



CCFC's Guide to Designing Your School's Super Successful Screen-Free Week

The most exciting and memorable Screen-Free Week experience for students is one that includes a school week's worth of events and activities, either during lunch/recess or, better yet, after school.

- **Lunch/recess Screen-Free Week activities** might include book readings by the principal or other unexpected staff (P.E. teacher, school nurse, etc.), board games, readings (where teachers and children enjoy silent reading during a break), teacher and student talent shows, open mic events, student poetry readings, volunteer activities, school fundraising activities, short gardening projects, arts and crafts, and more.
- **After-school Screen-Free Week activities** can be more creative since students might have fewer time constraints and more flexibility outside of the classroom. Ideas for after-school activities appear near the end of this document.
- **Off-campus Screen-Free Week activities** can be simple and fun, too! Not all Screen-Free Week after-school activities need to be held on school premises. Many schools in smaller communities take advantage of what their communities offer and collaborate with smaller service providers to do so. They may obtain reduced or free admission to local indoor swimming pools, the local Y or recreation center, restaurants, museums, community theaters, bowling alleys, skating rinks, and more. Or they may ask local parks and nature centers to lead a hike, gardening activity, outdoor recreation activity, or nature immersion experience.
- **Family Screen-Free Week activities** are designed to include the entire family. Family game night, family scavenger hunts, family hikes, family craft nights, etc. can involve younger or older siblings or grandparents!
- **Themed Screen-Free Week activities** are a creative way of organizing events. Some schools may choose to organize a different theme each night, for example: a reading event, an exercise event, an outdoors event, a gardening event, a music/arts and crafts event, a community service event, etc. Such diverse events expose the students to a full range of screen-free possibilities. Alternatively, some schools focus on a single theme, whether it be the outdoors, physical activity, or reading.

- *For those schools unable to plan an entire week of Screen-Free Week activities, here are some alternatives that other schools have used:*
 - Some schools prefer planning just one screen-free activity during Screen-Free Week and encourage local organizations (especially libraries) and businesses to offer other free activities or reduced rate options, independent of the school (in other words, no school representatives attend).
 - Some schools encourage students to fill out pledge cards to go screen-free during Screen-Free Week and then provide one big blowout Screen-Free Week activity (a dance party, student talent show), often on Friday evening or the weekend.
 - A school may try something vastly different during Screen-Free Week: going screen-free during the school day. This experiment took place in a school in [Kenai, Alaska](#), with positive results. The students reported finding the experience enlightening. More details are available [here](#).
 - Finally, some schools choose not to organize formal Screen-Free Week events during or after the school day for their students. Instead, they encourage their students to participate in Screen-Free Week at home, with some sort of prize, award, raffle, or certificate of achievement for participants. These schools send the following items to parents: a letter of explanation to parents about Screen-Free Week, a pledge that children may choose to sign, and a form asking for a parent's signature that the child participated. These can be taken or adapted from our online [resources](#).
- ***Screen-Free Week is for students of all ages.*** The most receptive audience for Screen-Free Week tends to be elementary schoolers and preschoolers. But what about middle and high schoolers?
 - Some middle schools participate in Screen-Free Week, because middle schoolers still enjoy fun group activities during break or after school.
 - Some middle and high schools choose to screen one of two films dealing with kids and screens – [Screenagers](#) or [Celling Your Soul](#) (and its accompanying one-week [No App For Life](#) challenge). The film is used to prompt discussions during Screen-Free Week about excessive screen use for entertainment and ways to incorporate better life balance.
 - In schools that allow screens during lunch breaks, they may choose to offer screen-free fun during those breaks, such as yoga, basketball tournaments, meditation, and other activities that appeal to teens.
 - Some schools challenge their middle or high school students to try an entertainment screen “fast” for 24 hours or more (with the exception of school work and phone calls), followed by discussions and essays that explore how it felt to be unplugged and what they learned from the experience. This kind of screen-free experience has even been implemented successfully on the university level. In this [article](#), the author reflects

upon her undergraduate students' positive experiences with her assigned four-day screen-fast.

