



## Smartphone Free Childhood

Connecting, empowering and uniting parents, educators and regulators to delay smartphones and social media, establish phone-free schools, and safeguard the use of technology in education.

# A Parent's Guide: Explaining screen limits to grandparents & caregivers



Setting consistent screen time boundaries with other caregivers, such as grandparents, au pairs, or family members, is vital because consistency is what helps young children understand and accept rules.

**This requires approaching the conversation with teamwork, clarity, and empathy.**

Here is a step-by-step approach and useful scripts for setting these boundaries:



### Establish Your Family Media Plan

*Before speaking with anyone else, you and your co-parent/partner need to be aligned on the non-negotiables. Here is an example:*

Boundary Element	Your Rule for the Under -5 Child
Time Limit	X minutes total per day (e.g., "30 minutes total").
Timing/Zones	Screen-Free times (e.g., "No screens during meals," "No screens one hour before nap/bedtime").
Content Quality	Only high-quality, parent-approved educational shows (e.g., "Only Kids-approved shows, no YouTube/movies").
Co-Viewing	Parent/caregiver should watch with the child to encourage conversation and critical thought.



## Approach the Conversation with Empathy and Teamwork

When talking to caregivers, it's helpful to frame it as a partnership, in which we are all learning as we go, rather than a list of demands.

### The "Grandparent/Family" Script:

*"We are so grateful that you spend time with [Child's Name], you create such wonderful memories with them!"*

*Because of how fast their brain is growing, their pediatrician has given us a few simple rules we're trying to stick to, so we can keep things consistent."*

#### Focus on the Rule:

*"Our main rule is that [Child's Name] gets 30 minutes of screen time total per day, and we like to save it for a calm-down moment before dinner. If they use a device while they are here, we ask that you limit it to 15-20 minutes so they still have some time left for later."*

#### Offer Alternatives:

*"To make it easier, I put together a Screen-Free Activity Bin with blocks, cars, dolls, lego, play-dough, and a stack of books for them to choose from. Could you please encourage them to use that first?"*



Grandparents often want to spoil the child, which can mean relaxing rules, and spoiling them with devices. Acknowledge this love first.

### The "Au Pair/Nanny" Script

*Thank you for supporting our rules while you are caring for [Child's Name].*

*When it comes to screen time, we have a very clear policy we need you to follow for consistency.*

#### Focus on the Rule:

*"The rule is [State your Time Limit and Timing Rule clearly]. We also ask that they only watch [State Content Type]. If they ask for a device, please use the phrase, 'Let's find a screen-free activity, I know! Let's go build a fort!'"*

#### Address Transitions:

*"We know ending screen time can be hard. If you do watch a short show, please give them a 5-minute warning before you turn it off and transition right into a fun, exciting physical activity like playing outside or a bubble bath with toys."*



For paid childcare, the rules are clearer as it is a professional relationship, but still be empathetic and supportive in your discussion.



## Use Practical Tools to Reinforce the Boundary

When talking to caregivers, it's helpful to give suggestions on practical alternatives to screens.

### Create an "Activity Menu":

For their home (grandparents) or your home (sitter), provide a simple visual list or bin of engaging alternatives (as suggested in the previous answer) to instantly divert attention from the screen



### A "Screen Time Jar":

If your child gets a daily allowance (e.g., 30 minutes), give the caregiver a stack of tickets or a jar of buttons representing that time. Once the tickets/ buttons are used for the day, there is no more screen time.



### Use Visual Timers:

Give the caregiver a simple, non-digital hourglass or kitchen timer to use. When the sand runs out or the bell dings, the screen goes off. This shifts the blame from the caregiver to the timer.



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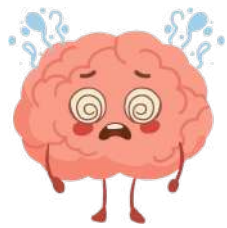
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## Provide assistance for managing screentime



Ending screen time often causes the most friction and meltdowns. The key is using predictable language and offering a positive transition to a new activity. Here are specific phrases and techniques to suggest to caregivers, to help a young child prepare for the screen to turn off.

