ultimately stand for and who you really want to be. Next, you'll practice slowly deleting unnecessary apps from your phones. In the last step, you'll introduce sacred time and sacred spaces back into your life in order to reclaim your attention by freeing yourself of screen overuse.

As you dive into this process, there will be steps you go through as a family and steps you take with the other family/ies in your group who are also choosing this route. The arrow markers below make it clear which part is which.



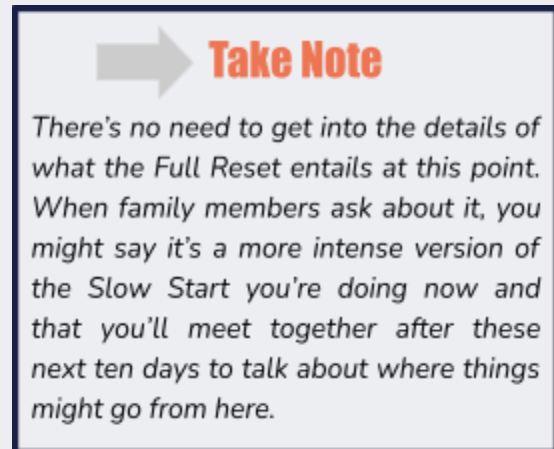
PRACTICE MEDIA MINDFULNESS


To start out, you'll take about 20 minutes to hold a family meeting. Let everyone know that you and a few other families are concerned about how often we all get lost on our screens. Discuss as a family what some of the pros and cons of screen use might be. Hear each other out, respectfully.

There is so much research coming out that proves how harmful screens can be to our well-being if we overdo it. In an effort to get mentally, emotionally, socially, and physically realigned with healthier practices, you'll be weaning off of screens over the next ten days. After that, you'll talk about what you noticed and see if you're ready to try the Full Reset with all the other families.

Address the fact that many of us are scrolling our lives away mindlessly. Media lords launch platforms without restriction and are largely unregulated. This allows them to manipulate us and distract us in ways that can be habit-forming. We can't go back in time to restore all that's been lost, but we can start to reclaim some of the ground we'd like to get back.

With the help of Gen Z leaders Freya India, Gabriela Nguyen and Sean Killingsworth, this step-by-step plan has been created for those who refuse to live meaningless, screen-bound lives. This outline can help us reclaim our attention, calm our nervous systems, and start to wake back up to the moments passing by right in front of us. It won't happen all at once, but these steps can help us ease our way into a healthier way of living.



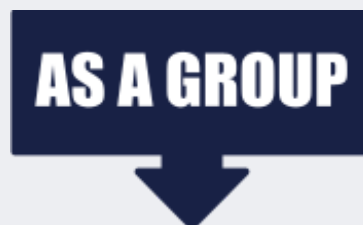
 **Take Note**

There's no need to get into the details of what the Full Reset entails at this point. When family members ask about it, you might say it's a more intense version of the Slow Start you're doing now and that you'll meet together after these next ten days to talk about where things might go from here.

It's time to practice being brutally honest about our screen practices. What do we really have to show for all the time we spend gazing at our glowing devices? What opportunities or benefits might we be giving up in exchange for that time? If we traded out this next month of scroll time for working toward a meaningful goal, what could we accomplish? How would that change how we feel about ourselves?

Step one of the Slow Start is to take the next 48 hours to pay attention to when and why we're on our devices. Is it because we're bored? Stressed? Lonely? Is it just an automatic reaction? What are we really looking for?

Give everyone a key ring, paper clip or sticker to put on their devices to remind you to think about your motive every time you pick up your phones. After doing this step for a couple of days, you'll meet up with the other family/ies in your group and go over what you learned about why you reach for your phones.



Note to Group Leader:

Welcome everyone and make introductions, if necessary. Have copies of the activity in Appendix B available for those who are old enough to participate. Make sure each person has something to write with. The younger kids will need blank paper and crayons, markers, or colored pencils to draw with. If you don't have enough room to sit everyone at a table, pass out books as hard surfaces to write or color on.

Play quiet music as you fill out the worksheets or color to help everyone focus while you do the exercise. Once you've taken some time to complete it, let everyone share whatever they're comfortable sharing. Then continue on to the next section.

VALUE ALIGNMENT

- SHARING TIME (~10 min)

Let everyone who participated in the media mindfulness exercise share what they learned about why they're reaching for their phones.

- REFLECTION ACTIVITY (~40 min)

Next, you'll individually fill out the two pages found at the end of this guidebook in Appendix B. A digital version is available in the Members Area under Back on Track at tame-your-tech.org. Reassure everyone they don't have to share their answers, but you'd like to hear any thoughts they're comfortable putting out there once you've all taken time to do this activity.

This is geared toward kids ages 10 and up. For younger kids, ask them to draw two pictures: one showing what they love to DO the most; the other one will be of something they care about more than anything. Have them show and tell what they made when you have your open sharing time at the end.

Half of this time will be spent doing the activity itself with the other half being dedicated to open sharing time as a group. Ask each person to share one answer from their worksheets, if they'd like to.

PHONE BOUNDARIES

- **CREATE SOME DISTANCE (~10 min)**

We tend to believe we have to be constantly available to everyone, but we don't. There's no need to apologize when we choose to minimize our distractions. In fact, time and attention are our most precious commodities. We don't have to let social norms dictate how we use them. During the next few days, we'll practice liberating ourselves from meaningless, useless, or counterproductive screen habits that leave us feeling empty.

To start with, it can be helpful to de-personalize our screens as much as possible. When we put our own photos or fancy screen savers on our phones, we identify with them and tend to feel even more connected to our devices. We might sometimes think of them as being extensions of ourselves. By using dull, neutral screen savers and taking as much color out of our phones as possible, they become less appealing and less habit-forming. So our next step is to increase our appetite for real life and decrease our appetite for our phones by making them a little more boring to look at. Are you ready to give it a try?

Take your phones out and change your screen savers to a neutral, boring background. Set your phones to a monochrome color scheme if you can.

- **WRAP-UP (~3 min)**

The group leader can thank everyone for coming and express excitement about this experiment you're doing to try and pay attention to the things that matter most.



As soon as you get the chance, go over the action items below. It should only take about 15 minutes to cover this. Follow up each day to see how everyone is doing with the new phone boundaries.

Review the apps that each of you have on your phones. Who has the most? Can you delete those that don't align with your values or that aren't helping you become who you truly want to be? Maybe there are a few that you never really use anyway that are just cluttering up your phone. Start with those.

In this step, you'll purge your phone of apps that don't add any real value to your life. As you consider each one, ask these questions:

- Is this app adding to my well being?
- When I'm honest with myself, does spending time on this app really make me feel better about myself?
- What fears do I have about deleting it?

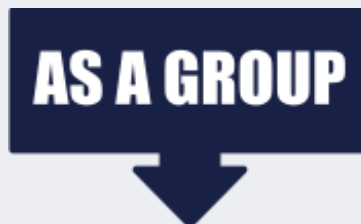
Often, our social media apps are what allow us to be in touch with others. The thing is, those same apps can rob us of the emotional and mental well-being that brings out the best in us.