- ***Talk to students before and after Screen-Free Week to get them thinking more deeply about the benefits of a week without screens.*** Teachers can turn Screen-Free Week into an educational exercise in the following ways:
 - **Before Screen-Free Week**, encourage students to think (in age-appropriate ways) about the benefits of Screen-Free Week, what it might feel like to step away from entertainment screens for a week, what they think would be good substitutes for screen entertainment, and how they can deal with the temptation to use a screen during the week.
 - **After Screen-Free Week**, assess the experience. How was it challenging, how was it rewarding, and how might it affect their future behavior? When they have free time, will they automatically reach for screen entertainment, or will they be able to carve out screen-free time for themselves on a daily basis – to read, get exercise, and spend time outdoors?
- ***A school's Screen-Free Week does not have to take place during national Screen-Free Week.*** There are schools that prefer timing screen-free week around standardized testing, around or during spring break, or just before summer break. The priority is experiencing a screen-free week together, but it does not necessarily need to coincide with national Screen-Free Week if it isn't feasible or desirable.
- ***What kinds of Screen-Free Week activities are possible?*** Here are Screen-Free Week activities that were organized by schools for Screen-Free Week 2018:
 - **Reading** – author reading, principal read-aloud, poetry event, library event, group read-in
 - **Physical activity** – hip-hop dance workshop, soccer tournament, group climbing, fun run, obstacle course, four square tournament, archery, yoga, tae kwon do, kickball, bowling, ice skating, roller skating, swim night, miniature golf, dance party, Zumba, family fitness night, baseball game, trampoline park outing, color war, relay games, parents v. students game
 - **Outdoors/nature/gardening** – farmers' market meet-up, community park visit, bird walk, beach event, picnic, campfire, gardening, yard cleanup, nature talk, playground meet-up
 - **Games** – family bingo night, family game night, music trivia
 - **Community service** – school fundraisers, giving back night
 - **Arts and crafts** – tile painting, knitting, sidewalk chalk drawing

- **Music and theater** – music concerts, talent shows, open mic night, magic show
- **Out-of-the-box** – ventriloquism workshop, family bike to pizza night, used book sale, truck day, cooking, scavenger hunt, dress up day, carnival, free night at the local Y, Mad Science night, Lego building, themed week (*i.e.*, Dr. Seuss), book character parade, cardboard box challenges, museum outings
- **More ideas** – check out the Screen-Free Week website for a [list](#) of last year’s activities by schools and other organizations, as well as some additional [ideas](#) from previous years. Or, follow Screen-Free Week on [Facebook](#), where a variety of screen-free ideas are regularly posted.
- **Resources for a successful Screen-Free Week.** Here’s everything you need:
 - Review our [how-to chart](#) on organizing your Screen-Free Week
 - Download our free [organizer’s kit](#)
 - Use our [essential handouts](#) – this page includes:
 - Sample flyer – in English and Spanish
 - Sample parent letter and permission slip – in English and Spanish
 - Pledge cards and reading pledge cards – in English and Spanish
 - Activity logs – in English and Spanish
 - Certificate of achievement – in English and Spanish
 - Family guide – in English and Spanish
 - 101 screen-free activity guide – in English and Spanish
 - Children’s books about going screen-free
 - Logos
 - For more information about kids and screens, visit www.screenfree.org, www.commercialfreechildhood.org, and www.screentimenetwork.org.
- **Don’t forget to promote your Screen-Free Week!** Besides sending press releases to your local news outlets (Screen-Free Week consistently generates positive press about schools and their celebrations), be sure to promote your Screen-Free Week on social media. Check [here](#) for a draft press release and social media ideas.
- **Don’t forget to register your Screen-Free Week with CCFC.** Register your school’s Screen-Free Week [here](#).
- **Contact the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood** at ccfc@commercialfreechildhood.org if you need any help during the planning process.
- **Most importantly, have fun!**