

#210 - How to Lazy Genius Kids' Screen Time

Hi there! You're listening to the Lazy Genius Podcast. I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 210 - how to lazy genius kids' screen time. It's here, you guys, it's here! This is such a highly requested topic, and I think now that we're about to go into summer, we could use some perspective on how to approach this ever-present topic. So I have three perspectives and then a few ideas for house rules when it comes to your kids and screen time.

First, there is not one correct approach to this. We think there is, but there isn't. There's no universal rule or approach or time limit or any of that. There have been seasons of my life, particularly when I was pregnant with my middle son, Ben, and Sam wasn't even two yet, and I was exhausted. Sam is a high energy kid, he can run circles around his own circles, and I couldn't do it. I didn't know how to spend my days because I was sick and so tired and couldn't get up off the couch a lot of days, and we'd read and try and play and all the things, but they wouldn't always very long. Sam watched a lot of TV simply because I didn't have another option. I couldn't see another option. And that's okay. So go ahead and remove the expectation that there is one way to do this, that there is a right or wrong way. You get to decide what matters based on your own kids, your own personality, and your own stage of life. Sometimes seasons last a few days while you're sick and your kids aren't, and it's just a short season of them watching a lot of screens. Please start there, and start there when you're talking to other caregivers too. We're already on high alert about making bad parenting choices, and we don't need to add to anyone else's insecurities by questioning or doing a "wow" when someone says how long their kid has iPad time. Let's release that, please. It'll be kinder for everyone. So there's no correct approach.

A second thought is that you want to use screen time to fill your own bucket. That is so so important. The reason I think a lot of us are so sad when kids' screen time is over or when they ask for it again and we're like fine go ahead is because we're not full. Or even halfway full. We're not taking advantage of time where we don't have to be directly engaged with our kids by being directly engaged with ourselves. So it's important for you to name what you want out of your kids' screen time. What's the point? When do you need time? Start with your own needs. They don't care when they get it, so pay attention to you. Pay attention to if you want to make dinner on your own, or maybe you want them to help you make dinner and doing screen time right before dinner doesn't make any sense then. What do you need, and when do you need it? Use your kids' screen time wisely for you.

And a third perspective is particularly for right now. Summer could be a great chance to reset or restart your approach to screen time. If you're in a rhythm you'd like to change, we're starting a new season on the calendar likely without school, so it's a great time to start again with what matters most now. So if you're in that place of resetting, I encourage three things: make it clear, make it collaborative, and write it down. Make the screen time rules or guidelines or approaches or whatever clear. Make them clear for your kids. It will help them know the deal, and it will keep you from losing your mind every time they ask if they can have screen time. The rule is clear.

Next, make it collaborative. Depending on your kids' ages, if you're moving into summer and are trying to name some things about screen time, ask your kids what they think. Name that they love screen time but that's not the only thing they love. Ask them if they have ideas of how to approach it or what house rules might work. Bring them into the conversation. And finally write it down. Once you know your house rules or your approach, write it down. The other day, I went into my oldest's room where he was supposed to be doing his math homework, and instead he was playing a math computer game on his school computer. One of our only screen time rules is "ask first." I don't want them sneaking, and sometimes what they ask for, I might say yes to. Just ask first. It's a very simple rule, and we repeat it all the time. And yet he was still playing. Now you might be think yeah he was hiding, but when I asked him "Sam, what's our only real rule about screen time?" He guessed four or five things that weren't at all "ask first." And he's lost screen time in the past as a consequence for not following that rule. We talk about it all the time. And he still forgot. Writing it down helps. Making it visible somewhere will make things a little easier for you and your kids.

Okay, so there's no single way to do this, you need to use your kids' screen time to intentionally fill your own bucket, and you can reset this summer or any time by making it clear, making it collaborative, and writing it down.

Now let's run through a few possible House Rules you could use when it comes to kids and screen time.