Just because certain apps seem essential doesn't mean they make life any better. If you're ready to defend your right to decide for yourself what your handful of years on this planet will look like, there are work-arounds to using time-sucking apps. If an app drains you of energy and contentment with who you are, is there a way to exist without it?

Here's one idea worth trying.

- Make a list of family and friends you really want to stay in touch with. Who in your list of contacts would show up for you in a crisis? Not just online (which has its place) but in person (which is priceless). Those are the relationships worth investing in. Let each of the people in that category know that you're trying to improve your life so you can focus on things you really care about. Tell them they'll have to reach you by text or phone from now on. This will allow you to build higher quality connections with those who really matter to you, while letting go of the people who are indifferent to your existence.

If you really need to get on social media or one of the apps you've loved, use a desktop computer to access it so it's more out of reach. If you don't have access to a computer, use a web browser on your phone to get on the app, making it a little harder to get to. When it's not as easy to log on, you're more likely to only use it when there's a more legitimate reason for doing so.



After taking a few days to remove time-killing apps from your phones and putting a little distance between you and your devices, meet up with your small family group again to talk about how this last part went, to introduce the next step, and to brainstorm activities you'd

like to do together as you prepare for the Full Reset. As questions come up about what that will look like, tell everyone your individual families will have a meeting about it soon and not to worry too much about it because, no matter what, you'll all be going through it together.

- **GROUP DISCUSSION (~10 min)**

The person in charge will ask everyone who removed apps from their smartphones how that felt, what they've noticed and what's still hard. Validate what everyone has to share and encourage them to continue working toward total freedom from screen time if it's in conflict with their core values. Remind them that so much of our screen consumption isn't in alignment with who we really want to be and can never really satisfy us.

Reiterate that this is *not* an easy process. In fact, most people fail when they attempt this step because they don't have adequate support. That's where the power of this group can make all the difference. If you're the facilitator, let everyone know you're in this together, and that you know it'll be worth it as you exchange what is pointless and temporary for what is lasting and worthwhile.

RESTORING WHAT'S SACRED

- **3 SACRED PILLARS (~20 min)**

The next step we'll all be experimenting with is creating sacred spaces in our homes. What do you think the word sacred means? Share your ideas with each other. Then cover the Three Sacred Pillars of a screen-smart home.

3 sacred PILLARS



Sacred Spaces - We want to make sure certain areas in our homes are phone-free zones. The three crucial spaces we want to protect include our bedrooms, bathrooms, and the kitchen tables. Once this meeting is over, we'll make sure our screens aren't used in those three areas anymore.

- What do you think will be hard about this?
- What good do you think could come from it?
- Can we give it a try just to see if it makes any difference?



Sacred Moments - Instead of feeling the need to share and post so often, we can keep some moments just for ourselves so we can be more fully present. We'll try limiting what has to be made public and remember we're not living our lives for someone else's mindless entertainment.

- Why is it we feel the need to share so often?

- What value can come from posting?
- When do you think it's really necessary?



Sacred World - We want to try reconnecting with the tangible world around us by depending less on our phones and finding alternatives. To keep our phones out of our rooms, we can use real alarm clocks. Instead of needing our phones to use as a camera, we can get actual cameras. Instead of using it to play music, look into devices that only play music. We could also swap our smartphones for simple basic phones. Taking steps like these puts us back in touch with the physical world so we're more aware of ourselves and our surroundings.²

By setting limits within our homes about where phones are allowed, we're proving to ourselves that we care more about our own well-being, more about the people we live with, and more about our long-term goals than we do about satisfying our short-lived cravings. The dopamine hits we get from our screens only feel good until we put the phone down. Why do you think our screens have that effect on us?

By honoring these sacred pillars, we're able to be so much more present and aware of what's going on around us. Why do you think that matters so much?

One answer might be that there are people in the real world who crave our attention—who want to know they're truly seen, truly heard and truly cared for. There are moments we're likely to miss and a level of peace we'll never find if we're zoned out too often on our devices.

Right now, we get to decide what's worth more to us in the long run: satisfying our hunger to be entertained and to feel productive, or focusing on the activities and choices that build us up, that make us feel useful, and that satisfy our longing to become something more than we were before.



Take Note

If any concerns or complaints come up during this portion, the leader can either redirect the question to see what the whole group has to say about it, or encourage the person to talk it over in their individual family.

² Some families might opt for downgrading their phones to simpler, more basic phones as they gear up for doing the Full Reset. Alternative phone options can be found at this website: www.waituntil8th.org/devices.

REPURPOSE YOUR TIME

- BRAINSTORM SESSION (~15 min)

Do you know what it means to repurpose something? Can you give an example? In this next step, we get to repurpose the time we usually spend distracted on our phones and plan other activities to do as a group instead.

If taking a break from your phone seems hard and you're thinking you can't do it, there's a reason for that. And it's not just you. This is challenging for all of us! It's also proof that the apps we love and our phones themselves are designed to keep us hooked. They were created to hold our attention endlessly. That might not be a problem if the end result was feeling more alive, more worthwhile, and more at peace. But studies are showing that instead, we're more stressed out, more disconnected, and less motivated to tackle big goals than ever.

With the way new, improved tech is always rolling out, things could get worse. We don't want to see screens steal our peace of mind by hi-jacking our attention. So let's come up with some new ways to spend our time that WILL help us upgrade our level of happiness.

In about a week, you kids will get to spend time in each of our homes hanging out and doing real stuff together. Let's brainstorm. We're going to make a list of all the things we'd like to do while we're taking a break from our screens. What kinds of things would you like to plan for when you meet up?

Write any ideas the group comes up with on a large white board or poster.

- WRAP-UP (~3 min)

Let everyone know when the Full Reset is starting. The official start should be about a week from the time you have this meeting. Tell the group they'll be going over the plan in more detail in their individual families. Mention how excited you are to give this a try and to see how much better everyone feels as you trade your screen time out for 'hang out and grow time'. In the meantime, you all get to practice the 3 Sacred Pillars while still being aware of your screen use and minimizing the number of apps you use.

Week One: The Full Reset

Laying the Groundwork

During this first week, members of the Slow Start group will continue with the healthier screen habits they've already created. Everyone in the group will spend this time gearing up for the Full Reset. The purpose of these next seven days is to assess, deliberate, and strategize so you have all the clarity and backing you need to do this successfully.

Give yourself 3-4 days to complete this section (pages 20-29), breaking the material up into smaller segments.

Target Concerns

Start with this question. What are the top three behavioral concerns you'd like to target regarding each of your kids? Feel free to include yourself in this experiment as well! Are there tendencies you'd like to change? Areas you hope to strengthen? Identify what these are by referring to the table below and then describe your baseline. Where is each person at *right now* with those behaviors? Use different colored pens for each family member.