### The Phased Warning System:

Use three simple, consistent steps to transition the child from the screen to the next activity. The language should be the same every time, which gives the child a sense of control and predictability.

Timing	Script/Wording	Action
<b>1. The First Warning (5 Minutes)</b>	"Five more minutes until screen time is over. When it is over, we will go [Name the Next Activity]."	Gently touch their shoulder or make eye contact if possible.
<b>2. The Last Chance Warning (2 Minutes)</b>	"Two more minutes! That means this will be the last song/game/scene. When it is done, we are going to [Name the Next Activity]."	Reiterate the transition. If they are watching a show, point out the next likely stopping point.
<b>3. The Shutdown (Time is Up)</b>	"Time is up! The screen is sleepy now and needs a rest. Let's say, 'Bye-bye screen!' Now, let's go [Start the New Activity]!"	Turn the screen off immediately (or physically remove the device). Do not negotiate or wait for the child's permission.



## Key Techniques for Smooth Transitions

### Externalize the "Blame"

Make the device or the timer the "bad guy" instead of the caregiver. This is especially helpful when dealing with strong emotions.

- "Oh look, the timer says our time is all used up for the day! The timer is the boss today!"
- "The TV is getting very tired and needs to sleep now. We can wake it up again tomorrow."
- "The battery is all gone! Time for it to charge while we go play."

## Connect the "Off" to a "Fun On"

*Never end screen time without immediately starting the next activity. Have the transition activity planned and ready to go.*

- *Bad: "Screen time is over now."*
- *Good: "Screen time is over! Now it's time to build the tall tower we planned! Let's go!"*
- *Good: "Screen time is done for the day! Let's go to the kitchen and make play-dough now!"*

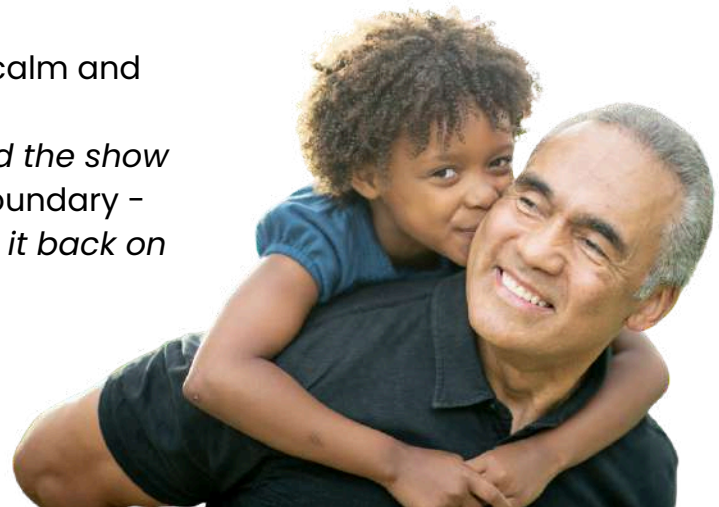
## Use the Power of Choice

*Giving the child a small choice about the transition can make them feel respected and cooperative.*

- *"The screen is done! Would you like to walk to the toy bin, or would you like to hop to the toy bin?"*
- *"Do you want to turn the TV off, or should I? Ready? 3... 2... 1... Off!" (Let them push the button if they choose it).*

**Remember:** If they have a meltdown, remain calm and empathetic.

**Acknowledge the feeling** - *"I know you are sad the show is over, that's okay to feel sad", but hold the boundary - "The screen is off now, and we are not turning it back on today".*



**Consistency is a sign of respect for your child's developing brain. By working together, you can ensure your child benefits from the best of both worlds: loving care and healthy boundaries.**