

Fighting the Screen Time Battle

By Tasha Killian

One of the biggest challenges parents face today is the battle that comes when it's time to put the screens away. Your children think it's the end of the world because they can't finish their game, watch the next episode of their show, or keep their online or text conversations going. A battle ensues and you both end up angry by the time the screen is actually turned off and you are transitioned to the next activity. If this resonates with you, you are not alone. Like I said at the beginning, one of the biggest challenges parents face today is transitioning from screen time to another activity – and this goes for children of all ages. But, it doesn't have to be this way. Here's some tips, adapted from an article posted by Common Sense Media that will help you eliminate the stress and struggle of screen time transitions.

The first tip is to have a plan. Work with your children on how and when screens will be turned off. Get their input and then decide on when it will be. That way they know and can anticipate the time when they will be turned off. I say all the time that practice makes prepared, in this case your practice will be the plan you've already decided on, so when the time to shut off the screens comes, you and your children will know that's the plan. This leads to the second step – create a routine. Just like getting children to bed on time is easiest to be done on routine, so is setting screen time limits. If your children know that at 8:00 pm every night screens are off, they will get into the routine of finishing their games, sending their messages, etc. before that time. Building a routine is important, but remember, start where you are. New routines take time, so if you aren't where you want to be now, work step by step to get there. This might mean that you turn the screens off an hour later and then each week shorten that time by fifteen minutes so that you can work up to the desired device off time.

This next tip is one that's for younger children. The tip is to teach them how to shut off the TV. Young children live in a world where they are constantly searching for ways to build autonomy. From teaching them how to get dressed by themselves to having them help around the house, children are learning how to be functioning members of society. By teaching a child to turn off the TV, or another device, themselves, it is another step towards autonomy. In fact, you may even find that they start doing it themselves. An example of how you can do this is by saying things like “okay, once we see the words on the television and hear the music, we know the show is over and it is time to press this button on the remote to turn the television off so we can do something different.” Like I said, this is just an example, but younger children get excited about learning new skills that help them feel older and like they are in charge, so giving them the responsibility of being in charge of turning off their screen when it is time to transition to a new activity will help when enforcing screen time guidelines.

Tip number four is to try to avoid back to back shows. How many times have you been sucked into watching two more episodes than you probably should have because whatever you were streaming your show on had auto-play going? Did you know that streaming services have options to turn off the auto-play option? Doing this on all your accounts on all your devices will

keep you from hearing “but it already started” and make it easier to enforce limits. Just like with many other things, children need warning in advance. It might be good to give a two-minute warning. If you know two minutes won’t cut it, give a ten-minute warning. Giving the responsibility to shut off media back to your child will be helpful, that way, you aren’t the bad guy. They know the limits, they have the warning, and they are prepared for when the time to turn off the device is. Remember, prepared makes perfect. Prepare your child for when screen time will be up so there won’t be a battle. Another tip to try is to give praise. If your child successfully transitions to another activity, make sure to acknowledge that action by saying something like “thanks for turning off the TV and coming to set the table.” Children are more likely to follow through again if they have a positive experience. The last tip is a bonus tip –BE PATIENT. I know it can be hard to take away a screen from a child, but remember that your children are still people and you’d be upset too, if someone took away your cellphone, show, or game while you were engaged in it. Patience is key.

Monitoring and limiting screen time can be challenges for parents today, but they don’t have to be. You can turn media mayhem into technology togetherness. I will be teaching an online course about this topic within the next month. Like our Facebook Page and follow us on Instagram to stay up to date with all the courses and programs we have coming out!