Emotional	Behavioral	School-Related	Social	Physical
Meltdowns	Oppositional, defiant	Forgets homework	Poor sportsmanship	Headaches
Irritable mood	Argues a lot	Easily distracted	Blames others	Stomachaches
Depressed mood	Yells/screams	Disruptive in class	Annoys peers	Migraines
Fearfulness	Aggression	Trouble learning	Lacks empathy	Body aches
Nightmares	Defensiveness	Poor concentration	Can't read others	Back/neck pain
Separation anxiety	Hyperactivity	Fights reading	Inconsiderate	Low energy
Isolative, withdrawn	Can't stay on task	Struggles in math	Poor eye contact	Out of shape
Doesn't enjoy	Messy room	Procrastination	Avoids	Overweight
		Underachievement		Craves sweets

activities	Refuses to do chores		face-to-face	Tics/stuttering
Easily frustrated			No/few friends	Trouble sleeping
Compulsiveness	Impulsiveness		Immaturity	Oversleeping
Obsessiveness	Can't get ready for the day			

The table below is an example of how your Target Behavior Chart might look:

Top Three Problem Areas and Frequency	What Outcomes are You Hoping For?
<i>Meltdowns</i> Frequency: 1-2/day Typical length: 30 minutes Typical intensity: 8/10	Less frequent (less than daily) Shorter length (less than 30 minutes) Less intense (less than 8/10)
<i>Homework</i> Forgets to turn in about 50% of completed work	Turns in more than half of homework Homework scores improve
<i>Trouble Sleeping</i> Complains of being too tired in the morning Fights going to bed Has dark circles under eyes	Answers "yes" to "Did you sleep okay?" Goes to bed earlier and more readily Looks reseted, has more energy

Don't underestimate the power of tracking. It will prove to be insightful and informative. Tracking will increase your awareness of what behaviors you're noticing and shed light on whether or not the reset is having an effect.

Doctor Dunckley says "you may see dramatic positive changes and then sudden, unexpected pullbacks. Or, change may be very gradual and hard to notice at first (*Reset*, 187)" but don't come to any conclusions until the fast is complete. Carry on with it faithfully. Record your top three target areas to focus on here.

Name	Top Three Problem Areas and Frequency	What Outcomes are You Hoping For?

Get Your Spouse On Board

Both parents should be equally committed to doing this. That's the ideal. But life doesn't always reflect the ideal. If your spouse is resistant to the idea of doing the reset, find out why and validate their feelings, then share why this matters so much to you. You might choose to read a few of the quotes from the collection found in this manual.

Couples in disagreement might fill out a cost/benefit chart together (see sample below) to decide if they're ready to move forward with it or not. Some spouses aren't necessarily against the idea, but they're also not committed to backing up their spouse. Keep in mind that if one parent is more lenient in this matter, the child could exploit that and wear them down, creating unnecessary tension and compromising the effectiveness of the reset. To prevent that, see how you both feel after doing the cost/benefit exercise below. Ultimately, what you need most is for your spouse/partner to support you as you carry this out, even if he/she has mixed feelings about it.

Here's a real-life example of a cost/benefit chart, as created by parents of a son these parents were concerned about:

Reset Costs	Potential Short-term Gains	Potential Long-term Gains
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Energy to convince others it has to be done ● Time/energy/money to replace activities ● It's inconvenient ● Dealing with others' reactions ● Not being able to take breaks or have quiet time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tics might get better ● More interest in playing outside ● Better sleep, fewer nightmares ● More compliant ● Easier time getting ready for bed and school ● Happier and easier to be around ● Get more homework done without resisting so much ● Could go places without worrying he'll have a meltdown ● Less stress if his 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better sense of himself and his identity ● Richer relationships with friends and future girlfriends ● Help him go further in school and reach his potential ● More mature and respectful to adults ● More responsible and more likely to get and keep a good job ● Broader interests ● Better grades ● Avoid use of medication

	behaviors are reduced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tics could continue to get better • Less stress on our marriage • I'd be better able to pursue my own interests
--	-----------------------	---

If it would be helpful, use the cost/benefit form below to see if you and your partner/spouse can come to an understanding.

Reset Costs	Potential Short-term Gains	Potential Long-term Gains

More often than not, simply filling this out will lead to a consensus that doing the reset really couldn't hurt, and may in fact prove extremely beneficial. If that doesn't happen and your spouse refuses to consider doing the reset, ask if they'd be willing to support you and your child/ren as you move forward with it anyway and ask that he/she not give in if a child comes to them to complain. You'll also need them to comply with the new family screen rules, or be out of the house when he/she wants to use a screen in a way the family has agreed not to.

Hopefully, as he/she witnesses the positive changes for good among the rest of you, they'll soften toward the idea and be more compliant moving forward. And thankfully, you'll be surrounded by a community of other families who are supporting you and going through the same reset right alongside you, no matter how your spouse reacts. This alone will greatly improve your chances of successfully pulling this off.

When it comes to the child of a single parent spending time with the other parent, the initiating parent will need to present this plan and hope for compliance from the former spouse. This is more likely to go well if you share your concerns relating to the child's behavior and ask them to review your own cost/benefit sheet. See if he/she would like to add to whatever you've filled in so they know their opinion matters too. Share the research. Try negotiating to see if you can come to an arrangement you're both happy with. If there's no way that's going to happen, let the group know so they can rally in giving you and your child extra support. There will still be pay-offs when the child is with you and the wins will still be noticeable. Every effort to enforce healthy screen use in a way that is fun and cooperative is a step in the right direction.

Write a Purpose Statement

Take some time to meditate on what you really want for your child(ren) now and in the future. Set a specific intention in order to heal and free your child's mind, brain and body. What pay-offs would mean the most to you? What's the best possible outcome you can imagine? Here's an example of what it might look like.

My mission is to create a healthy environment for my daughter, such that she feels happy, focused, and loved by friends and family. In the future, I want her to reach her greatest potential in school and at work, build fulfilling relationships, and develop strong moral character. To this end, I intend to provide a screen-free setting for the next few weeks in order to let her brain rest, heal, and reset, and for me to gain clarity as to how I might best manage screen-time in the future.

Record your own Purpose Statement below, then make a copy you can post as a visible reminder during the screen fast:

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT

Star

Star

Spread the Word

Next, determine what other adults within your social sphere need to be notified to ensure screen exposure is kept to a minimum. Daycare staff? School teachers? Babysitters? Neighbors where your kids will likely be spending time? In order to make this as successful as

possible, let them know what you're doing and enlist their support. To do this, you might say something like, "A group of us are trying out a new program based on evidence that screen-time can worsen behavioral or emotional issues because it's so overstimulating. To do this effectively, my child will need a break from screens to reset his/her brain. I'm wondering if you'd help out by giving [child's name] alternative activities to do that don't involve screens? That would be such a big help!" If an adult is unwilling to support you in this, it's best if your child doesn't spend time around that person, if possible.

