PARENTING + CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The 21-Day Screen Detox Plan for Children

Mrs Folasade's Method for Reclaiming Your Child from Screen Dependency

Stop fighting the phone.
Rebuild what it replaced.
The phone becomes optional.

Method by Mrs Folasade Adeyinka | Documented by Amaka O. | 2026

START HERE

Your child is not broken.

The phone filled a vacuum. This plan rebuilds what the phone replaced.

If the phone is the first thing your child reaches for in the morning, if taking it away produces rage, or if your child struggles to eat, sleep or sit still without a screen, you are in the right place. You are not a bad parent. Most of us handed over a device because we were tired and needed thirty minutes of quiet. Those thirty minutes quietly became hours.

This guide is built on one idea from retired child development specialist Mrs Folasade Adeyinka, who spent thirty years studying children's behaviour and the last ten focused on screen dependency:

> **THE CORE IDEA**
> *"Stop fighting the phone. The phone is not the problem. The phone is the symptom. Your child has lost four essential systems: boredom tolerance, emotional regulation, sustained engagement, and smooth transitions. The phone replaced all four. Rebuild all four, and the phone becomes unnecessary."*

Every earlier attempt you have made probably **fought** the phone: cold removal, locks, apps, yelling. This plan **replaces** what the phone provides. You will not take the phone away in Week 1. You will not have a showdown. You will build, trade and settle.

The 3 phases

Phase	Days	What happens
1. The Replacement Architecture	1 to 7	Build alternatives **before** reducing any screen time. No removal. No confrontation. Building only.
2. The Gradual Reduction	8 to 14	Screen time steps down by roughly 20 to 30 minutes a day, with a replacement in place for every minute removed.
3. The New Normal	15 to 21	A sustainable routine of about 1 to 2 hours of **intentional** screen time. The phone keeps its place. It loses its throne.

READ THIS FIRST

Why Fighting the Phone Fails

Understanding the **why** is what stops you quitting on Day 4. Every removal-based approach triggers the same cycle, and once you can see it, you can stop feeding it.

The tantrum cycle

1. The phone has become your child's main way of calming down, filling time and switching off. It is regulation, not just entertainment.
2. You remove it suddenly. Your child loses their main coping tool and has nothing to put in its place.
3. The result is rage, bargaining and pleading. It looks like bad behaviour, but it is a nervous system with no backup plan.
4. After a few days of battle you surrender, because you are exhausted and the household is miserable.
5. Your child learns the most important lesson of the cycle: **if I resist hard enough, it comes back.** The next removal is harder.

Why each common approach falls short

Approach	What usually happens	Why it fails
Cold removal	3 days of tantrums, then surrender.	Takes the coping tool away without building another. Teaches that resistance wins.
Screen time limits	Child cracks the passcode or switches to another device.	Limits control the device, not the need behind the use.
Parental control apps	Content is monitored. Compulsion is untouched.	Monitors behaviour without changing it. The habit just moves.
Alternative activities (alone)	15 minutes of interest, then “Can I have the phone now?”	No plan, no routine, no skills built. The activity competes with the phone and loses.
No phone at meals	Child stares at the wall. Dinner becomes a punishment.	Boredom tolerance is weak, and nothing has replaced the phone's role at the table.
Yelling	The child hides the phone and the relationship takes a hit.	Shame replaces fear. The phone goes underground instead of away.

What works instead

Everything above **fights** the phone. None of it **replaces** what the phone provides. This plan rebuilds the four systems the phone took over: boredom tolerance, emotional regulation, sustained engagement and smooth transitions. When those are strong, the phone loses its grip without a war.

THE SHIFT IN ONE LINE

Stop asking “How do I get the phone away?” Start asking “What is the phone doing for my child that I can help them do another way?”

BEFORE DAY 1

How to use this guide

Read this section and the next (The 4 Systems) in one sitting before you start. It takes about 20 minutes. Then follow the plan one day at a time. Each day has the same layout so you always know what to do:

Section	What it gives you
Goal	The one thing today is for.
Do	The exact steps. Most days take 20 to 40 minutes of your time.
Say	Word-for-word script so you stay calm and consistent.
Watch for	What resistance looks like today and how to handle it.
Checkpoint	A tick-box so you can see your own progress.

Who this plan is for

Children aged roughly 5 to 15. Every day includes age notes for 5 to 8, 9 to 12 and 13 to 15. Teenagers need more choice and more negotiation, so use the 13 to 15 notes and involve them in decisions from Day 1.

What you need

- A notebook or the tracker pages at the back of this guide.
- Basic supplies for replacement activities: paper, crayons or pencils, blocks, cardboard or any building material, a ball, cards or a board game (ludo, ayo, draughts, scrabble). The Screen-Free Activity Kit (Bonus #1) lists 50+ options by age.
- A visual timer or phone timer on **your** phone (not your child's).
- A charging spot outside the bedroom (you will set this up in Phase 3, but choose the location now).
- A calm voice. You will rehearse this more than anything else.

The 7 golden rules

1. **Add before you subtract.** Never reduce a screen slot until something else is ready to fill it.
2. **Be boring and predictable.** Same words, same tone, same order every day. Predictability is what lowers resistance.
3. **Validate the feeling, hold the limit.** “I know you want it. It is hard. The answer is still after.”
4. **No negotiating during a meltdown.** Discuss rules when everyone is calm, never in the heat of the moment.
5. **Never use the phone as punishment or reward.** That makes it more powerful. Treat it as a normal, limited part of the day.
6. **Join in.** Sit with your child for the first 10 minutes of each activity. Connection is the real replacement.

7. **Model it.** Put your own phone away during the plan's activity windows. Children copy what they see far more than what they hear.

A NOTE ON YOUR OWN GUILT

If you gave the phone at age 6, you did what many tired parents do. The goal now is not blame. It is a better next step. Guilt makes parents inconsistent; consistency is what makes this work.

BEFORE DAY 1

Day 0: Your baseline

Do not change anything yet. For two ordinary days, just watch and write down. You cannot see progress without a starting point.

Measure the starting point

Question	Your answer
Average daily screen time (check device usage settings or estimate honestly)	____ hours ____ min
What does the phone do for your child most? (tick any)	[ ] fills boredom [ ] calms big feelings [ ] sleep aid [ ] mealtime companion [ ] social contact [ ] habit
First thing in the morning child does	
Last screen time at night (clock time)	
Hardest transition of the day (e.g. phone to school, phone to dinner)	
Biggest trigger for tantrums	
Other devices in the home (tablet, TV, console, older sibling's phone)	

Choose your three “anchor slots”

Over the next three weeks you will work with these daily slots. Circle where the phone is used most:

Slot	Typical time	Phone use now
Morning	Wake-up to leaving home	
After school	Arrival to homework	
Mealtimes	Dinner and others	
Evening	After dinner to bed	
Bedtime / night	In bed, lights out	
Weekend	Saturday and Sunday	

Tell your child what is coming (the 3-minute talk)

Pick a calm time, not during a screen conflict. Keep it short and positive. You are not announcing a punishment; you are announcing a family project.

SAY THIS (AGES 5 TO 12)

“I have noticed the phone has become a really big part of our days, and I made that happen when I gave it to you so early. That was my part.”

“So for the next three weeks, we are going to try something. I am not taking your phone away. We are going to add some fun things first, and your phone stays. Are you willing to try?”

SAY THIS (AGES 13 TO 15)

“I want to talk about how much we both use our phones. I am going to change some of my habits too. I would like your input on how we do it, since it is your time. Can we agree on a trial of three weeks?”

SAFETY CHECK BEFORE YOU BEGIN

If your child's distress around screens is extreme (violence toward people, self-harm talk, refusing to eat or go to school, signs of low mood or anxiety), speak to a paediatrician or child psychologist alongside this plan. This plan is a family routine tool, not treatment.

THE FRAMEWORK

The 4 Systems Rebuild

Screens are designed to hold attention and to respond instantly. When a child uses a phone as the main way to handle boredom, big feelings, concentration and changes of activity, the skills behind those four things get less practice. This framework is Mrs Folasade's way of naming them so that you can rebuild each one on purpose. You will see them in every day of the plan.