First, have a time limit. A lot of devices have time limits built in for kids, or you can just set a stopwatch on your phone when a kid is doing screen time. They get, for example, 30 or 60 or 90 or 120 minutes a day or whatever you want to say, and they can use up those minutes whenever they want. But once they're gone, they're gone for the day. This is likely a House Rule that's good for reasonably responsible kids who understand delayed gratification. My Ben would do well with this House Rule. Sam would not. He would burn up his time before breakfast and then complain all day. You know your kids best. But one approach is setting up a House Rule around a time limit that's not connected to a particular time of day.

The second approach to a House Rule is to the specific time of day. Maybe you have screen time built into your rhythm. We do screen time from 3-4pm every day or from 10-11am every day or during breakfast every day or whatever you want to say. Now this does cause a bit of a stir if your days aren't as routined you frequently miss. So attaching screen time to a certain time of the day is best if you know that your days are fairly rhythmic already.

The third approach is to allow screen time after other things have been done. Maybe you have Daily Sheets which I talk about in the kids' chores episode, maybe during the summer, they need to read, play outside, make something, do a chore, or whatever else for certain amounts of time before they get screen time. It's not really your choice. You just point to the list on your fridge or whatever and say, have you done all your things? Now if you have kids who struggle to see screen time as just part of a list of things they enjoy, this could make screen time set apart as better than the other things. Kind of like holding dessert hostage until dinner is over. For

some kids that works but for some it doesn't. It's okay if this doesn't work for your kids. It doesn't really work for mine as well as having a routined time because it diminishes the power of the playing and reading and other things by setting screen time against it. But I know other kids who this works perfectly for.

A fourth House rule approach is to think about energy and make a rule around that. I once heard someone say that they don't give their kids screen time before lunch at all because the kids have a harder time getting momentum for the rest of the day. Everything else seems like a downer, and I have seen that to be true in my family as well. Again, it's not true for everyone, but a House Rule could very much be "no screen time before 2pm." That's it. The kids know that, they know what the answer will be if they ask, and you can decide how it works after 2pm.

A fifth way is to treat different days with different approaches. Maybe you don't do screen time on certain days of the week or you for sure do it on others. Maybe rainy days get extra time. Maybe really hot days get extra time. You get the idea. The point is that not every day needs to be the exact same when it comes to screen time.

And a sixth way is to let it ride. Depending on who you are, where and how you live, and what your kids are like, your kids might not have an expectation of daily screen time. They do other stuff happily and may even prefer it to screen time. So you can actually have your house rule be "just ask first" because you know they won't ask all the time.

The point here is that everyone is different. Everyone needs to parent around screen time differently, and every kid responds to rules around screen time differently. So name what matters to you. Name what matters to your kid. Name what matters about your day. How do you want screen time to be a supportive part of that day, not just another thing you do that the kids whine for constantly? Look at it with intention for you first and then for them. Once you figure out what you need, create a House Rule that is clear, and it will keep a lot of that whining at bay.

And that's how to Lazy Genius screen time for kids. I'm not about to give you some kind of formula or schedule for very obvious reasons. And if you're new around here and haven't gathered from this episode on its own, I do not like giving prescriptives. We're just too different for that. We all need tools to apply to our own needs and lives, and I hope these give you some direction in how to approach your screen time.

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the week! This week, it's Miranda Smith @mirbsmith, who shared with me that she uses my Daily Soundtrack albums as her way to Decide Once when it comes to what music she listens to that day. A number of you have told me that lately which I so love. I love sharing those albums with you every day in stories, and remember they're all saved to a highlight if you want to flip back. But I wanted to highlight Miranda because she is just a few weeks postpartum, is home with her baby, and we all need some tiny cracks of sunshine in those days. I just love, Miranda, that you're deciding once on your music and enjoying it and bringing a little ease into those newborn days. High fives from all of us to you.

Okay, that's it! Thanks so much for listening, everyone. If you're new around here and wouldn't mind taking a second to leave a review on Apple Podcast, that would be amazing. It helps the show get in front of more eyes which is always a lovely thing to have more people become Lazy Geniuses! You guys are the best. UNTil next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!