Prepare to reduce screen exposure at school ahead of time. It can help to acquire a doctor's note to pass along to the child's teacher(s). To obtain one, call your family physician ahead of time to schedule the appointment and explain what the purpose of your visit will be. Visit with your doctor in person to share your concerns using any statistics or quotes found in this booklet or from other reliable sources. This kind of information might also be helpful to pass along to school administrators and your child's teacher(s). The doctor's note might be worded like this:

Date _____

RE: [child's name]

To whom it may concern:

Because screen-time can overstimulate the nervous system and cause chronic hyperarousal (fight-or-flight), and thereby negatively affect attention, mood regulation, behavior, and/or sleep, [child's name] is to be off all computers and any other electronic screen devices for the next three weeks, starting on [date] and finishing on [date]. Accommodations may be requested regarding this issue hereafter, to be determined at a later date. Your cooperation is appreciated!

Sincerely,

[Doctor's Signature], MD

License # _____

You might also consider requesting an IEP for your child so that he/she can consistently opt out of using interactive screens while at school. A doctor's note could be helpful in facilitating this process.

Create a Safety Plan

You know your kids best. There may be a chance one of them will have an extreme reaction to the reset that leads to so much dysregulation, it requires intervention. If you

anticipate this might happen, it's a definite sign that something has to be done to support your child's mental health as soon as possible. It also means a plan needs to be outlined ahead of time before you let the family know about the screen fast. If you're unduly worried about it, enlist a mental health professional or other trusted adult to help introduce and reinforce the plan. Here's what that might look like:

THE LEAD-UP

- When your child is most likely to respond optimally, let them know that you'll be meeting as a family to talk later on and that it could be potentially upsetting to him/her. Because the child's safety is your number one concern, say that certain behaviors will be okay, but others will not be acceptable. For example: getting mad and yelling are okay, but hitting, shoving, and throwing things are not.
- Talk about what coping strategies your child has used effectively in the past and go over those. Will he/she need time and space to process? Will the child need to be allowed to run or punch or rip something used for that express purpose? Will they want to give an adult support person a call?
- Your child will likely be persistent in wanting to know what this is all about. Let them know exactly when the meeting will take place and reassure them that the purpose for it stems from a place of deeply caring for your family and wanting to give them every chance to live the best life they can.
- Make sure at least two adults will be present when you have the family meeting.

DURING THE FAMILY MEETING

- At the time of the family discussion, if the child is unable to self-regulate in spite of the talk you had beforehand, let them know you're concerned for their safety and give a warning that you may have to call a crisis line for help. Set a timer for 15 minutes to see if the child improves on his/her own.
- Once the timer goes off, the adults present will need to determine what to do next. If the child is still reacting in a way that alarms you, call or text the Safe Utah number at 988. You might also download the SafeUT app beforehand. As another option, you can text HELP to 741741 or call the national hotline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). 9-1-1 is also an option, although if that's what you choose to do, be aware that it will be the police who show up and not trained social workers, which could be more frightening for your child. If you do reach out to any of the other hotlines, a representative will ask you what the situation is and determine whether a team of trained volunteers needs to be dispatched in order to put a more reliable safety plan in place. They will usually show

up within 30-45 minutes and will work with your child to see what needs to be done in order to ensure his/her safety.

The anxiety you feel for your child may well be justified. But doing nothing may only lead to symptoms worsening and your child's future being further jeopardized. Doing the reset will help alleviate the behaviors you're concerned about while improving your peace of mind.

This quote by Dr. Dunckley may bring you comfort:

*"Screen-time and light-at-night worsen depression and suicidality, **so the risk of not removing devices is much greater than removing them...** I've never had a child commit an act of self-harm in relation to this program. In fact, children with a history of self-injurious behaviors tend to get better, not worse (Reset, 171)."*

Notify Your Family

Since your group has decided on a date when you'll begin, you'll want to let your child/children know what the plan is at some point. This will be a MUCH easier sell with other families participating than it would be if you were tackling it all on your own. They'll likely be far more open to the idea knowing they'll get to hang out with other kids and do fun things together than if it was just your family alone taking this step.

If you have teenagers or kids who have been used to being on screens with very few restrictions, jumping straight into a full reset may not be feasible. If that's the case in your family, you'll want to opt for the Slow Start-Up method before phasing into the actual reset. If your family has chosen to dive straight into doing the Full Reset, skip over the Slow Start section below. Otherwise, you'll ramp your way up to doing a digital detox more gradually.

As the parent, here are some ways you can prepare for the moment when you present this plan to the family:

- 1) Resolve to keep your voice calm and even.
- 2) Don't react or respond to any threats or verbal abuse.
- 3) Don't attempt to reason or lecture.
- 4) Do what you can to reduce the stimulation in the room, turning down lights, reducing noise, etc.

The Family Discussion

We're in This Together

Somewhere around day five of this first week, sit down together when everyone is rested, fed and undistracted. Tell them you and several other families want to try an experiment together. Let them know who the families are (if they don't already know) and make a big deal of this! Talk it up and emphasize the fact that *many* parents are concerned and that the kids will be going through this together with other kids.

You'll want to break this discussion up into two different sessions. This first discussion (pages 30-35) will take longer than the second one and will cover the bulk of the plan for running the reset. Once you've run through this portion, you can take a break for a day or two before addressing the second set of action items.

Why You're Doing This

Because so much research is showing the damage screens can have on our brains, you're going to try changing the way screen time is handled for a few weeks to see if it makes any difference. It can help to compare what screen time does to our brains by saying it's like a computer trying to run too many programs at once. The whole thing

slows down and gets overheated. It's not working optimally. Our brains can get overloaded too and might crash if something isn't done about it. Mention that you care too much about your child(ren)'s minds, health, social lives, emotions and futures to let that happen. So you and all these other families are teaming up together to see if being off screens feels better or not.

Make sure you convey that this is *not* a punishment, but an effort to improve *everyone's* mental, emotional and physical health.



Manage Reactions

There could be some intense reactions to this, initially. As those occur, show empathy but also convey confidence that this will be good for all of you. If emotions run too high or there's a lot of conflict as you talk this over, it may be best to postpone the rest of the discussion until later on. Consider saying, "We love you too much to fight about this, so we'll

finish talking about it once everyone has calmed down. Let's take a 20 minute break and then we'll try again."

Rules Outlined

Your success with the reset will depend largely on how strictly you adhere to the plan, regardless of what behaviors or reactions come up. Be aware of that as you dive into the nuts and bolts of how this will work.

On the agreed-upon start date, the whole family will follow a set of rules. Make sure you get everyone's input as you go over these. Feel free to adapt in a way that works for your family to determine where you need to compromise and where you should remain firm. These three expectations should be respected, however:

THE BIG THREE

1. All unnecessary devices will be removed from the home*
2. The only screens allowed will be parents' phones (for necessary purposes only, and ideally for a limited time throughout the day), a family computer to be used at certain times in the open, and the TV which will only be used up to 5 hours a week (as long as it doesn't become a problem), but never during mealtime or before bed.**
3. Screens will be limited at school too.