System 1

Boredom Tolerance

What the phone took over: Every gap in the day. Waiting, travelling, quiet moments, the pause after finishing something.

What it looks like when it is weak:

- “I'm bored” within a minute of any quiet
- Reaching for the phone in any queue, car ride or pause
- Cannot play alone

How to rebuild it:

- Start tiny: 2 minutes of unscheduled time, then 5, 10, 20 over the weeks.
- Keep a “Boredom Jar” of ideas on folded paper. When your child says “I'm bored”, they pull one out. You do not fix the boredom for them.
- Say “Boredom is where ideas start” and let them sit through the first uncomfortable minutes.

> YOUR TOOL
> **The Boredom Ladder.** Week 1: 2 min. Week 2: 5 to 10 min. Week 3: 15 to 20 min of free, unstructured time per day. No screens, no instructions, just a few materials left within reach.

System 2

Emotional Regulation

What the phone took over: Calming down, cheering up and zoning out. The phone became the off-switch for every uncomfortable feeling.

What it looks like when it is weak:

- Disproportionate anger when the phone is interrupted
- Cannot name feelings; just says “I'm fine” or shouts
- Uses the phone to avoid anything hard (homework, chores, conflict)

How to rebuild it:

- Teach a feelings vocabulary: mad, sad, worried, tired, jealous, lonely, bored.
- Give 2 or 3 calming tools the child chooses: slow breathing, drawing the feeling, a drink of water, a short run outside, hugging a pillow, squeezing a soft ball.
- Create a “calm corner” with a cushion and those tools. It is not a punishment spot; you can use it too.

YOUR TOOL

Name it, then choose it. Ask: “What is the feeling? How big is it, 1 to 5? What will help?” Practise when calm so the child can use it when upset.

System 3

Sustained Engagement

What the phone took over: Attention. Short-form video trains the brain to expect a new reward every few seconds.

What it looks like when it is weak:

- Cannot stay with homework, a book or a game for more than a few minutes
- Teacher reports low concentration
- Switches activities constantly

How to rebuild it:

- Build “deep play” in small blocks: 10 minutes, then 20, then 40.
- Choose projects with a visible result: a model, a drawing, a recipe, a garden bed, a puzzle.
- One thing at a time. A tray with only one activity on it. No TV or music competing in the background.
- Praise effort and staying power, not the outcome: “You kept going even when it fell down.”

> YOUR TOOL
> **The Focus Ladder.** Pick one activity per day and extend the minutes by 5 each time. Use a visual timer so the child can see the time passing.

System 4

Smooth Transitions

What the phone took over: Switching from one thing to the next. Phones removed suddenly cause the biggest explosions.

What it looks like when it is weak:

- Meltdowns whenever the screen ends
- Ignoring instructions while on the device
- Hard time stopping any enjoyable activity

How to rebuild it:

- Give warnings: 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 1 minute.
- Use a visual or sound timer so the “bad guy” is the timer, not you.
- End with a ritual: “Save your place, say bye to the game, put it in its home.”
- Always give a next step: “When the timer rings, we are making tea together.” Children handle stopping better when they know what comes next.

> YOUR TOOL
> **The 10-5-1 Rule.** “Ten minutes left. Five minutes left. One minute left. Time. Phone goes home.” Same words every time.

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Phase 1: The Replacement Architecture

Days 1 to 7. Do not reduce or remove anything.

Phase 1 has one purpose: to give your child's brain something engaging to do before the phone. You are building a habit of “something first, then the phone”. Your child will probably resist at the start. That is normal and it fades, usually within two to three days of consistent repetition.

> **THE ONE RULE OF PHASE 1**
> The phone stays. You are not taking it, hiding it or limiting it. You are only adding a short activity **before** it. Use the same sentence every time: “You can use the phone after. This comes first.”

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Day 1: First Replacement

TODAY'S GOAL
Start the “something before the phone” habit with one 20-minute after-school activity.

Do

1. Choose your anchor slot: after school, before homework (or before the phone if homework comes later).
2. Pick a building activity with a clear result: blocks, Lego, cardboard and tape, clay, or a simple craft.
3. Set a visible timer for 20 minutes. Sit with your child for the first 10.
4. Put your own phone out of sight.
5. When the timer ends, give a specific compliment about the process, then allow the phone as normal.

SAY THIS
“You can use the phone after. This comes first.”

“I am going to build with you for ten minutes, and then I will cook while you carry on.”

Watch for

Pushback such as “Can I just use the phone?”. Say the script once, calmly, then turn to the activity. Do not argue or explain more.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Build a tower or a town from blocks or cardboard boxes.	Build a model car, a bridge or a fort. Add a challenge: “Can it hold a book?”	Build something to a brief: a phone stand, a desk organiser or a small ramp. Give them real materials and freedom.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Day 2: Same Slot, New Activity

TODAY'S GOAL
Repeat the same slot at the same time. Habit forms through repetition, so keep the structure, vary the activity.

Do

1. Same time as Day 1. Say the script as you start.
2. Switch to a drawing or art activity: draw, colour, paint, or make a comic.
3. Join for 10 minutes. Draw something beside your child; do not correct their work.
4. End with a process compliment: “I noticed how long you worked on the shading.”

SAY THIS
“You can use the phone after. This comes first.”
“Show me what you are making when you are ready.”

Watch for

Comparing the activity to the phone (“This is boring”). Respond: “It is okay to feel bored. Give it ten minutes.” Then wait.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Colouring, drawing a family portrait, or making a greeting card.	Comic strips, design a game board, or sketching a favourite character.	Sketching, lettering, journaling or designing posters for their room.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Day 3: Move the Body

TODAY'S GOAL
Add a movement activity. Active play helps mood and burns off the restless energy that a phone often absorbs.

Do

1. Same slot, but go outside or into open space for 20 minutes.
2. Play something simple and active: catch, skipping, football, races, dance, or a walk with a mini mission.
3. Join in at their level and keep it playful. Avoid turning it into exercise class.
4. End with water and a short chat about the best moment.

SAY THIS
“You can use the phone after. This comes first.”
“Come on, I will race you to the gate.”

Watch for

A child who sits on the side with arms crossed. Do not force. Say “I will start without you” and play on. Most children join within a few minutes.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Skipping rope, hide and seek, chase, or dance to a favourite song.	Football, basketball, relay races, or an obstacle course built from household items.	Walk or jog together, shoot hoops, or do a family workout of their choice.

NOTE
Day 3 is often where resistance drops. Not enthusiasm yet, but neutrality. That is a real win.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Day 4: Family Game Hour

TODAY'S GOAL
Replace solo screen time with a shared, low-pressure game.

Do

1. Pick a game your child likes or one you can learn together: ludo, ayo, draughts, scrabble, cards, snakes and ladders, a puzzle.
2. Play for 20 to 30 minutes. Put away all other devices, including yours.
3. Let your child win sometimes, and also model losing well.
4. Invite a sibling or another adult if possible.

SAY THIS
“You can use the phone after. This comes first.”
“It is your turn to pick the game today.”

Watch for

Frustration when losing. Name the feeling: “That felt unfair. It is hard to lose.” Offer one deep breath. Then decide together whether to continue.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Ludo, snakes and ladders, memory cards, simple card games.	Ayo, draughts, Uno, charades, trivia teams.	Scrabble, chess, strategy cards or a co-operative family challenge.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Day 5: Add the Second Replacement

TODAY'S GOAL
Introduce an evening activity before the bedtime phone. Now you have two replacements a day.

Do

1. Keep the after-school activity going.
2. Add a second slot: 20 minutes in the evening before any phone time (after dinner is ideal).
3. Choose a calm activity: reading aloud, a puzzle, cooking a simple snack together, or making something with their hands.
4. Dim the lights a little and speak softly. Calm environment, calm child.

SAY THIS
“You can use the phone after. This comes first.”

“Pick one: puzzle, story, or kitchen helper.”

Watch for

Evening is when the phone is most often an automatic habit. Expect a longer pause before the child agrees. Wait. Hold the line gently.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Picture books, a puzzle, helping to cook or lay the table.	Read a chapter book aloud together, make a snack, or help with dishes.	Listen to music together, read, or cook dinner prep with them in charge.

