

The S.U.M.M.E.R Approach to Raising Confident Kids Beyond the Screen

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Summertime has begun! As a parent, you may feel overwhelmed trying to fill the extra hours in your child's day, along with the ongoing challenge of balancing screen time and the inevitable "Put-that-iPad-down-and-GO-OUTSIDE"!

It's important to remember that not all screen time is bad. Some screen time connects us to family and friends that live far away, and other screen time invites us to jump into adventures and stories that can contribute to certain aspects of development and problem-solving (Jeffries, 2024). But too much screen time, or the wrong kinds of screen time can cause negative effects on child development and mental health (Anderson, 2025).

Your mindset around what a healthy summer looks like for your family, and a commitment to doing your best with that tricky screentime balancing act, will make all the difference. Try remembering the acronym, **S.U.M.M.E.R.**, to keep you on track for a memorable summer.

S - Slow Down

Did you know there is research to suggest that being bored is a good thing? You don't have to fill every day with adventures and content! Being bored can lead to creativity, problem solving, self-discovery, and more imaginative play (Man and Cadman, 2014). When everyone in the house starts to complain about being bored, embrace it! **Slow down** and welcome boredom.

U - Unplug

Be aware of how much time you and your family are spending on and off screens and intentionally schedule

regular "**Unplugged**" time. What works for your family may be different than what works for others. The American Academy of Pediatrics has come up with a new recommended guideline for regulating your child's screen use called, *The 5 C's*. Ask these questions to make the right decisions for you (Kryl, 2026).

1. **Child:** Who is your child, and how do they react to media?
2. **Content:** What is worth their attention?
3. **Calm:** How do they calm their emotions or go to sleep?
4. **Crowding Out:** What does media get in the way of?
5. **Communication:** How can you talk about media to raise a media savvy, responsible child?

M - Move your Body

The benefits of physical activity are nearly endless. **Moving our bodies** improves strength and coordination, keeps our hearts healthy, helps us think more clearly, and reduces anxiety and depression (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025). The best part? You and your kids don't have to be "sporty" or at the gym to enjoy all these benefits. Build an obstacle course in the yard or inside the house. Try a yoga video, or dance to your favorite song, or get outside for a nature walk, hike, or bike ride. You can even track all that movement by joining the Marathon Kids program. Check out [Marathon Kids | Extension | USU](#) to learn more, sign up (it's free!), and download your printable movement trackers.

M - Make Something

Making things is exactly the kind of embodied experience we all need to express ourselves creatively, solve problems in real time, and build resilience (Yang et al., 2025). Make something together, or set your kids loose in the kitchen, the backyard, the garage—really, anywhere can be turned into an impromptu makerspace if you've got materials to work with and age-appropriate tools at your fingertips. **Make something** and get creative.

E - Explore

Summer is the perfect time for kids to **explore**, whether it's physically in the great outdoors, or mentally in the unfamiliar worlds of fictional characters. Unstructured outdoor play builds children's confidence and resilience as they face a bit of physical risk, challenge, and uncertainty and learn to show bravery and problem-solving skills amid their adventures (Gray et al., 2025). And when kids

read stories about characters who face and overcome challenges, they develop greater empathy, emotional regulation, and social understanding (Batini et al., 2021).

R - Reconnect

Spending time with friends and family and **reconnecting** with others is not only a great way to spend the summer, but it also has profound impacts on your health. Some doctors refer to social connections as “a pillar of lifestyle medicine” (Marinto, Pegg, & Frates, 2015) and socializing should be used as medicine! Schedule a friend date either for yourself or for your children.

Conclusion

Summer is a wonderful time to experiment with your family's screen time rules and routines by encouraging greater exploration and growth in the real (non-screen) world. Let your kids discover the magic of **slowing down, unplugging, moving their bodies, making things, exploring, and reconnecting with friends**. They'll be talking about this summer's adventures for years to come!

Fun Resources for Maximizing Your S.U.M.M.E.R. Fun!

[Marathon Kids | Extension | USU](#)

[Let Grow - When Adults Step Back, Kids Step Up.](#)

[Every Kid Outdoor \(EKO\) Home Page - Utah Outdoor Recreation](#)

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