*Devices to Consider Removing:

- All handheld devices of every kind (see exception below)
- All laptops or TV's in the children's rooms
- Any video game consoles

**Suggestions for TV Usage:

- One hour at a time is best
- Only use a family TV set up in an open area
- The smaller the TV the better
- No channel flipping
- Decide what will be watched beforehand and put a parent or older, responsible child in charge of the remote
- Use a backlight to make the TV easier on the eyes. Lower the brightness level on the TV as well.

- Avoid streaming content, if possible (this adds unnecessary EMF exposure)
- It's best not to watch anything too fast-paced like cartoons or violent shows.

If any of your teens have a basic phone with no internet access, you might let them keep these with them when they're away from home if you feel they're using them responsibly and need them for legitimate reasons you can't work around. Just have them turn them in when they're at home.

Of course, you have the final say and know what would work best for your child. As long as you keep the end goal in mind and don't let anything detract from that, feel free to adjust logistics in any way necessary in order to fit your unique situation.

Parent Screen Use

This might be a good time to ask the kids what they've noticed about *your* screen time. What feedback do they have for you? You might also list a few of the side effects you've noticed from your screen use that you're concerned about and want to change.

As parents, you'll be making adjustments to your screen usage to show you're willing to make changes too. If you recoil at that suggestion, that makes sense. This won't be easy! Even with fully developed brains that can reason and exercise impulse control, we too have built up a dependency on our devices.

Your kids may or may not understand that you have legitimate reasons for needing to be on a phone or computer. Make it clear to them that your added responsibilities will require you to be on a screen so you can perform those obligations. Set clear limits around this and let your family know what those are so they can see that you're still playing fair. They need to recognize that you're making sacrifices for this cause as well.

That being said, it'll be up to you to decide what merits a necessary reason for being on a device and what is ultimately distractedness, fear of not responding to a message immediately, or an urge to tune out. Be aware that your kids will be watching to see how faithfully you adhere to your own rules to know how seriously they should be taking this. If they can sense this is hard for you and see that you're really trying to back away from so much pointless screen time, they'll feel better about the limits that are being imposed on them.

Here's one way to set reasonable parent screen boundaries that kids can respect and hold you to.

Possible Parent Guidelines

1. We can be on a screen if it's work related, time sensitive, or completely necessary.
2. We're allowed to keep up with texts and messaging, but won't overdo it. We'll keep it to a minimum and set aside specific times for doing so.
3. We'll avoid mindless media, which includes perma-scrolling, gaming, and watching shallow content.
4. We won't interact with our smartphones while driving if the car is in motion.

Those who went through the Slow Start option spent a couple of days mindfully aware of why they reached for their devices throughout the day. They attached a key ring, paper clip or sticker to their phones to remind them to ask, "What's my real reason for wanting to get on my phone right now?" Sometimes it's a drive to be productive, no matter the cost. Maybe it's in order to avoid some other task or difficult situation. Often, it's simply that we've formed automated responses to reach for our smartphones rather than sit in silence or boredom. It can be insightful to pay attention to this urge so you understand what's really driving that action.

Resolve Concerns

Your kids will have questions. Here are some that might come up, along with *one* way (not the *only* way) you might answer their concerns. Find more Q&A's in Appendix A.

Q: When will we get our screens back?

A: We'll have to wait and see because it depends on how things go. Since this is an experiment, we can't know what comes next until we get all the way through it and see what the results might be. We'll do whatever is best for the family though. I hope you believe that.

Q: What if I need to reach you?

A: It's not likely you'll really need us for anything urgent, but if you do, we'll make sure you know our numbers so you can use a nearby phone to call us.

Q: What about being in touch with my friends and making plans with them?

A: For the next few weeks, you can talk to them through calls on one of the parents' phones or send a quick text using one of our phones (set a firm limit with texts, as this can quickly get out of hand. Less than 10 minutes a day is best). We can also plan time

for them to come over here if they don't mind putting their phones aside for a little while. You could plan something fun to do so the phones aren't such a distraction while you hang out. (They may not be thrilled about this, but so often, teens secretly crave a break from their screens and wish they had a good reason to set them aside for a while.)

Q: What will I tell my friends?

A: You can say your parents are part of a group experiment that's trying to see if we all feel better with less screen time. Tell them we're doing this for a while to see if it makes a difference.

Q: What about when guests come over?

A: Near the front entry we can position a box like those pictured below. We can let guests know our family is practicing being more present so we'll ask if they wouldn't mind leaving their phones in the box. They're welcome to check it any time if they need to, but we'll emphasize that we want to make the most of our time with them while they're here.



Q: What if I want to listen to my music?

A: Yeah, that might be a little tricky. We're all going to miss that. What do you think we can do instead? I guess we've still got the radio. Maybe we could get an old record player. Or we could create a family playlist that can be played from a device that allows us all to enjoy it. Maybe we could go retro and get some old CD players.

Q: I need to use my phone as an alarm so I can get up on time.

A: True. Sounds like we need to invest in some desktop alarm clocks, huh?

Q: Can't we just have a little screen time? What's the big deal?

A: For an experiment to work, it has to be done right. That means cutting out as much screen time as possible. We're guessing that getting off screens will make us all feel better. Even the parents. I guess we'll see!

This is where you'll end the first family discussion, with the second one to be held 24-48 hours later. At that point, you'll cover the three remaining steps that follow.

Accountability Act

During this screen break, a member of the family will likely break one of the rules at some point. When this happens, the family gets to decide what a fair consequence might be. You could have one set of consequences for the parents and another set for the kids. When someone gets called out as a rule breaker, what would your family like to do about it? Here are some ideas to consider.

Kid Consequence	Parent Consequence
Tickets might be given out at the beginning that can be turned in for fun prizes at the end. Maybe if a rule is broken, the child loses some tickets and has less they can spend, post-reset.	For each offense, put \$5.00 in a jar designated for the purpose. Any money that's collected there will be spent afterward on a treat or activity of the kids' choosing.
Make a list of harder chores that the child can choose from to complete as payment.	Someone who can be trusted gets to put the parents' phone in a "Time Out" box kept in a

	central location for an agreed upon amount of time.
Create a list of army drills a child can choose from, like doing 50 jumping jacks, 20 push-ups, running up and down the stairs 10 times, etc.	The parent has to engage in an activity the kids decide on for 30 minutes, when convenient.
Maybe the offender has to serve everyone dinner or make everyone's beds. Write up a list of service opportunities they could choose from.	The parent has to serve the family their favorite dessert within 24 hours of breaking the rule.

Once the Accountability Act is completed and agreed upon by all, have everyone sign it and post it in a visible location.

Feel free to fill in your ideas in the table below.

Family Accountability Act	
If a child breaks a rule, they'll have the following options to choose from as a consequence:	
If a parent breaks a rule, they'll have the following options to choose from as a consequence:	

Making the Most of It

Pull out a notebook or whiteboard where you can brainstorm with the kids about the kinds of things they'd like to do *instead* of having screen time. Drawing upon resources available in the parents section at letgrow.org might be fun for them, or building a “spare parts” playground in the yard, complete with hay bales, old wooden pallets, old tires, barrels, crates, etc. Make sure a little risk-taking, problem-solving, outside time and free play are built into your reset and watch as your kids thrive in these settings. Decide on a budget and then create a list of various materials and supplies you'll need for the activities listed.