NOTE
Many parents hear their child say “This is actually okay” around now. Do not make a big deal. Just smile and say “Good.”

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Day 6: The Weekend Project

TODAY'S GOAL
Give your child a bigger, longer project to practise sustained engagement. Saturday is ideal.

Do

1. Choose a project that takes 60 to 120 minutes and can be done in stages.
2. Gather materials the night before so there is no gap for the phone to fill.
3. Examples: build a cardboard house, bake, plant seeds, paint a wall mural on paper, build a kite, make a family photo album.
4. Stay available but let your child lead. Ask questions instead of giving instructions: “What is your plan?”
5. Take a photo of the finished project and display it.

SAY THIS
“Today we have a big project. The phone can wait until it is done or we take a break.”

“What do you want to be the boss of today?”

Watch for

Losing interest after 15 minutes. Offer a break and a snack, then return. Stretching attention is a skill and takes weeks.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Bake a cake, grow beans in a cup, build a cardboard castle.	Build a model, bake bread, paint a canvas, start a small garden.	Cook a full meal for the family, build a piece of furniture, record a podcast about their favourite topic.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 1 | THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE | Days 1 to 7

Day 7: Review and Celebrate

TODAY'S GOAL
Look at what changed, celebrate it, and prepare your child for Phase 2.

Do

1. Check this week's phone minutes against your Day 0 baseline. Most families see an automatic drop of 30 to 45 minutes without any removal.
2. Hold a 5-minute family chat: “What was the best activity this week? What was the worst?” Write down answers.
3. Reward effort with an experience, not a screen: a trip to the park, a special meal, a movie night in the sitting room.
4. Look ahead: tell your child that next week you will trade phone minutes for fun things together.

SAY THIS
“You did something hard this week. I noticed you tried even when you did not want to.”
“Next week we will start trading some phone time for things you choose. You will have a say.”

Watch for

Parent doubt. If it did not feel dramatic, that is fine. The change in Phase 1 is quiet: less resistance and more willingness.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Let them choose the celebration.	Ask them to rank the week's activities.	Ask them what they would change and why.

NOTE
Phase 1 complete. You have broken the phone's monopoly by giving something else a seat at the table.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Phase 2: The Gradual Reduction

Days 8 to 14. Trade, do not take.

You are now going to reduce phone time by roughly 20 to 30 minutes each day, always with a replacement in place for every minute removed. The child trades time. This keeps the change feeling fair and predictable.

The Trade Board

Draw a simple board on paper: on the left, “Phone time” with the daily allowance in minutes. On the right, “My trade” with the activity chosen. Each day you update it together. Let your child choose the replacement from a short list you prepare.

Example step-down (for a child starting at about 6 hours a day)

Day	Daily phone allowance	Slot trimmed	Trade
7 (baseline after Phase 1)	About 5 h 15 min	None	Natural drop from Phase 1
8	About 4 h 50 min	Morning	Morning routine game or breakfast job
9	About 4 h 25 min	Mealtimes	Table talk cards, no devices at table
10	About 4 h	Travel / waiting	Car games, audio stories
11	About 3 h 35 min	After school	Choice of two activities
12	About 3 h 10 min	Evening	Family activity of child's pick
13	About 2 h 45 min	Weekend	Outing or project
14	About 2 h 20 min	Review and reset	Celebrate and adjust

ADJUST TO YOUR CHILD

If your child starts at 3 hours, scale the steps down: for example 10 to 15 minutes a day. The principle is the same: small, predictable, traded. If a day feels too big, repeat it. Slow and steady beats fast and broken.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Day 8: Introduce the Trade Board

TODAY'S GOAL
Show your child the Trade Board and make the first trade: the morning slot.

Do

1. Sit together and draw the Trade Board. Write today's allowance on the left.
2. Offer two morning alternatives (e.g. help make breakfast, a 10-minute morning stretch, or a quick game).
3. Let your child pick one. Choice builds buy-in.
4. Reduce the phone's morning slot by about 20 to 25 minutes and fill it with the chosen activity.
5. Keep the after-school and evening activities from Phase 1.

SAY THIS
“Here is how it works. When we take some phone minutes away, you choose what goes in their place.”

“Which one do you want for the morning: breakfast helper or stretching?”

Watch for

Morning rush makes parents want to skip. Keep the swap tiny: 10 to 15 minutes is fine. The point is the new pattern, not the clock.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Pick a sticker for each trade completed.	Choose the morning activity, track time on a wall chart.	Take real ownership: let them plan their own morning order.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Day 9: Mealtimes Without Screens

TODAY'S GOAL
Make mealtimes screen-free by swapping the phone for connection.

Do

1. Announce at the start of the meal that the phone has a “parking spot” away from the table. Park yours too.
2. Use a conversation prompt: “What was the funniest thing today?” or “If you could have any superpower...”
3. Keep the first screen-free dinner short and light. Do not force eating or talking.
4. Let silence happen; do not fill every gap.

SAY THIS
“Phones are parked for dinner. Yours and mine.”
“Tell me one thing that was good and one thing that was hard today.”

Watch for

A child staring at the wall. That is the Boredom Tolerance system working. It improves within days. Stay warm and relaxed.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Draw “table questions” from a jar.	Take turns choosing a topic.	Ask for their opinion on a family decision.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Day 10: Travel and Waiting

TODAY'S GOAL
Replace the phone in cars, queues and waiting rooms with games and stories.

Do

1. Prepare a “waiting bag”: small notebook, pencil, cards, a small puzzle, a book.
2. For car journeys, set up audio stories or a simple game: I-spy, 20 questions, licence plate bingo.
3. Keep the phone in the bag at the start of the journey. Offer it only if the journey is long, and set a time.

SAY THIS
“We have a long drive. First we play, then we decide about the phone.”
“Your turn: I spy with my little eye...”

Watch for

Complaints in the first 10 minutes. This is expected. Hold steady.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
I-spy, sing-along, story-telling in turns.	20 questions, riddles, audio books.	Podcasts they choose, music playlists, a travel journal.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Day 11: After-School Reset

TODAY'S GOAL
Shrink the after-school phone slot and give a short choice of two replacements.

Do

1. Offer two options for the after-school activity.
2. Reduce the phone's after-school slot by 20 to 25 minutes.
3. Use the 10-5-1 rule when the slot ends: “Ten minutes, five minutes, one minute.”
4. Give a clear next step: “When the timer rings we are doing homework snacks.”

SAY THIS
“Ten minutes left. Five minutes left. One minute left. Time. The phone goes home.”

“I know that was hard. Thank you for stopping.”

Watch for

The first time the timer rings may bring a meltdown. Stay calm and do not extend the time. Validate and hold the limit.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Let them hold and press the timer.	Show the timer on the wall so they can see it.	Let them set the timer themselves.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Day 12: The Day He Puts It Down

TODAY'S GOAL
Look for the first signs your child puts the phone down on their own, and notice them out loud.

Do

1. Keep the day's plan the same: two replacements and a smaller phone slot.
2. Watch for moments when your child puts the phone down without prompting.
3. If it happens, say one short, warm sentence and move on: “I noticed you stopped on your own.”
4. If it does not happen yet, that is fine. Keep going.

SAY THIS
“I noticed you put it down. That was your choice.”
“Thank you. That was hard and you did it.”

Watch for

Do not over-praise. Big praise can make the child feel watched. Keep it low-key.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Sticker or high-five.	Noting it on the Trade Board.	A short private word of acknowledgement.

NOTE
Many parents see the first spontaneous “phone down” around Day 12. It may happen sooner or later for your child. Both are normal.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Day 13: Weekend Trade

TODAY'S GOAL
Trade a chunk of weekend phone time for a family outing or project.

Do

1. Offer a short list of weekend options: park, visiting a relative, market trip, football, baking, a mini picnic.
2. Let your child choose.
3. Reduce weekend phone time by 20 to 30 minutes, but protect their enjoyment of the new activity.
4. Take photos of the outing, not videos for the phone.

SAY THIS
"On weekends we swap some phone time for something we choose together."
"What would make this the best Saturday?"

