

Supporting Children with Screen Time

A Parent Guide for Ages 4–8

Digital devices can be enjoyable and useful, but many children find them difficult to stop. This guide offers simple, research-informed strategies to help children manage screen time and reduce tantrums when devices are turned off.

Why do tantrums happen when devices are removed?

Devices are highly stimulating and engaging. When children are asked to stop, they may feel:

- Frustrated
- Disappointed
- Overstimulated
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A tantrum is often a sign that a child is **struggling to regulate their emotions**, not simply being “naughty.”

What to do when a tantrum happens

Stay calm and consistent

- Use a calm voice:
“I can see you’re upset. It’s hard to stop.”
- Avoid long explanations during the tantrum

Hold the boundary

- Do not give the device back to stop the behaviour
- Consistency helps children learn limits over time

Offer comfort

- Sit nearby or offer reassurance if your child accepts it

Keep language simple

- *“iPad time is finished. Now it’s time for ___.”*
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After the tantrum (when your child is calm)

- Name the feeling:
“You felt angry when the iPad turned off.”
 - Teach alternatives:
“Next time you can say, ‘Can I have one more minute?’”
 - Reassure:
“Big feelings are okay.”
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Preventing daily struggles

Give clear warnings

- “5 minutes left... 2 minutes... last minute”

Use a visual timer

- Helps children see when time is ending

Transition to something appealing

- Plan the next activity:
- Outdoor play
- Drawing or craft
- Building toys (e.g., LEGO)
- Reading or listening to stories

Keep routines predictable

- Same time each day → less negotiation and anxiety
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Helping children transition off devices

Step-by-step approach

- Set clear limits:
-“You can use the iPad for 30 minutes after school.”
- If needed, reduce gradually:
-Shorten use by 10–15 minutes over time

Create a “closing routine”

- Finish the game or show
- Say “goodbye”
- Plug the device in → signals the end

Replace, don’t just remove

Children cope better when they have something else to do:

- Outdoor play (best for emotional regulation)
- Creative activities
- Social play

Boredom is not harmful—it often leads to creativity.

Healthy screen habits at home

- Keep screens out of bedrooms
 - Avoid screens during meals
 - Turn off devices at least 1 hour before bedtime
 - Model healthy use as adults
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How much screen time is recommended?

For children aged **4–8 years**:

- Aim for **no more than 1–2 hours per day** of recreational screen time
- Less is often better, especially on school days

Focus on quality

Choose:

- Slow-paced, age-appropriate content
 - Educational programs or apps
 - Co-viewing when possible (watching together)
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Key messages for parents

- Tantrums are a sign of **big emotions**, not bad behaviour
 - **Preparation and routine** reduce struggles
 - Stay calm, consistent, and predictable
 - Offer engaging alternatives to screens
 - Focus on teaching lifelong self-regulation skills
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Remember:

You are not aiming for perfect behaviour—
you are helping your child learn how to manage their feelings and make healthy choices over time.