Plan some one-on-one time with each child to do something they enjoy, and ask everyone what they think would be fun to do when the other kids from the group come over. What kinds of things can you plan for your kids to do alone? What things would you all like to do together as a family?

Once the official list of activities is ready to go, post it in a visible area. Hopefully this part of the discussion will start to get your child(ren) excited about this family experiment.

Collect Needed Supplies

Get all the items from your list ordered or purchased and have them ready to go as close to your start date as possible.

Practicing Healthy Screen Management

Some kids are automatically predisposed to screen sensitivities. The more attributes the child has from the list to the right, the more prone his/her brain is to dysregulation. If your child has three or more traits from the examples mentioned here, be extra conservative in your approach.

A FEW REMINDERS BEFORE STARTING

- You'll need to be especially vigilant with younger children, and with children who exhibit severe symptoms or who display multiple symptoms
- You'll never go wrong with “too little” screen-time; when in doubt, pull back

RISK FACTORS

- Male gender
- Younger age
- Any psychiatric disorder
- Any neurological disorder
- Any developmental disorder
- Chronic medical conditions
- Any learning disorder
- Any sensory-motor disorder
- Attention deficit issues
- Poor academic performance
- Poor social skills
- Family history of addiction or major psychiatric illness
- Pregnancy or birth trauma

- A resurgence of symptoms or a regression in functioning can suggest screens have been sneaked back in without your knowledge
- Don't compare your child's screen time to that of other children – most children use screens far more than is recommended

Week Two: The Fast Begins

During this first week of the actual fast, it's typical for younger children to adapt in 1-3 days. Teens can take up to a week, but may initially be more emotionally inconsistent. Older teens and young adults can have more severe reactions if they've been exposed to smartphones for longer. A child with a high level of screen attachment will need especially close monitoring during the first week of the fast.

Keep track of the reactions you're seeing. If your child says something like, "Screens are the only thing that make me happy!" take that as a sign that this is the right thing to do. During this week, you may wonder if you'll be able to make it through the whole fast. Review your mission statement and reach out to other parents in your group for validation and support.

Positive Changes to Watch For:

- A return to healthier, more imaginative, and more physical forms of play as creative energy returns
- Improved mood and less-extreme or less-frequent meltdowns as dopamine and serotonin begin to normalize
- Improved compliance and less oppositional-defiant behaviors as the brain moves away from protective-defensive mode

Action Steps:

- Participate in the group chat to share what's working and what's not
- Follow up with any rules that may have been broken by referring to your Accountability Act and respecting the agreed upon consequences
- Record what you're seeing and experiencing
- Update your behavior tracker
- What are you doing to take care of yourself?

Week Three: Keep it Up!

During this week, you can expect further changes and challenges to surface. Keep your long-term goals in mind and know that you're taking brave steps for the ultimate good of everyone in your household. It's not easy to feel like the "bad guy" in this scenario, but you know what you're fighting for and you care enough to try and optimize brain function while improving overall wellness for everybody. That's no small thing.

Positive Changes to Watch For:

- Deeper, more restorative sleep
- Less resistance at bedtime and more restored upon waking
- Improved mood and less meltdowns
- Improved impulse control and attention
- Better organization
- Less arguing and negotiating about devices
- Increased spontaneous play and use of imagination

"Biorhythms and brain chemistry may be close to normalizing, and as healing continues, stress and sleep hormones rebalance and promote calmness rather than hyperarousal. From the cell to the entire brain, oxidative stress and inflammation lessen, due to reduced stress load, and hormones will start to rebalance. As your child moves out of a state of chronic stress, the brain's energy is freed up to do other things—like learning new concepts and processing emotions. In contrast to the survival state, which is inherently selfish, impulsive, and one-track minded, your child is now on his or her way to becoming healthier in mood, thought, behavior, and relationships (Reset, 179)."

Action Steps:

- Check in with the group to see how things are going for other families and share your own experience
- Make sure you remain consistent with your Accountability Act
- Review your Purpose Statement as needed to help you continue moving forward
- Update your behavior tracker
- Ask for feedback from your family members; show empathy without relaxing the rules
- Record what you're noticing

Week Four: Wrap Up

As you head into this final week, your family has likely slowly adapted to this experiment and everyone is returning to a state of greater awareness, healthier sensory responses, and improved energy. You've come this far and have proven how much this matters to you. What have you learned?

We live in such unusual times. Times in which any answer, any product, any song, video, or form of entertainment is instantly available. It's not easy to turn down the volume on tech or to back away from the rush those conveniences offer. If you've managed to hold the line with tech up to this point, you've beat the odds. Hopefully, you're recognizing the value it has on relationships, on attention spans, and on your own peace of mind.

Positive Changes to Watch For:

- Lower stress response and deeper rest
- Reduced signs of anxiety
- Heightened curiosity and improved retention of new information
- Better manners and more respectful attitude
- A virtuous cycle of improved mood, attention, self-image, etc.

Action Steps:

- Check in with your support group. How's it going for other families? Share your insights.
- Is there any need to follow up with rule infractions? Carrying out the consequences attached to your Accountability Act reflects your level of commitment to this reset.
- Continue collecting data and reviewing your original goals. Summarize all your notes and chart whatever you were tracking regarding the baseline you started with. Did each area improve? By how much?
- Write about your experience. What are you noticing? What's easier? What unexpected roadblocks have you come across? How has this affected you?
- Notice and record any positive changes you've seen that may not be on your tracking chart. Is your child showing an interest in trying new things? Are they more curious? Are they kinder to others? Focus on where you've seen improvement, rather than on what is still a problem. Indirect changes count too. Be as specific as possible.
- Attend the parent meeting to review, reflect, and to determine how the group would like to carry on from here. Develop a game plan for what you'll do next in your family.

Didn't See Any Changes?

As you evaluate how everything went, there's a chance you didn't see as much change in your child as you would've liked. There could be several reasons for this.

- **Are there devices you overlooked?** Review your child's schedule to assess where that might've happened. On the bus? At recess? During carpool? It may have snuck in any number of ways.
- **The fast was too short.** If it's a teen or young adult who has consistently been on screen for the bulk of their time before the fast, it'll likely take longer to detox. You can't go wrong by extending the fast.
- **Did you find yourself relaxing the rules?** Without adequate support, parents might let things slide and not monitor as closely as they should. Early success may also have led to a loosening of rules.
- **EMF's from other sources.** Being connected to WiFi, using bluetooth technology, and using CFL or LED bulbs to light the home could be a factor. See the section titled "Other Ways to Reduce Stress on the Brain (pg. 45)" to learn more.