Watch for

Weekends have the longest gaps. Plan at least two anchor activities.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
A picnic or playground trip.	A market trip or football with friends.	A family cooking day or a day out.

Checkpoint

- ☐ I completed today's activity with my child.
- ☐ I stayed calm and used the script.
- ☐ I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 2 | THE GRADUAL REDUCTION | Days 8 to 14

Day 14: Midpoint Review

TODAY'S GOAL
Review progress honestly and adjust before Phase 3.

Do

1. Total this week's phone minutes. Compare with Day 7 and Day 0.
2. Ask your child: “Which trades were easy and which were hard?”
3. Adjust: if a slot is stuck, repeat it for a few more days instead of pushing.
4. Celebrate: a special family meal or outing.

SAY THIS
“You are doing something really hard. I am proud of how you are handling it.”
“Which trade do you want to keep? Which one needs changing?”

Watch for

Tiredness and a dip in motivation are common here. Keep the routine. Don't skip days.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Review with stickers or a chart.	Let them lead part of the review.	Treat it as a meeting: they bring opinions, you take notes.

NOTE
Phase 2 complete. Your child has been practising trading, waiting and switching. Those are the skills that make Phase 3 stick.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Phase 3: The New Normal

Days 15 to 21. Settle into a routine you can keep.

The aim of Phase 3 is not zero screen time. It is a sustainable routine of roughly 1 to 2 hours of **intentional** screen time, with the phone in a defined place and a defined window. The phone keeps its place. It loses its throne.

WHAT INTENTIONAL SCREEN TIME MEANS

Chosen in advance, not grabbed on autopilot.

Has a start and an end (use the 10-5-1 rule).

Is not used to avoid feelings, homework or sleep.

Sits alongside offline activities that are valued equally.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Day 15: Set the Daily Screen Window

TODAY'S GOAL
Agree on a daily screen window that fits your family and write it down.

Do

1. Look at what has worked in Phase 2 and choose a daily total of about 1 to 2 hours (adjust to your child's age and school needs).
2. Decide the window together: for example 4:30 to 5:30 pm and a short slot after dinner.
3. Write it on a poster with the child's own drawings and place it where everyone sees it.
4. Include your own screen rules for the family.

SAY THIS
“Here is our new routine. We built it together.”
“What do you want to do in your screen time? That is your choice.”

Watch for

Negotiating for more time. Respond: “We agreed on this together. We can review it on Sunday.”

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
A drawn poster with pictures.	A written routine with times.	A shared document or a chart they design.

Checkpoint

- ☐ I completed today's activity with my child.
- ☐ I stayed calm and used the script.
- ☐ I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Day 16: The Phone's Home

TODAY'S GOAL
Create a “home” for devices outside bedrooms. The phone sleeps there.

Do

1. Choose a spot: a shelf in the sitting room, a basket by the charger.
2. Decorate or label it together: “The Phone's Home”.
3. Show that every family phone goes there at night, including yours.
4. Buy a cheap alarm clock if the phone was the alarm.

SAY THIS
“Phones go to bed in their home, just like we go to bed in ours.”
“Goodnight, phone. See you tomorrow.”

Watch for

Night-time pushback. Stay calm. If your child has a genuine safety reason for a phone at night, agree a clear rule instead.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Decorate the basket with stickers.	Ask them to say goodnight to the phone each night.	Share the responsibility: they plug it in themselves.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Day 17: Choose Your Screen

TODAY'S GOAL
Teach the difference between autopilot scrolling and chosen screen time.

Do

1. Ask: “What do you want to watch or play today?” before the screen goes on.
2. Prefer longer, purposeful content (a show, a project video, a game with a goal) over endless short-form scrolling.
3. Watch together for 10 minutes and talk about it.
4. Use the 10-5-1 rule to end.

SAY THIS
“Before we start, what is your plan for this screen time?”
“Was that worth your time, or was it just scrolling?”

Watch for

Defensiveness. Ask with curiosity, not judgement.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Choose between two shows.	Plan screen time using a mini planner.	Review their feed together and unfollow what drains them.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Day 18: Independence Day

TODAY'S GOAL
Let your child choose a replacement activity on their own, with no prompting from you.

Do

1. Hold back from suggesting anything at the usual activity time.
2. Say only: “What are you going to do?”
3. Be available but do not lead. Notice what they choose.
4. Praise the independence, not the activity.

SAY THIS
“What are you going to do first today?”
“I noticed you picked that without me asking. That is a big step.”

Watch for

A child who defaults to the phone. Gently remind them of the routine. Do not scold.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Give two options and let them choose.	Ask them to come up with the plan.	Let them design and run the activity.

NOTE
Many parents describe this day as the one where they “saw the child come back”. Notice it and say so quietly.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Day 19: The Family Media Agreement

TODAY'S GOAL
Write a simple agreement that your whole family will follow.

Do

1. Sit together and write 5 to 7 short rules. Use positive wording.
2. Include rules for parents too.
3. Everyone signs. Place it where it can be seen.
4. Plan a monthly review.

SAY THIS
"These are our family rules. Everyone follows them, including me."
"What rule would you add?"

Watch for

Rules that are too long. Keep it short and positive.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Simple pictured rules.	Written rules with their input.	They draft it first, then you adjust.

Example agreement lines

Examples
We eat meals without phones.
Phones sleep in the Phone's Home.
We use the 10-5-1 rule when screen time ends.
Homework and chores come before screen time.
Parents follow the rules too.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Day 20: The Test Day

TODAY'S GOAL
Try a longer stretch with minimal screens, such as an outing, a visit or a screen-light day.

Do

1. Plan a full day with an activity away from home or a busy project at home.
2. Let your child bring the phone but keep it in a bag or at home.
3. Use the planned activities and the 10-5-1 rule if screens are used.
4. End the day with a reflection: “What did you notice?”

SAY THIS
“Today we are not using screens unless we need them. Let's see how it feels.”

“What was the best part of today?”

Watch for

Restlessness in the afternoon. This is normal. Add a snack, a change of scene or a short walk.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
A visit to a relative or the park.	A day of games, cooking and outdoor play.	A hike, a sports day or volunteering.

Checkpoint

- ☐ I completed today's activity with my child.
- ☐ I stayed calm and used the script.
- ☐ I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

PHASE 3 | THE NEW NORMAL | Days 15 to 21

Day 21: Celebrate and Plan Ahead

TODAY'S GOAL
Mark the finish line, celebrate the effort, and agree how you will keep going.

Do

1. Compare your Day 21 screen time with Day 0. Write both numbers down.
2. Hold a celebration your child chooses: a meal, a trip, or a family night.
3. Read the family media agreement aloud together.
4. Plan a monthly review date and two weekly anchor activities.

SAY THIS
“Look what we did. Three weeks ago things were hard, and now look.”
“I am proud of you, and I am proud of our family.”

Watch for

Relapse worry. A slip is not failure. It is a signal to go back one step. See the Troubleshooting section.

Age notes

5 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 15
Make a certificate together.	Choose a new project for next month.	Pick the next family challenge.

NOTE
You made it. Not by removing the phone, but by rebuilding what it replaced.

Checkpoint

- [ ] I completed today's activity with my child.
- [ ] I stayed calm and used the script.
- [ ] I noted the phone minutes in my tracker.

THE PARENT SCRIPTS

Word-for-word scripts

Children respond to calm, short and predictable language. These scripts turn confrontation into transition. Practise them out loud before you need them.

When your child asks for the phone

SAY

“You can use the phone after. This comes first.”

“Yes, and it is after our activity.”

Say it once, then move on. Repeat the exact same words each time.

When the timer rings and your child resists

SAY

“Ten minutes. Five minutes. One minute. Time. The phone goes home.”

“I know it is hard to stop. You can do it.”

Stay standing, calm, and close. Do not extend the time.

During a tantrum or meltdown

SAY

“I can see you are really upset. I am here. I will wait.”

“You are allowed to be angry. You are not allowed to hit or break things. The answer about the phone is still after.”

Keep your voice low and slow. Do not argue, bargain or lecture. Talk about it later when calm.

After the meltdown, once calm

SAY

“That was a big feeling. Can you tell me what happened for you?”

