



EVERYDAY SCREEN-FREE PLAY THE EASY WAY

Whether during a lockdown or school holidays, it's important to find a way to balance children's screen-time with other activities, but finding screen-free ideas they will enjoy can be a challenge.

Encourage your child's imaginative and creative skills with quick and easy activities which can be set up using everyday materials and objects from around the home. This handout also includes how to get smart with your child's screen-time, and top tips for a screen-free day of play.

TOP TIPS FOR A SCREEN-FREE DAY OF PLAY



Follow my leader – the more positive examples children have from how adults limit their screen time, the more likely they are to follow, so think about how and when you use your phone, digital tablet, or TV. If you're negotiating screen time allowances, be sure to include yourself in that too!



Don't be fearful of boredom – it's fine for children to have 'nothing to do' and there's a lot of science to back up the benefits of this and how boredom can stimulate creativity, imagination, independence, and problem solving. Be patient, and hold your nerve – children are great at finding things to do on their own.



Plan ahead – discuss and agree as a family when your screen-free days will be, and get children thinking ahead about what their day might look like, what they (and you!) will do that doesn't involve screens. It might all seem a little strange at first, but as screen-free days become more familiar, they will also become a more regular feature of family life too.



Resources – it's always worth having a few resources available for your child, so put together a small box of everyday items that become your child's 'go to' box for their free play. Here's some ideas of items you might want to include:

Large piece of white paper
Crayons/pencils
Cling film
Sticky notes
Chalks
Paper clips
Empty jam jar
Wooden clothes pegs

Coloured & white card/paper
Sticky back plastic (contact paper)
Sticky tape
Scissors
Rubber bands
Glue
Marshmallows
Cardboard tubes

Cardboard
Empty shoe box
Ziplock bags
Marker pens
Paper plates
Kitchen towel
Empty milk bottles
Pieces of felt/material
Buttons
Jar Lids
Bottle cap



BE SMART WITH SCREEN-TIME

Technology and screen time are part of everyday family life, but that doesn't mean it can't be meaningful and stimulating. Here are some great ways for families to get smart with screen time:

- **Choose screen activities which have educational interactivity** rather than just ones for pure entertainment. For example games which require decision-making, determination, and tenacity, e.g. which way to turn, where to place the next block, progression through increasingly difficult layers; or games where virtual worlds are created by responding to concerns of key characters.
- **Make screen-time interactive between family members** - sit with your child for at least part of the time they're playing a game on screen, and encourage feedback and conversation such as "*I wonder how we could move the square to the other side*" or "*Whose turn is it next?*"
- **Watch TV programmes together** if not for the whole time, then at least part of it. Family movie nights work well - watch a film together then talk afterwards about what you did or didn't enjoy. Encourage each other to justify what you're saying, so if someone says I didn't like character x, ask them what it was about the character they didn't like. This is a great activity for nurturing children's critical thinking skills.
- **Help children make good choices about their screen time** just as they would make good choices about food for a healthy, balanced diet. *Younger children:* use straws or lollipop sticks where each item is exchanged for say half an hour of screen time. *Older children:* talk about what they think is a reasonable amount of screen time, then negotiate using questions to reach a time allowance you are generally happy with. Remember to give positive feedback and praise when children keep to allowances and make good decisions about screen time.
- **Balance it out** - think about how screen time is balanced out with other activities, e.g. one hour of screen time may be balanced out with one hour (or perhaps two) of screen-free activities. Build screen time around screen-free family activities, not the other way round.
- **Be snack aware** – try not to make snacks available during screen use, but if you do, think carefully about a child's overall diet plan, and make the snacks as healthy as possible.
- **Sleep** – protect sleep time by making sure at least the last hour before bedtime is screen-free.

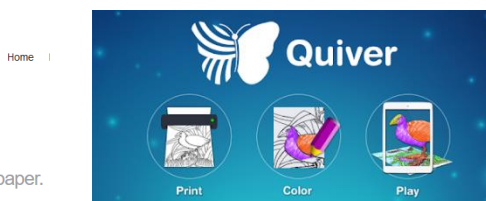
Other suggestions for smart screen use include:

- Taking the tech outdoors by using it for family activities which stimulate interaction such as [Geocaching](#), Making a video, or [Stargazing](#).
- Using apps which help make the connection between online and the real world with something they enjoy e.g. [Foldify](#) to create animals online then print, cut, and fold to play with them in real life; or [Quiver](#) where drawings on paper come to life as they are animated through augmented reality.



Create, Print, Fold

Create 3D figures on iPad. Then print and fold them from paper.



12 EASY SCREEN-FREE ACTIVITIES CHILDREN WILL LOVE

There are so many screen-free activities which require little or no planning, and very few resources other than items you have around your home such as those listed above. Many of the activities here also tap into your child's natural imagination and creativity, and support the development of areas such as maths, literacy, science, critical thinking, and communication skills, so they're learning as they have fun!