Where To Go From Here

There's a learning curve to figuring out how much screen-time children can handle, post-reset. Mistakes will be made during this process, so be patient with this stage and carry on, no matter what! Keep in mind that parents tend to allow too much screen time too soon and, in doing so, see symptoms return right away. Be aware of this pitfall and continue to document what's happening. Remember what life was like before and after the screen fast so you keep your overall objective in view.

Whatever changes you make, let your kid(s) know that screen time will be reintroduced gradually **as a trial run**. Screen time will be allowed to the degree the family is exhibiting mental, physical and emotional health. Inform your child/children that you love their input, but you're ultimately the judge of what's working and what's not.

As for where to go next, here are a few possibilities.

- Extend the fast
- Eliminate interactive screen time only (ex. gaming, apps, social media)
- Reintroduce screen use in small amounts and reassess as you go
- If dysregulation returns, before making other treatment decisions, try another fast
- If your child suffers a return of insomnia or non-restorative sleep, repeat the fast and consider elimination

Specific Rules You Could Implement

- Reintroduce screens by only allowing them to be used on weekends after all homework and chores are done. Start with just fifteen minutes once a week on Saturday or Sunday. Make sure it happens during the daytime and not at night before bed. Maintain this limit for 3 months, then increase to 30 minutes total over the weekend.
- Use a screen time allowance system in which the child checks out the device and sets a timer for the time allotted. This can continue only to the degree the child remains symptom-free and accountable.
- On weeknights there should be no interactive screen-time allowed, but 20 mins of TV is okay after homework and chores are done. On weekends, 30 minutes per day could be allowed after responsibilities are taken care of.
- No screen-time should be allowed on weeknights. One hour of passive or interactive screen-time could be allowed per weekend day.
- If all homework and chores are done, extra chores can earn 30 minute tickets of screen time on weekends, but only two hours total would be allowed per week.

Your goal is to determine the “dose” your child can tolerate, both in a single setting and over a given time period. If your child is consistently regressing back to poor behavior and unable to self-regulate, it’s an indication that overall screen time needs to be reduced further and kept that way.

It will continue to be helpful to track and document what you’re noticing as screen use is re-introduced. It’s recommended that you document the following:

- 1) How much screen time is occurring per week, what form it's in and when it's allowed
- 2) The date a change in screen allowance started
- 3) Problem areas you're detecting behaviorally, socially, physically or academically
- 4) Each time you change the parameters and for what reason

As the rules are modified, keep the Accountability Act in place as a way to continue reinforcing the rules.

What Doctor Dunckley Has to Say

"You may need to repeat the Reset multiple times over the years, and each fast may result in new rules or realizations for how screen-time can be best managed going forward...continually assess whether to continue the status quo, relax or tighten restrictions, or regroup by embarking on another fast (Reset, 220)."

"If you've effectively eliminated electronics as the prime suspect in your child's dysregulation, the identity of other issues may now be clearer. However, if you do identify a new or stronger source that better explains your child's dysregulation, I still recommend continuing to eliminate or strictly limit interactive screen-time while you get a handle on those issues, as this will render whatever else is going on more amenable to treatment (Reset, 223)."

"If problems promptly return, you may need to fast again for a period of several months... If you reintroduce [screens] and problems don't return, then maintain the new screen allowances for three months while monitoring problem areas... Even if your child can tolerate a moderate amount of screen-time after the reset, that may change over time. Keep documenting your child's behavior and progress (Reset, 223)."

"The moment you see behavior slipping, pull back or jump into another fast. Don't wait for things to become worse. Delays from attempting to moderate can compound damage. Since lying about and sneaking device use and being defiant with screen rules



are signs of screen addiction, treat this behavior seriously... If the violations are flagrant and ongoing, this is a sign that you need to eliminate interactive screen-time altogether for a period of three to six months to interrupt and quiet those addiction reward pathways (Reset, 236)."

"Puberty may be an especially important time to keep screen stimulation at a minimum, since what gets fired in the brain, gets wired in the brain (Reset, 238)."

When to Eliminate Screens

If children have any of the following conditions, it's strongly recommended to permanently eliminate screen use. It gets easier the longer you do it. As Dr. Dunckley puts it, "By controlling your child's environment, you have control over your child's prognosis (Reset, 226)."

- Psychosis
- ASD
- Intellectual disability
- Internet or technology addiction
- Reactive attachment disorder
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Academic failure
- Antisocial behavior and conduct
- Social incompetence
- Explosive aggression
- Severe ADHD (it can render medications and other interventions useless)
- Severe sensory dysfunction
- Depression with suicidality
- Serious medical conditions

Other Ways to Reduce Stress on the Brain

There are many culprits that put undue stress on our brains. It's not just our digital devices that are the problem. If you're looking for more ways to foster healthy brain development, here's a list of things to consider trying. Dr. Dunckley says the first three should be seen as non-negotiable, golden standard action items to support a healthy mental state.



- ***Model appropriate screen behavior yourself. Ask your kids regularly how they feel you're doing with your screen time. Try and stay off social media when you're around them.***
- ***Remove devices from all bedrooms permanently.***
- ***Use a directly wired communal workstation in an open area, requiring internet and social media use where it can be seen.***

- Eliminating wireless devices greatly reduces manmade EMF's (electromagnetic frequencies).
- Lower the screen brightness to more closely match the surrounding environment to reduce overstimulation.
- Larger screen size is a factor implicated in higher arousal levels.
- Never use a laptop or tablet directly on your lap.
- The bedrooms should remain free of electronics.
- Keep lights extra low an hour before bedtime.
- Avoid exposure to CFL and LED bulbs in the evening and never use them in bedrooms.
- Sleep in pitch-black darkness for more restorative sleep.
- Require that kids engage in an hour of physical activity before they're eligible for screen time.
- Interactive screen time should only be allowed when kids are symptom free, performing well and meeting expectations at home.
- Review rules with the family often and post in a visible area.
- Children respond best when parents are consistent and nurturing.
- Ban the use of multiple screens simultaneously as it fractures attention and magnifies hyperarousal.
- Establish certain times that are always screen free and designate a time when everything needs to be turned in and shut off.
- Have at least one screen-free day a week.

- Establish device-free zones like the dinner table, the bathroom, car and bedroom.
- Consider using timers and checkout sheets to hold kids accountable for their screen time.
- Meditation is a great counteractive measure against screen time side effects.

Quotes Worth Sharing

“The next wave of devices might make today’s screen-time problems seem laughable...Of course [letting your child use screens] is convenient. That is perhaps the sole reason for its existence. But don’t be fooled. A penny’s worth of convenience will cost you a pound of problems... Steer clear of adding new devices to the home. It’s harder to have and give up than never to have at all (Reset, 241).”

“The rise in childhood psychosocial and neurodevelopmental issues has increased in lockstep with the insidious growth of electronic-screen exposure in daily life” (Reset, 2).