“Next time, what could help you stop? A breath, a hug, a drink?”

Connection first. Ideas second. Rules last.

When your child says “I'm bored”

SAY

“Boredom is okay. Ideas often come after the boring part.”

“Pull one from the Boredom Jar, or sit with it for five minutes.”

Resist the urge to fix it. Boredom Tolerance is built by sitting through it.

When your child says “You are not fair. I hate you.”

> **SAY**
> *“It sounds like you are really angry with me. I still love you, and the plan stays.”*
> *“You can be angry and we can still do this.”*

Do not punish the words. The feeling behind them is the real message.

When your child sneaks or hides the phone

> **SAY**
> *“I noticed the phone was in your room at night. I am not angry. I want to understand what you needed.”*
> *“The phone sleeps in its home. Let's work out what makes that hard.”*

Hiding is often a sign of shame or fear. Respond with curiosity, not a lecture.

When they use another device instead

> **SAY**
> *“It looks like the tablet is now doing the same thing as the phone. The rules cover every screen.”*
> *“Let's add the tablet to our agreement.”*

Address the pattern, not just one device.

When a grandparent or relative undermines the plan

> **SAY**
> *“We are trying a three-week plan with the phone. Could you help by doing an activity with him when he visits?”*
> *“It would help us a lot if you did not hand over the phone as a treat.”*

Give relatives a role instead of a rule. Most want to help.

When you slip (and you will)

> **SAY**
> *“I lost my temper earlier. I am sorry. I am trying too.”*
> *“Let's reset and try again.”*

Repair matters more than perfection. Children learn from watching you repair.

When a teenager pushes back

> **SAY**
> *“I hear you. This is your time and your phone, and I also have a responsibility for your sleep and your health.”*
> *“What would you change about our plan? Let's find a version we both can live with.”*

Teenagers need autonomy. Negotiate the how, hold the why.

WHEN THINGS GET HARD

Troubleshooting

Problem	What to do
My child refuses every replacement activity.	Lower the bar. Offer 10 minutes instead of 20. Let them pick from two options. Join in and show interest in the activity. Stay consistent for at least 3 days before changing course.
Tantrums are getting worse, not better.	A short increase at the start is common as the old pattern is challenged. Check that you are adding before subtracting, using the same words each time, and not giving in mid-meltdown. If rage is extreme or frequent, consult a professional.
I gave in and gave the phone during a meltdown.	It happens. Do not abandon the plan. Calm down, then repeat the step you were on. Say less in the moment next time.
My child uses a different device or a friend's.	Include all devices in the agreement. Talk to the other families if you can. Keep the focus on the pattern, not the gadget.
The school or homework needs the phone or tablet.	Separate learning screen time from leisure. Schedule it as its own slot with a clear start and end. Use a computer in a shared space if possible.
My partner or relatives will not follow the plan.	Share the three-phase outline and the scripts. Ask each adult to take one specific role, such as the weekend activity or the dinner table.
We have an unavoidable disruption (travel, exams, illness).	Pause the reduction, keep the anchor activities, and resume when life settles. A pause is better than a collapse.
My child seems sad, anxious or withdrawn.	Screen use can be a coping tool for difficult feelings. If low mood, anxiety or sleep problems persist, speak to a paediatrician or child psychologist.
Progress stalled after Day 14.	Repeat the last successful step for a week. Check that the replacements are still fun. Rotate them.
Relapse after Day 21.	Go back one phase for a week. Re-run the Trade Board and the Phone's Home. Relapse is data, not defeat.

AFTER THE 21 DAYS

Keeping it going

Three weeks builds a new habit. Keeping it takes small, steady maintenance.

Weekly

- Two anchor activities a week that your child looks forward to.
- One screen-free family meal each day.
- A short Sunday chat: What worked this week? What do we change?

Monthly

- Review the Family Media Agreement and adjust.
- Introduce one new activity or hobby.
- Celebrate progress with an experience, not a screen.

Signs you are on track

- Your child puts the phone down without prompting at least some of the time.
- Transitions end in a grumble, not an explosion.
- Sleep is steadier and the phone is out of the bedroom.
- Your child chooses an activity on their own and stays with it for 20 minutes or more.
- Conversation at meals is easier.

Signs to seek extra support

- Persistent, severe aggression or self-harm talk.
- Marked changes in sleep, appetite or mood lasting more than a couple of weeks.
- School refusal or withdrawal from friends and family.
- Difficulty concentrating that was present before screens became an issue (talk to your child's doctor about assessment).

REMEMBER

The phone was engineered by thousands of the smartest people in the world. You cannot out-fight it. You can rebuild what it replaced, and the phone becomes one small part of a full life.

YOUR TOOLS

21-Day Tracker

Fill this in each evening. It takes two minutes. Tantrum scale: 0 none, 1 mild grumbling, 2 upset but recovered, 3 major meltdown.

Day	Phone min.	Activity done (Y/N)	Tantrum 0-3	Win of the day
Base				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Day	Phone min.	Activity done (Y/N)	Tantrum 0-3	Win of the day
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				

Weekly reflection

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Average phone minutes			
Best activity			
Hardest moment			
What I will do differently			

YOUR BONUSES

Two companion guides

Your purchase includes two bonus guides. Use them alongside this plan:

Bonus	Use it for
Bonus #1: Screen-Free Activity Kit	50+ activities by age group (5 to 8, 9 to 12, 13 to 15), with materials, time needed and which screen slot each one replaces. Pin it to the fridge.
Bonus #2: Parent's Evening Routine Guide	A complete evening routine that removes screens from the last hour: dinner, transition, wind-down, reading, sleep. Each step scripted.

Important disclaimer

This guide provides parenting strategies and behavioural techniques for managing children's screen time. It is not therapy, clinical treatment, or a substitute for professional mental health support. If your child shows signs of severe behavioural difficulty, self-harm, extreme aggression, or symptoms beyond screen-related behaviour, please consult a qualified child psychologist or paediatrician. Screen dependency can co-exist with underlying conditions such as ADHD, anxiety or depression that need professional assessment. Individual results vary.

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FREE BONUS #1

Screen-Free Activity Kit

50+ activities by age group
(5 to 8, 9 to 12, 13 to 15)

What you need. How long it takes.
Which screen slot it replaces.

Method by Mrs Folasade Adeyinka | Documented by Amaka O. | 2026

HOW TO USE THIS KIT

Your Screen-Free Activity Kit

Fifty-four activities, sorted by age, each with what you need, how long it takes, and **which screen slot it replaces**. Use it alongside the 21-Day Screen Detox Plan: whenever a day asks you for a replacement activity, pick one from here.

How each activity is labelled

Label	Meaning
What you need	Everyday items. Most cost nothing or very little.
Time	Realistic minutes, including a little set-up.
Replaces	The usual phone slot the activity is best at filling: Morning, After school, Mealtime, Evening, Bedtime, Weekend, or Travel/Waiting.
Builds	Which of the four systems it strengthens: **Boredom** tolerance, **Emotions** (regulation), **Focus** (sustained engagement), or **Transitions**.

Three rules for using the kit

1. **Offer two, let them pick.** Choice lowers resistance. Never offer ten; two is enough.
2. **Prepare before you offer.** Make an Activity Box (below) so materials are ready the second the phone slot arrives. A gap is where the phone sneaks back in.
3. **Rotate.** Use any activity 2 or 3 times, then swap. Novelty keeps it competitive with the phone.

> THE SENTENCE TO USE EVERY TIME
>
> *“Pick one. Phone comes after.”*
>
> *“You can have the phone after. This comes first.”*

How to introduce any activity

1. Choose two activities from your child's age page before the phone slot arrives, and have the materials ready.
2. Offer them calmly: **“Pick one. Phone comes after.”** Say it once.
3. Sit with your child for the first 10 minutes. Put your own phone away.
4. Use a visible timer. When it rings, praise something specific about the process, then move to the phone slot or the next step.
5. If they resist, repeat the sentence once, then start the activity yourself. Do not argue or explain.

Build your Activity Box (30 minutes, once)

A plastic box or basket kept in a visible, reachable place. Start with:

- Paper, plain and coloured; pencils, crayons, markers; glue and tape; safe scissors.
- Building items: blocks or Lego, cardboard boxes, bottle caps, empty tins and cartons.

