The Parenting Pal

Helping families build calmer, more connected homes.

Screen-Free Downtime Choices

A simple companion resource for

The Parenting Pal Screentime Series

Together, let's help make today feel a little easier.

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By using this resource, you acknowledge that you are responsible for determining how the information and tools are used within your own family and circumstances.

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Practical, relationship-centered support for the real-life moments that feel hardest at home.

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Screen-Free Downtime Choices

A companion resource for The Parenting Pal's Raising Children in the Age of Screens series

Screens can be helpful.

They can entertain, teach, connect, provide a break, and sometimes help a family get through a difficult moment. A device may make a long car ride easier, help during a parent's work call, or offer a little downtime at the end of a long day.

That is real family life.

This resource is not about taking those moments away or suggesting that using a screen for comfort means a caregiver has done something wrong.

Instead, it is about expanding the toolbox.

In Week 2, we look at the American Academy of Pediatrics' **5 Cs of Media Use: Child, Content, Calm, Crowding Out, and Communication**. This companion resource focuses on one of those Cs:

Calm

Because screens can calm quickly, they can easily become the first tool children—and adults—reach for when a moment feels hard.

The goal is not to stop children from ever using screens for comfort or downtime. Rather, it is to help them build **more than one way** to calm, reset, wait, or transition.

A helpful question to ask is:

What else can my child practice when they need to calm, reset, wait, or transition?

Some children may benefit from movement. Others may need quiet, comfort, creativity, fresh air, food, or connection with another person.

There is no single calming strategy that will work for every child—or even for the same child every time.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is to notice what helps.

How to Use This Resource

Use the chart during a **calm moment**, rather than in the middle of a screen-time conflict.

Look through the choices together and invite your child to select a few they would be willing to try.

Start small. **Three to five choices are plenty.**

After trying a strategy, simply ask:

Did this help—even a little?

Then mark the chart and add a quick note if helpful.

Over time, your child can build their own **Top 5 Screen-Free Calm-Down Choices**—a small, familiar set of tools they can return to when they need help calming their body, moving their energy, finding comfort, or reconnecting.

A Parenting Pal Reminder

Screen-free does not mean anti-screen.

Screens can still have a healthy place in family life. This resource simply helps make sure they are not the **only** tool available when a child needs comfort or regulation.

Notice what helps. Practice together. Adjust as needed.

One small shift can make a big difference.

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Screen-Free Downtime Choices

Use this simple chart to explore screen-free calming choices with your child. Choose a few to try, notice what helps, and build a personalized list of go-to strategies for calming, resetting, waiting, or transitioning.

When I Need to Calm My Body

Calm Choice |	Try It |	Helped? Yes |	No |	Notes
Take 5 slow breaths	☐	☐	☐	_____
Get a drink of water	☐	☐	☐	_____
Eat a healthy snack	☐	☐	☐	_____
Stretch my body	☐	☐	☐	_____
Take a short walk	☐	☐	☐	_____
Go outside for fresh air	☐	☐	☐	_____
Use a cozy blanket or pillow	☐	☐	☐	_____
Rest in a quiet space	☐	☐	☐	_____

When I Need to Move My Energy

Movement Choice |	Try It |	Helped? Yes |	No |	Notes
Jump in place	☐	☐	☐	_____
Dance to one song	☐	☐	☐	_____
Ride my bike or scooter	☐	☐	☐	_____
Play outside	☐	☐	☐	_____
Do wall pushes	☐	☐	☐	_____
Run around safely	☐	☐	☐	_____
Bounce a ball	☐	☐	☐	_____
Help with a simple job	☐	☐	☐	_____

When I Need Quiet or Comfort

Quiet Choice |	Try It |	Helped? Yes |	No |	Notes
Read a book	☐	☐	☐	_____
Listen to calming music	☐	☐	☐	_____
Draw or color	☐	☐	☐	_____
Build with blocks or Legos	☐	☐	☐	_____
Write or journal	☐	☐	☐	_____
Look at a favorite book	☐	☐	☐	_____
Snuggle with a stuffed animal	☐	☐	☐	_____
Spend time with a pet	☐	☐	☐	_____

When I Need Connection

Connection Choice |	Try It |	Helped? Yes |	No |	Notes
Ask for a hug	☐	☐	☐	_____
Talk to a parent or caregiver	☐	☐	☐	_____
Sit near someone I trust	☐	☐	☐	_____
Ask for help	☐	☐	☐	_____
Play together	☐	☐	☐	_____
Help make a snack	☐	☐	☐	_____
Read with someone	☐	☐	☐	_____
Take a walk with someone	☐	☐	☐	_____

My Top 5 Screen-Free Downtime Choices

When I need to settle down or calm my body, I can try:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Family Reminder

Screens may be part of our home, but they do not have to be the only way we remain steady. We can practice other tools together.

The goal is not perfection.
The goal is learning.

When we understand more, we can make more thoughtful choices together.

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