How many hands?

You will need: piece of paper and a pencil

Have your child draw around their own hand and yours. Cut out the shapes then walk around the house measuring 'how many hands' particular objects are, comparing the difference between adult and child sized hands.



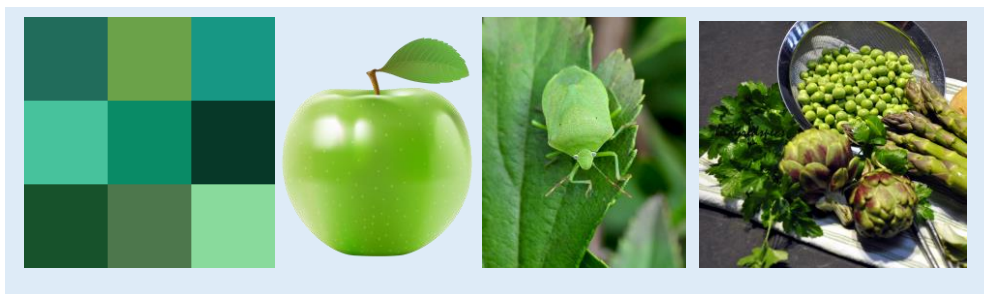
Explore your day in colour

You will need: observation skills

What colour is today going to be – red, blue, yellow, green? You decide!

Now to explore your day in that colour... let's say the colour green is chosen. You could:

- Collect items from around the house which are green
- Eat green food
- Look for green insects or animals
- Take a photograph of green flowers
- Paint a green picture



Enjoy your day of colour. What colour will tomorrow be?

Shadow Art

You will need: plain paper, toy animals (or whatever objects your child chooses), and a sunny day!

Place the paper on a flat surface outside and arrange the objects around the edge of the paper. As the shadows are cast, trace the shadows made. Create a fuller picture by adding in other details.

Extend the activity by creating a shadow puppet theatre.

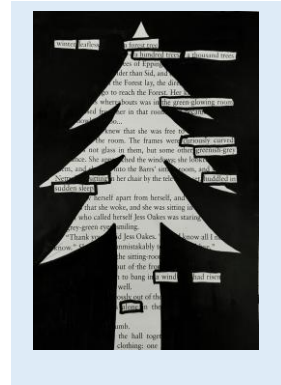


Be a Blackout Poet

You will need: an old book or magazine

This is a really fun way to get children using words to create art. In its simplest form, just choose a page of an old book (preferably one you don't mind being written in), select a paragraph and start to black out words with a marker pen. Leave behind words to create a new sentence or piece of prose.

More creative flair can be added to this activity by creating shapes and patterns through blacking out larger chunks of words. Go create!



Magic Paper Towel Art

You will need: kitchen paper towel, marker pens, water

1. Take one piece of paper towel and fold it in half. Now cut this in half so you have two small squares, one behind the other, of the same size.
2. Take your marker pens and draw an outline of a picture on the top layer of the paper. Some of the ink will come through to the piece of kitchen towel underneath but that's fine.
3. Now fold back the top piece and colour in the outline on the second piece. A rainbow is one of the easiest things to draw to start off with.
4. Next, put some water in a wide bowl, then place the kitchen paper gently into the water. As the water soaks into the paper it looks like the colours of the rainbow have appeared by magic!



Don't Touch the Lava (with a twist!)

You will need: coloured circles of card (or cushions if you don't have card)



Place cut out, brightly coloured circles of card around the room. The idea is to move around walking only on the circles – everything else is lava, so watch out! The twist comes when there is a race to 'rescue' particular items that have also been placed close to the lava – this might be words or numbers (if your child is learning these), or perhaps food items which make up a favourite treat!

Photo credit: themanylittlejoys.com

Treasure Hunts with a Twist

Treasure Hunts are enjoyed by children of all ages, but sometimes even the more traditional games benefit from a little twist. Try these ideas for treasure hunts with a difference:

- *Theme* your hunt according to interest e.g. Space, Fairies, Superheroes, Nature
- *Colours* – a hunt based around colours can help children learn about mixing colours too
- *Community* – ask questions about the local community which hunters then discover the answer to e.g. 'What kind of pet does No. 6 have?'
- *Sensory/Shape* – find items which represent the following: prickly, soft, rough, smooth and/or items which have points, are circular, triangular etc.
- *Create a series of QR codes* to hide around the house and/or garden. When scanned, each QR contains a clue to solve which leads to the next hidden QR and so on, until the final one reveals where the treasure is!
- *Indoors* – indoor hunts need a little more thought as the environment will be more familiar to your child, but use of cryptic clues can be fun and non-literal, promoting imaginative thinking

Tell me where to go

You will need: indoor or outdoor space; blindfold

A great activity at home or out and about. Set up a simple obstacle course, blindfold one player and the other calls out directions to lead them through the course. If playing outside then give directions to a particular place such as a park bench, or tree.