- Games: ludo, ayo, draughts, playing cards, a puzzle, scrabble.
- Movement: a ball, skipping rope.
- A notebook, a timer (not on your child's phone), and a Boredom Jar of folded ideas.

SAFETY
Always supervise young children with scissors, kitchen tools, hot items and water. Choose age-appropriate materials and keep small objects away from children under 4.

ACTIVITY KIT | PART 1

Ages 5 to 8

Young children need hands-on, sensory and shared activities. Sit with them for the first 10 minutes, then let them carry on.

HOW TO INTRODUCE THESE ACTIVITIES (AGES 5 TO 8)

"Pick one. Phone comes after."

"I will do the first ten minutes with you. Then you are the boss."

#	Activity	What you need	Time	Replaces	Builds
1	**Cardboard City** Build houses, roads and shops from boxes. Add a car to drive through.	Boxes, tape, markers, scissors (adult)	30-45 min	After school	Focus
2	**Block Tower Challenge** Build the tallest tower in 3 minutes. Beat your own record.	Blocks or plastic cups	15-20 min	After school	Focus
3	**Skipping Games** Skip, count jumps, invent a skipping rhyme.	Skipping rope	15 min	After school	Emotions
4	**Home Obstacle Course** Crawl under, jump over, tiptoe along a line.	Cushions, chairs, rope or tape	20 min	Weekend	Transitions
5	**Play-Dough Zoo** Make animals and build their homes. Dough: flour, salt, water, a little oil.	Flour, salt, water, oil, food colour	25 min	Evening	Focus
6	**Treasure Hunt** Draw a map or write clues. Hide a small prize.	Paper, pencil, small prize	20 min	Weekend	Boredom
7	**Fruit Salad Chef** Wash, peel and mix fruit. Adult cuts, child assembles.	Fruit, bowl, spoon	20 min	Mealtime	Focus
8	**Draw the Story** Parent tells half a story, child draws the ending.	Paper, crayons	20 min	Evening	Boredom
9	**Ludo or Snakes and Ladders** Practise taking turns and losing gracefully.	Board game	20-30 min	Evening	Emotions
10	**Memory Match** Make pairs of cards with drawings, flip two at a time.	Card, pens	15 min	Travel/Waiting	Focus

#	Activity	What you need	Time	Replaces	Builds
11	**Dance and Freeze** Dance to music, freeze when it stops. Take turns picking songs.	Music from a speaker or radio	10 min	Morning	Emotions
12	**Bottle-Cap Sorting** Sort by colour, size or shape. Make patterns and count.	Bottle caps, tray	15 min	Boredom slots	Boredom
13	**Seed Planting** Plant beans in a cup and water daily. Draw the changes.	Cup, soil, bean seeds	15 min	Weekend	Focus
14	**Sock Puppet Show** Make puppets and perform a short play for the family.	Old socks, markers, buttons	30 min	Evening	Emotions
15	**I-Spy and Car Games** I-spy, counting colours, spot the letter.	Nothing	10-30 min	Travel/Waiting	Boredom
16	**Water Play** Boats, pouring, floating and sinking in a basin.	Basin, cups, small toys	20 min	Evening	Transitions
17	**Picture-Book Picnic** Blanket on the floor, snack, three picture books.	Blanket, books, snack	20 min	Bedtime	Emotions
18	**Table Setter** Child sets the table and names each family member's place.	Plates, cups, spoons	10 min	Mealtime	Transitions

ACTIVITY KIT | PART 2

Ages 9 to 12

Children in this age group want challenge, mastery and a visible result. Give them real projects and some independence.

HOW TO INTRODUCE THESE ACTIVITIES (AGES 9 TO 12)

“Pick one of these two. Phone comes after.”

“I have got the stuff ready. Show me what you can do.”

#	Activity	What you need	Time	Replaces	Builds
1	**Model Building** Build a bridge, car or house to a brief. Test it with a weight.	Cardboard, tape, glue, string	45 min	After school	Focus
2	**Ayo, Draughts or Scrabble** Play best of three. Swap roles and teach someone else.	Board game	30 min	Evening	Focus
3	**Comic Strip Creator** Plan 6 panels and draw a short story with a twist.	Paper, pencil, markers	30 min	After school	Focus
4	**Ball Drills** Football or basketball skills: dribble, pass, shoot. Count scores.	Ball, open space	30 min	After school	Emotions
5	**Bake Something** Follow a recipe from start to finish.	Recipe, ingredients	60 min	Weekend	Focus
6	**Mini Garden Bed** Prepare soil, plant seeds, keep a growth diary.	Seeds, soil, small tools	45 min	Weekend	Boredom
7	**Three-Line Journal** Write 3 lines: one good thing, one hard thing, one hope.	Notebook, pen	10 min	Bedtime	Emotions
8	**Magic Trick School** Learn one trick and perform it for the family.	Cards or coin	20 min	Evening	Focus
9	**Kitchen Science** Baking soda and vinegar volcano. Predict, test, write results.	Baking soda, vinegar, tray	30 min	Weekend	Boredom
10	**Short Story Writing** Write a story in 10 sentences. Read it aloud.	Paper, pencil	30 min	Evening	Focus

#	Activity	What you need	Time	Replaces	Builds
11	**Jigsaw Puzzle** A 200 to 500 piece puzzle on a table. Add a few pieces a day.	Puzzle	40 min	Evening	Focus
12	**Bucket Drums** Make drums from buckets and tins. Copy and create beats.	Buckets, tins, wooden spoons	20 min	After school	Emotions
13	**Cook a Family Dish** Plan and cook one dish with an adult nearby.	Ingredients, recipe	60 min	Weekend	Focus
14	**Fix-It Project** Clean a bicycle, mend a toy, tidy a toolbox.	Cloth, basic tools	45 min	Weekend	Focus
15	**Audio Story and Draw** Listen to a story, draw the scenes.	Audio story, paper	25 min	Travel/Waiting	Boredom
16	**Chess Basics** Learn the pieces and play a short game.	Chess set	30 min	Evening	Focus
17	**Nature Scavenger Walk** Find 10 items on a list: leaf, stone, feather, etc.	List, bag	30 min	Weekend	Boredom
18	**Teach Me Hour** Child teaches a parent a skill or game they know.	Anything	20 min	Evening	Emotions

ACTIVITY KIT | PART 3

Ages 13 to 15

Teenagers need autonomy and purpose. Let them choose, treat them as capable, and keep conversations two-way.

HOW TO INTRODUCE THESE ACTIVITIES (AGES 13 TO 15)

"Here are a couple of options. You choose, and the phone slot comes after."

"I will keep my phone away too. Deal?"

#	Activity	What you need	Time	Replaces	Builds
1	**Cook a Full Meal** Plan the menu, shop, cook and serve for the family.	Recipe, ingredients	60-90 min	Evening	Focus
2	**Learn an Instrument** Guitar, keyboard, drums or recorder with books or lessons.	Instrument	30 min	After school	Focus
3	**Workout or Run** Home workout, a jog or a skipping circuit.	Trainers, open space	30-45 min	After school	Emotions
4	**Audio Project** Record a podcast or a family interview on a voice recorder.	Recorder, notes	45 min	Weekend	Focus
5	**Photography Walk** Take 20 photos around a theme. Agree on camera-only use first.	Camera or phone in camera-only mode	45 min	Weekend	Boredom
6	**Free-Write Journal** Write without stopping for 10 to 15 minutes.	Notebook, pen	15 min	Bedtime	Emotions
7	**Build or Repair** Fix a chair, assemble a shelf, restore an old item.	Tools, materials	60 min	Weekend	Focus
8	**Community Service** Help at a place of worship, school or neighbourhood project.	Time	90 min	Weekend	Emotions
9	**Language Study** Learn 10 words and use them in sentences.	Book or cards	20 min	Evening	Focus
10	**Game Night with Friends** Chess, ayo, cards or scrabble tournament.	Games, friends	60 min	Evening	Focus
11	**Sketch or Calligraphy** Practise one style and finish one piece.	Paper, pens	30 min	After school	Focus

#	Activity	What you need	Time	Replaces	Builds
12	**Small Business Plan** Plan a simple business idea: cost, price, customers.	Notebook	40 min	Weekend	Focus
13	**Read 20 Pages** A novel of their choice. Discuss one scene.	Book	30 min	Bedtime	Focus
14	**Study Group** Homework with a friend, with phones in a basket.	Books, friend	45 min	After school	Focus
15	**Join a Club or Team** Sports, music, debate, scouts or drama.	Registration	Varies	Weekend	Emotions
16	**Walk and Talk** Walk with a parent. No agenda, just talk.	Shoes	30 min	Evening	Emotions
17	**Room Redesign** Plan and rearrange or decorate a room corner on a budget.	Paper, tape, paint	60 min	Weekend	Boredom
18	**Learn from a Relative** Sewing, cooking, tailoring, carpentry, hair or farming.	A willing relative	45 min	Weekend	Focus

FIND ACTIVITIES BY SYSTEM

Which system does your child need most?

