

How to End Screen Time Without A Struggle

If you ever struggle to end screen time and move your children on to another activity or preparation for bed, without arguments and tears, you may find these tips helpful. [Isabelle Filliozat](#) is a clinical psychologist specializing in positive parenting.

Here is Isabelle Filliozat's very simple method to end screen-time without the screams.

The science behind screen-time

When we human beings (not only children!) are absorbed in a film or playing a computer game, we are, mentally, in another world. During these moments, our brains produce dopamine, a neurotransmitter which relieves stress and pain. All is well – that is, until the screen is turned off. The dopamine levels in the body drop fast and without warning, which can, literally, create a sensation of pain in the body. This drop in hormones, this physical shock, is where children's upset begins. It does not matter that we parents are quite clear that now is the end of screen-time. After all, we'd discussed and arranged it beforehand ("20 minutes!"), and/or given them warning ("5 more minutes!"). To us, it is clear and fair enough, but to the child, it is not. When in front of a screen, she isn't in a state to think that way or to take that information in. Her brain is awash with dopamine, remember? To turn the "off" switch on the television can, for the child, feel like a shock of physical pain. You're not exactly slapping her in the face, but this is, neurologically speaking, how it might feel to her.

Cutting her off forcefully is hurtful. So instead of simply switching the "off" button, the trick is *not* to cut her off, but to instead enter *her* zone.

The trick: build a bridge

Whenever you decide that screen-time should come to an end, take a moment to sit down next to your child and enter his world. Watch TV with him, or sit with him while he plays his game massacring aliens on the screen. This doesn't have to be long, half a minute is enough. Just share his experience. Then, ask him a question about it.

Once the child starts answering your questions or tells you something she has seen or done on screen, it means that she is coming out of the "cut-off" zone and back into the real world. She's coming out of the state of flow and back into a zone where she is aware of your existence – but slowly. The dopamine doesn't drop abruptly, because you've built a bridge – a bridge between where she is and where you are. You can start to communicate, and this is where the magic happens. Because of the minute of easing-in, your child will be in a space where he can listen and react to your request.

Go and try it yourself

Next time your child is sitting in front of a screen, and you want to end it, try this:

- Sit with her for 30 seconds, a minute, or longer, and simply watch whatever she is watching/doing.
- Ask an innocent question about what's happening on screen. Most children love their parent's attention, and will provide answers.
- Once you've created a dialogue, you've created a bridge – a bridge that will allow your child to, in his/her mind and body, step from screen back into the real world, without hormones in free-fall, and therefore without crisis.
- Enjoy the rest of your day together.