“So what can you expect from the Reset? Based on utilizing a strict electronic fast in over 500 children, teens and young adults, and observing the changes during and following the fast, I have found that in children with diagnosed psychiatric disorders, about 80% will show marked improvement (symptom reduction of at least 50%) across all psychiatric symptom and diagnostic categories. In children without an underlying disorder, the percentage may be even higher, and of those who respond positively, about half will show a complete resolution of symptoms (that is, cessation of tantrums, chronic irritability, poor focus, and so on), and the other half will show marked improvement. You can expect to see a happier child with better focus and organization, improved compliance, and more mature social interactions. Beyond relief from the worst aspects of ESS (Electronic Screen Syndrome), my goal for your child is not just symptom relief, but optimization of brain, mind, and social development” (Reset, 10).

“The cycle of craving play, playing, and then withdrawing not only creates stress but also causes the brain to be more sensitive to stress, resulting in a hair-trigger response to even mild stressors...the inability to deal with stress leads to the need to escape, and the user uses more. In fact, ‘escapism’--using screen-time to avoid reality--has been found to be a predictor of video game addiction (Reset, 42-43).”

“Screen-time affects our brains and bodies at multiple levels, manifesting in various mental health symptoms related to mood, anxiety, cognition, and behavior... Over time, repeated fight-or-flight and overstimulation of the nervous system from electronics will often eventually culminate in a dysregulated child” (Reset, 16).

“Dysregulation – the loss of the ability to modulate responses in a manner appropriate to the current environment (Reset, 44).”

“Abuse and addiction of stimulant drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine have a very similar presentation to that of ESS, including mood swings, concentration problems, and restricted interests outside of the substance or activity of choice” (Reset, 17). “Actual brain damage occurs from excessive Internet and video game use that looks remarkably similar to that from drug and alcohol abuse” (Reset, 21). “Their brains ‘light up’ in exactly the same areas as the brain of someone addicted to drugs...it’s an arousal addiction – that is, the user becomes addicted to high levels of stimulation and arousal and then needs more stimulation to achieve or sustain that feeling” (Reset, 42-43).

“The power of screen liberation should not be underestimated (Reset, 125).”

“If it were up to me, I’d love it if no interactive screen devices were introduced at all to children until age twelve, and after that only sparingly for computer skills. Further, I’d recommend that children who were having any problems in school or at home related to mood, cognition, or behavior issues have zero interactive screen-time, along with very limited television (Reset, 231).”

“The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting screen-time to one to two hours daily. However, these guidelines don’t distinguish between passive and interactive screen time, and they apply to an ideal, ‘symptom-free’ child, one who is well-rested, performing up to his or her academic potential, physically and creatively active, and enjoying healthy relationships with peers. Otherwise, be much more conservative, since this guideline is way too high for a dysregulated child (Reset, 238).”

“We create our children’s futures. We don’t know what the next wave of technology will bring, but surely being mindful of vulnerabilities specific to children, and to mental health in general, can help us to adapt to technology in a more graceful and balanced manner in the future. If we were all more aware of the magnitude, severity, and variety of electronic-related stress that most of us are exposed to on a daily basis, and we all took action accordingly, we would not only reduce suffering from mental and physical illnesses, but we’d dramatically reduce the costs associated with these illnesses. This, in turn, could free up resources to provide what children, families, and communities really need to thrive (Reset, 283).”

“Quality of life and success will always be optimized by a healthy brain, solid self-esteem, and a sense of true connectedness with others – especially for children struggling with other issues. Thus, to best raise our children, we must restore our trust in Mother Nature, choose truth and reality over technology’s razzle-dazzle, and return to living in the manner in which individuals and society function best – as a village (Reset, 294).”

“If a child is suffering from ESS, it is critical that it be taken seriously and addressed with strict screen management. Attention, mood, cognitive, and behavioral disorders will become a barrier to any future career, computer-related or not... A person’s skills and mental abilities will be immeasurably improved by early screen-time limits (Reset, 315).”

“Screen-time compounds hyperarousal; it slows down treatment or renders it ineffective; it creates a ‘hair trigger’ response to stress; it limits the capacity for intimacy, empathy, trust, and compassion; and it effectively magnifies stress load on the adoptive family (Reset, 227).”

“Screen-time is associated with weight gain, high blood pressure, blood sugar dysregulation, and high cholesterol. Further, studies suggest screen-time increases risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome—conditions that were essentially unheard of in children even one generation ago...screen time slows metabolism and impairs hunger and fullness cues (Reset, 313).”

*“Extreme shyness, poor sportsmanship, limited empathy skills, and reduced tolerance for intimacy are all made worse when face-to-**screen** replaces face-to-**face**. A defensive nervous system in survival mode cannot trust and therefore cannot form close relationships, and a poorly functioning frontal lobe cannot delay gratification, tolerate disappointment, or self-reflect. Aside from predicting relationship quality, these are essential ingredients for becoming a responsible adult with a strong moral compass” (Reset, 85-86).*

Appendix A - FAQ's

For more current FAQ's and helpful insights on how to troubleshoot situations that may arise, refer to the Member's Area link here: <https://tame-your-tech.org/back-on-track/>

Q: What if I have a child who absolutely refuses to do the reset?

A: As parents, we don't always have the perfect solution. Because each situation is different, it's hard to say what will work and what won't with your child.

One way to handle this would be to give the child a couple of different options. Maybe they're allowed to use a basic phone if they do some extra work to earn that privilege, while still respecting the foundational Slow Start rules. Perhaps you make a deal that involves one-on-one time with you each week as part of the compromise. Maybe you give them a list of things to do before they decide on their own what's really best for them. Are there articles you'd like them to read? Mentors they could talk to that will help reinforce your concern for their well-being?

It's often best to express trust that they'll make the best choice for them. Convey that you love the child no matter what and that you love having them in your life. Then move forward the best you can.

Q: What if I have a teen who doesn't want to attend the group activities?

A: Ask questions to try and understand the real reasons behind this. Validate whatever they have to share.

If you feel the child could use more face-to-face time to socialize, see if you can find another creative way to make that happen. What other outings or activities would he/she enjoy and be open to trying?

No matter what, let the child know they'll be missed and make sure they feel your support, regardless.

Q: What if a family backs out of the reset mid-process?

A: Learn what their reasons are for this and extend appreciation for them giving it a try. Adjust the family groups you might have organized and carry on the best you can.

Press Pause. Reconnect. Come Alive Again.

If life feels too busy, distracted, and disconnected, *Back on Track* is your invitation to do a reset. In just a few short weeks, your family will rediscover what it feels like to be more present, grounded, and truly connected—no screens attached.

Based on the proven work of Dr. Victoria Dunckley (*Reset Your Child's Brain*) and inspired by other waymakers like Jonathan Haidt and Lenore Skenazy, this program helps families trade digital overload for real-life balance. With the support of other families walking the same path, you'll build new rhythms that bring fresh perspective and a calm awareness into your home.

This isn't just a screen break—it's a chance to reclaim your family's time, attention, and identity. Now's your chance to wake up to what matters most so you don't miss the moments passing by right before your eyes.

Join us and see what's possible.