Every activity rebuilds one of the four systems from the 21-Day Plan. If your child struggles most with one area, start here.

System	Ages 5 to 8	Ages 9 to 12	Ages 13 to 15
Boredom tolerance	Treasure Hunt; Draw the Story; Bottle-Cap Sorting; I-Spy and Car Games	Mini Garden Bed; Kitchen Science; Audio Story and Draw; Nature Scavenger Walk	Photography Walk; Room Redesign
Emotional regulation	Skipping Games; Ludo or Snakes and Ladders; Dance and Freeze; Sock Puppet Show; Picture-Book Picnic	Ball Drills; Three-Line Journal; Bucket Drums; Teach Me Hour	Workout or Run; Free-Write Journal; Community Service; Join a Club or Team; Walk and Talk
Sustained engagement	Cardboard City; Block Tower Challenge; Play-Dough Zoo; Fruit Salad Chef; Memory Match; Seed Planting	Model Building; Ayo, Draughts or Scrabble; Comic Strip Creator; Bake Something; Magic Trick School; Short Story Writing; Jigsaw Puzzle; Cook a Family Dish; Fix-It Project; Chess Basics	Cook a Full Meal; Learn an Instrument; Audio Project; Build or Repair; Language Study; Game Night with Friends; Sketch or Calligraphy; Small Business Plan; Read 20 Pages; Study Group; Learn from a Relative
Smooth transitions	Home Obstacle Course; Water Play; Table Setter	-	-

PIN IT TO THE FRIDGE

Quick Picks by Slot

When a screen slot arrives and you are not sure what to offer, find the slot and choose two.

Slot	Ages 5 to 8	Ages 9 to 12	Ages 13 to 15
Morning	Dance and Freeze; Table Setter	Three-Line Journal; Bake something	Workout or Run; Read 20 pages
After school	Cardboard City; Skipping	Model Building; Comic Strip	Instrument; Sketch; Study Group
Mealtime	Fruit Salad Chef; Table Setter	Teach Me Hour; Cook a dish	Cook a Full Meal
Evening	Ludo; Puppet Show; Draw the Story	Chess; Puzzle; Story Writing	Game Night; Walk and Talk
Bedtime	Picture-Book Picnic	Three-Line Journal; Read	Free-Write; Read 20 pages
Weekend	Treasure Hunt; Seed Planting	Garden Bed; Kitchen Science	Audio Project; Community Service
Travel / Waiting	I-Spy; Memory Match	Audio Story; Nature Walk	Audio Project; Podcast

Weekly activity planner

Day	Slot 1	Slot 2	Done
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

This guide provides parenting strategies and behavioural techniques for managing children's screen time. It is not therapy, clinical treatment, or a substitute for professional mental health support. If your child shows signs of severe behavioural difficulty, self-harm, extreme aggression, or symptoms beyond screen-related behaviour, please consult a qualified child psychologist or paediatrician. Screen dependency can co-exist with underlying conditions such as ADHD, anxiety or depression that need professional assessment. Individual results vary.

FREE BONUS #2

Parent's Evening Routine Guide

A complete screen-free bedtime routine for the last hour of the day

Dinner. Transition. Wind-down.
Reading. Sleep. Every step scripted.

Method by Mrs Folasade Adeyinka | Documented by Amaka O. | 2026

WHY EVENINGS MATTER

The evening is where screens do the most damage.

For many families the evening is the hardest part of the day: the child is tired, the parent is tired, and the phone is the easiest way to keep the peace. But evening screens often push bedtime later, make it harder to settle, and leave children tired and short-tempered the next morning.

This guide gives you a complete, scripted evening routine that removes screens from the **last hour before sleep** and replaces them with connection, calm and rest. Sleep itself is one of the four things the phone tends to disturb, and good sleep makes every other part of the 21-Day Plan easier.

> **SLEEP NEEDS, IN BRIEF**
> The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends roughly 9 to 12 hours of sleep for children aged 6 to 12 and 8 to 10 hours for teenagers. If your child is asleep at 1 am or struggling to wake, the routine in this guide is the place to start.

The routine at a glance

These are example times for a school-day evening with lights out around 9 pm. Shift everything earlier or later to fit your child's age and your family's day.

Time	Step	Purpose
5:00 pm	Step 1: After-school reset	Snack, movement and an activity before any phone slot.
6:30 pm	Step 2: Dinner	Phones parked. Connection and a warm family reset.
7:30 pm	Step 3: The Screen Close	The last screen time ends with the 10-5-1 rule. Phones go to their home.
7:45 pm	Step 4: Wind-down	Bath, pyjamas, teeth, tidy. Slow body and lights.
8:30 pm	Step 5: Reading and talking	Shared quiet. The best part of the day for many families.
9:00 pm	Step 6: Lights out	Same words, same order, same time every night.

TONIGHT'S FIRST STEP

The Last Hour

The last hour before sleep is where screens cause the most trouble, and it is also where a small change pays off fastest. You do not need to install the whole routine tonight. You need one step.

YOUR FIRST STEP: THE 15-MINUTE SWAP
Take the final 15 minutes of screen time before bed and replace them with a guided wind-down activity. One step. Fifteen minutes. Nothing else changes yet.

Do

1. Pick tonight's cut-off: 15 minutes earlier than the phone normally goes off.
2. Give the 10-5-1 warnings (10 minutes, 5 minutes, 1 minute).
3. At the cut-off, walk with your child to the Phone's Home and plug the phone in together.
4. Start the wind-down straight away so there is no gap: dim the lights, then pick one quiet activity (drawing, stretching, a puzzle, a story or soft music).
5. Stay with your child for the 15 minutes. Your presence is the replacement.

SAY THIS
“Ten minutes. Five minutes. One minute. Time. The phone goes home.”

“Now it is wind-down time. Do you want to draw or hear a story?”

If your child resists

Expect complaints for the first few nights. Say the script once, stay warm, do not extend the time and do not argue. Resistance usually fades within three to five nights of repetition. When it feels steady, move the cut-off 15 minutes earlier and add the next step from the routine.

THEN BUILD OUTWARD
Once the 15-minute swap holds, add the other steps in order using the 7-night starter plan later in this guide.

STEP 1 | 5:00 pm

After-School Reset

PURPOSE
Help your child come down from the school day before screens or homework take over.

Do

1. Greet your child without a screen in your hand. Ask one open question: “What was the best part of today?”
2. Offer a snack and water.
3. Give 20 to 30 minutes of an activity first (building, drawing, movement, a game). Use the Activity Kit.
4. Only after that, allow the daily phone slot if the plan for the day includes one, using the 10-5-1 rule to end it.
5. Homework next, if it has not already been done.

SAY THIS
“Welcome home. Snack first, then your pick of two activities.”

“You can use the phone after. This comes first.”

Watch for

A child who bolts for the phone at the door. Use the same script every day. Calm and brief wins.

TIP
Keep your own phone in a pocket or drawer for the first 10 minutes after your child arrives. Your attention is the first replacement.

STEP 2 | 6:30 pm

Dinner

PURPOSE
Turn dinner into the daily moment of connection and a screen-free reset for everyone.