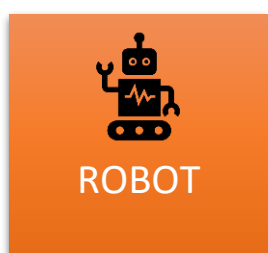
For younger children, model the activity so they know the directions and location words e.g. forwards, backwards, left, right, diagonal, to the left/to the right.

When completed or reached their destination, remove the blindfold, and talk about how easy or difficult it was to follow the instructions – what could have been improved or done differently? How well were the instructions followed?

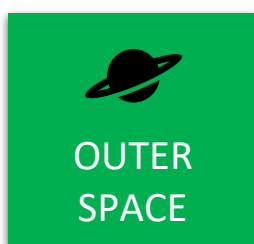
Pick a Story

[Download the story cards here](#), then cut each card out and put into 3 separate bags – one each for character, setting, and object. Pick one random card from each bag and create a story based on the character, setting, and object selected. With 16 cards in every bag there's no end of possible stories to create.

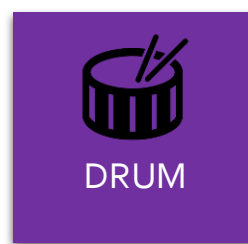
You could also add some of your child's small toys, or some small household objects into each bag, just change these from time to time to keep things unpredictable.



Character



Setting



Object

Cardboard Canvas

You will need: cardboard; imagination

If children regularly turn to screens to keep themselves occupied while parents are busy it can become a lot more difficult for them to find alternative ways to occupy themselves when boredom sets in.

Imaginative play is essential to children's development and there's no better way of encouraging this than through 'free play' with cardboard. Here are some simple ideas:

- Take one, or as many empty cardboard boxes as you have available, stand back, and **let the children play**. What ideas will they come up with? Could the box be a spaceship, a house, or a whole city? How about a racetrack, market stall, washing machine, maze, castle, puppet theatre, or television?
- **Cardboard shapes** (*younger children*) – create shapes such as animals, people, or cars from pieces of cardboard. Decorate with stickers or colour them in.
- **Create something which moves** e.g. a marble run
- **Create an object beginning with 'C'** e.g. computer, cooker (or choose any letter of the alphabet)

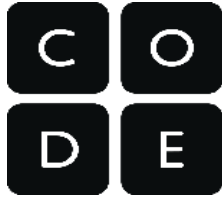
Resist the temptation to intervene and suggest ideas for what they can do - give them space to learn to enjoy being in the world, and some thinking time.



www.pinterest.co.uk/candochild/

Code Crackers

You will need: paper, pencil/pen, imagination



Create a new code and write messages to each other to decipher.

Make this a practical activity by writing instructions e.g. please do the washing up! Younger children can create drawings for their messages. Have fun!

Active Dice

You will need: paper, pictures (draw them or cut out from magazines), glue

Create a paper dice, then either draw on or cut out pictures of animals or insects.

Stick or draw one picture on each side, and write alongside each the action and a number e.g. Rabbit – 5 bunny hops; Ant – 1 minute marching like an ant; Butterfly – 5 circles fluttering like a butterfly.



Find more easy, screen-free activities in Lorraine's new book:

["A Parent's Guide to Easy, Screen-Free Activities Children Will Love"](#)

- ✓ Over 170 easy, screen-free activities children will love
- ✓ Budget-friendly ideas using everyday resources
- ✓ Balance of independent learning and family fun
- ✓ Tips for parents to encourage a child's Can-Do mindset
- ✓ Ideal for holidays, weekends, or on the move
- ✓ Printables and downloads available online

ACTION PLAN

To help put your action plan together, consider where you are on a scale of 0-6 for each of these questions:

How much of your child's screen time is used for entertainment?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Almost all			A fair amount			None at all

Does screen time get in the way of what you do as a family e.g. face to face conversations, trips out, conversations at mealtimes?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Most of the time			Occasionally			None at all

How far do you feel screen-time is disrupting your child's sleep?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Most of the time			A little			None at all

Is snacking controlled during your child's screen time?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all			Most of the time			All the time

Now create your own [Family Media Plan](#).

Complete this online together as a family, then print out and display at home.

How will you know if changes are successful?

Decide on your own criteria, but this may include:

- Feeling more confident in how your children are using their screens
- Less tantrums or complaints when children don't have access to screens
- Screen-free play becomes the 'go to' activity of choice