Do

1. Announce “phones parked” five minutes before dinner. Put everyone's phone, including yours, in the Phone's Home or another shelf.
2. Let your child help: setting the table, stirring, serving.
3. Use a conversation prompt: “What was the funniest thing that happened today?”
4. Keep dinner pleasant. Do not use dinner for lectures, correcting grades or arguing about the phone.
5. End with a small ritual: clearing plates together or saying one thing you are thankful for.

SAY THIS
“Phones are parked for dinner. Yours and mine.”

“Tell me one good thing and one hard thing from today.”

Watch for

A child staring at the wall or eating very slowly at first. It improves within a week. Do not force food or conversation.

TIP
Keep a “table questions” jar with 15 to 20 prompts. The jar does the work so you do not have to improvise.

STEP 3 | 7:30 pm

The Screen Close

PURPOSE
End all screens an hour before bed, calmly and predictably.

Do

1. Give a 10-minute, 5-minute and 1-minute warning using a visible timer.
2. When the timer rings, say the closing phrase and walk with your child to the Phone's Home.
3. Plug the phone in together. Say goodnight to it if you like. Children enjoy this.
4. Give an immediate next step: “Now it is bath time.”
5. Include everyone. Parents' phones go to the same place.

SAY THIS
“Ten minutes. Five minutes. One minute. Time. The phone goes home.”

“I know that was hard to stop. Thank you for doing it.”

Watch for

The biggest meltdowns of the day tend to come here. Do not extend the time, do not bargain, and do not remove the phone suddenly. Hold the routine and stay calm.

TIP
If your child currently uses the phone in bed, start by moving the cut-off 15 minutes earlier each night until you reach one hour before sleep. Slow is fine.

STEP 4 | 7:45 pm

Wind-Down

PURPOSE
Slow the body and the mind. Warm, dim, predictable.

Do

1. Bath or wash, then pyjamas and teeth, in the same order each night.
2. Dim the lights in the house. Lower the volume of everything.
3. Tidy up one small thing together: toys, school bag, clothes for tomorrow.
4. Offer a calming choice: stretching, a short drawing, quiet music, a warm drink without caffeine.
5. Keep screens out of the bathroom and bedroom.

SAY THIS
“First bath, then pyjamas, then reading. You choose the story.”
“Bag ready for tomorrow? Great. That makes the morning easier.”

Watch for

Hyperactivity after the phone goes away. This is the body adjusting. Quiet movement such as stretching or a slow walk helps.

TIP
A visual checklist on the wall (picture cards for younger children) lets the routine run itself. Children love ticking things off.

STEP 5 | 8:30 pm

Reading and Talking

PURPOSE
Replace the last screen with a shared, quiet activity that builds closeness and calm.

Do

1. Get into bed with the lights low. Parent sits beside the child.
2. Read together: a picture book for younger children, a chapter book for older ones. Teenagers can read independently while you sit nearby for five minutes.
3. Ask one gentle question: “What is something you are looking forward to?”
4. Say something warm and specific about the day: “I loved how you helped your sister.”
5. Finish with the same words every night.

SAY THIS
“Let's read two chapters, then lights out.”

“I love you. Sleep well. See you in the morning.”

Watch for

Children who ask for “just five more minutes” to delay sleep. Agree on a fixed number of pages beforehand and stick to it.

TIP
This is the best time for children to share worries. If they do, listen first and fix later. A calm “Thank you for telling me” helps more than advice.

STEP 6 | 9:00 pm

Lights Out

PURPOSE
Same words, same order, same time. Predictability lowers bedtime resistance.

Do

1. Lights off, door open or slightly ajar if that comforts your child.
2. A short bedtime phrase or ritual: a hug, a pat, a prayer, a song.
3. Leave calmly. No negotiating and no extra requests after the ritual.
4. If your child gets up, walk them back to bed quietly and without conversation.
5. Keep the phone out of the bedroom, including as an alarm. Use a simple alarm clock.

SAY THIS
“It is sleep time now. I will see you in the morning.”
“Your body is tired and ready. Close your eyes.”

Watch for

Repeated calls for water, toilet or one more thing. Do a “last call” before the ritual: water, toilet, hug. After that, it is quiet time.

TIP
Be boring. A calm, repetitive response teaches the brain that bedtime is not negotiable and not exciting.

THE PHONE'S HOME

Setting up the charging spot

The Phone's Home is a spot outside the bedroom where every family phone sleeps overnight. It is the simplest change with the biggest effect on night-time screen use.

1. Choose a place in a shared room: a shelf near the kitchen or sitting room, or a corner with a power strip.
2. Use a basket, box or charging station. Let your child decorate or name it.
3. Add an alarm clock for anyone who uses the phone as an alarm.
4. Parents' phones sleep there too. Children believe what they see.
5. If a teenager needs the phone in an emergency, agree a rule: the phone is on loud or on a household landline or similar alternative, in the shared area.

IF YOUR CHILD SNEAKS THE PHONE TO BED

Do not shame or punish. Say: “I know the phone is hard to leave. Let's work out what makes it difficult.” Often the child is using it to fall asleep or to avoid feeling lonely or anxious. Work on those needs, and keep the phone's home consistent.

YOUR FIRST WEEK

7-night starter plan

Do not try to fix everything on night one. Add one piece at a time.

Night	Focus	What to do
1	Screen Close	Set the Phone's Home. Use the 10-5-1 rule at your chosen cut-off time. Everything else stays as it is.
2	Screen Close	Same as Night 1. Practise the words. Notice how it feels.
3	Wind-down	Add the bath, pyjamas and teeth order. Dim the lights.
4	Reading	Add 10 to 15 minutes of reading in bed.
5	Dinner	Add phones-parked dinner. Use the table questions jar.
6	Lights Out	Fix a consistent lights-out time and phrase.
7	Review	Ask: “What part of the evening was best? What should we change?” Write the answers down.

Age adjustments

Age	Adjustments
5 to 8	Earlier bedtime (often 7:30 to 8:30 pm). More hands-on help in the routine. Picture checklist. Parent reads aloud.
9 to 12	Bedtime around 8:30 to 9:30 pm. Child leads parts of the routine. Chapter books and audio stories.
13 to 15	Bedtime around 9:30 to 10:30 pm. Negotiate the cut-off with them. Independent reading, journalling, music. Phones still charge outside the bedroom.

WHEN IT DOES NOT GO TO PLAN

Evening troubleshooting

Problem	What to try
Meltdown at the Screen Close.	Stay calm. Repeat the 10-5-1 words. Validate the feeling. Do not extend the time. Talk about it the next day when everyone is calm.
Child cannot fall asleep without the phone.	Move the cut-off earlier in small steps (15 minutes at a time). Add a longer wind-down and reading. Use soft music or an audio story on a speaker that is not the phone.
Child wakes at night and looks for the phone.	Keep the phone out of reach. Walk them back to bed with minimal talk. Check that the routine is predictable and that they are not hungry or anxious.
Siblings share a room and one has a device.	Apply the Phone's Home to everyone. No exceptions, including older siblings, so no one feels singled out.
Teenager says “I need it for homework or an alarm.”	Separate study from leisure screen time. Finish homework earlier. Use a basic alarm clock. Revisit the plan together.
Parent is too tired to hold the routine.	Simplify. Keep the screen cut-off and Phone's Home, and drop the other steps for a week. Ask another adult to take one step.
Weekends or holidays break the routine.	Keep the Screen Close and Phone's Home. Allow a slightly later bedtime if needed, but keep the order the same.
Persistent sleep problems, snoring, night terrors or anxiety.	Speak to a paediatrician. Sleep difficulties can have causes unrelated to screens.

Nightly checklist

- ☐ Phones parked at dinner.
- ☐ 10-5-1 rule used at the Screen Close.
- ☐ Phones in the Phone's Home, including mine.
- ☐ Bath, pyjamas and teeth in the same order.
- ☐ Reading together, lights low.
- ☐ Same goodnight words.
- ☐ Lights out on time.

YOUR TOOLS

Evening Routine Tracker

Tick each item and note the time of lights out. Look for trends after two weeks.

Night	Phones parked	Screen Close	Reading	Lights out (time)	Notes
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					

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