

Kailan Carr
Prioritizing play!

Scaling Back SCREENS



Starter Kit

Ages 2-7

A path to less screen time
and kids who can
entertain themselves!

Hi! I'm Kailan.

And before you go further, I want you to know this...

I'm not anti-screen time.

I'm a mom too, and I know screen time can be a useful tool in our parenting tool belt!



But, as a former teacher, I also know how important it is for kids to have plenty of PLAY in their day. It's the BEST way to grow their brains!

And frankly, screen time is replacing other important activities for kids during a time of critical development that is setting the foundation for their future.

It's SO easy to start to rely on screens too much. (I mean, they are purposely designed to keep us using as much as possible.)

Before you know it, they've become the default activity and you have cranky, whiny kids who can't figure out what to do on their own.

But, just because you want to cut back on screen time DOESN'T mean you have to fill in the gap and become activity director all day!

So what do the kids do? They play! And in the following pages I'll show you how to get them playing on their own and other things I did as alternatives to screen time.

Talking About it with Kids

As a former teacher, I love to use books as teaching tools about important topics. Kids just listen better when it comes from a book instead of you, am I right?

So I went on a hunt for books to help me explain to my kids why they couldn't be on screens all day.

And, wow. There was nothing out there that said what I wanted to say.

So I wrote it!



It's a lighthearted and playful rhyming book to show your child the value of turning screens off and encourage them to explore, create, learn, and play in so many ways!

"This book is the PERFECT reminder to young kids that there is SO MUCH MORE in this great big world to enjoy than their devices!"

-Dr. Nimisha Amin, pediatrician

- Available on Amazon [here](#)
- Autographed copies and extra goodies available on my website [here](#)

Must-Know Tips to Get Kids Playing Independently!

Question: How do you get things done without using screen time to keep kids occupied?!

Answer: They play! And it is possible to do so on their own without you!

Kids need **TIME** and **SPACE** to practice play time on their own. Otherwise they will become just as reliant on an adult for entertainment as a screen.

It may be a mindset shift for you, but your job does **NOT** involve making sure your child is entertained all day.

It's so important for them to learn how to entertain themselves. But it takes practice.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1 Connect first

Fill their cup up. They want connection with you more than anything. Once they feel satisfied with that, they will be more apt to play on their own.

This may look like reading a story together, going on a walk, cooking or eating together, you starting to play with them and then distancing yourself.

2 Minimize Toy Options

It's like decision overload. When you have too many options, you can't pick. You just end up saying no to everything right?

Make a few different types of toys accessible at a time (see Toy Rotation Made Easy for details).

3 Rotate Toys

This idea is seriously magic! When the new toy bucket comes out the kids are fascinated with them, and it's like they got a whole batch of new toys. It's totally worth the effort (which isn't much and helps you minimize toy options.) See [Toy Rotation Made Easy](#) for details.

4 Proximity to You

Let them play near you! Kids feel more secure when you are near by. This could look like a toy shelf in the living room, a play kitchen near the kitchen, a morning basket in your bedroom, etc.

5 Stick to Boundaries

Here are some ways to respond when your kids come to you asking you to play. Remember independent play takes practice! It's important to stick to your boundaries.

- "I can't play right now. I need to do the dishes. But I will be here to watch you play."
- "I'd love to play after I finish my work."
- "My job right now is to start dinner. Your job right now is to play."
- "I'm going to fold the laundry and you can help me or you can go play."
- "Let's set the timer for 10 minutes. I can play after it goes off."

Attention Span Expectations

If your kids are really little, it is completely natural for them to jump from one thing to the next because their attention spans are so short.

Age Appropriate Attention Spans

2 years old: 4-6 minutes
3 years old: 6-8 minutes
4 years old: 8 to 12 minutes
5 years old: 10 to minutes
6 years old: 12 to 18 minutes



But this doesn't mean they need you all the time! It may look like your two year old flipping through books for 4 minutes. Then they lose interest in that and go stack blocks for 4 minutes.

This was why my house was always a mess with things scattered everywhere!! They'd pick up and move on on their own, but of course wouldn't clean it up.

If I had let them have more screen time, that would have certainly occupied them and kept them from making messes. But so much more **LEARNING** comes from those messes than on screens.

And we just picked up when we were ready to transition (leaving the house, meal time, bed time, etc.)

Toy Rotation Made Easy!

There is no doubt in my mind that toy rotation helped keep me from the temptation of reaching for a screen when my kids were young. Toy rotation day is magical.

- Your kids will be enthralled with the “new” toys.
- You don’t spend a dime.
- You will declutter your area.
- Less toys out is less overwhelming for kids and they will actually play longer.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1 Sort and Organize

- Sort toys into the following categories:
 1. Blocks and building toys
 2. Puzzles and problem-solving toys
 3. Books
 4. Pretend play - dolls, dress up, etc.
 5. Action figures or animals
 6. Gross motor skills - balls, pull toys, riding toys
- Throw away any broken toys or trinkets.
- Donate any toys your child has outgrown.
- If you have space, save any that have meaning to you or them. Based on experience, they will likely want to play with them again in a year or two!
- Divide toys up into 2, 3, or 4 piles (using some from each category). If you have 2 piles, they’ll see the same toy set every other week. If you have 4 piles, they’ll see each set once a month. I found the longer in between the toy sets, the better! But if you don’t have space for that many tubs, it’s totally fine to have less in the rotation.

2 Display Toys



- Pick one toy pile and set them out so they are accessible to your child.
- I bought this non-fancy shoe shelf from Target to display the toys they could play with. (I kept it in the living room because that's where we spent a lot of time and they would be near me.)
- Use what works for your area - a dresser, a bookshelf, cubbie storage shelves, etc.
- Display toys "not put together" or in loose parts. For example, put puzzle pieces in a basket or bag instead of all put together. Completed toys/puzzles just say "It's done already!"
- Use baskets or containers to store the loose pieces.

3 Store the Rest

- Put the remaining piles of toys in separate storage tubs.
- Store them where they are easily accessible to you. I used one of my kids' closet. Other areas could be under the bed storage or in the garage.
- If you don't have much space, you can use less tubs to alternate between.



4 Rotation Day

- The most fun day of the week!! And let your kids help.
- Take all the toys out of your display area and swap them with toys from your chosen storage tub.
- Put the old toys in the storage tub and back in your storage area. They will go to the bottom of the rotation.
- It doesn't have to be every week. If the kids are still enjoying them, then let them stay out longer.

Open-Ended Toys Cheatsheet

Offer open-ended toys for longer play sessions that are great brain-builders!

OPEN ENDED TOYS

VS

ONE-AND-DONE TOYS

- The child is in charge of play
- Multiple ways to play
- Usually not battery operated
- Tool for your child to entertain themselves
- Grows with your child

- The toy leads the play
- One way to play
- Usually has lights and sounds and requires batteries
- Meant to entertain
- Can outgrow it quickly



Note: One-and-done toys are NOT terrible things that should be thrown out immediately. My kids had a few toys like the above that they truly loved. But when it comes to new toys that enter your house, there are better options out there that will last longer and be far less irritating to you.

Toy Category Ideas



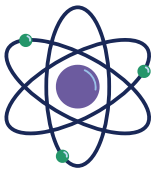
Blocks and Building

- LEGO
- Wood blocks
- Magnet blocks
- Log blocks
- Kinex
- Train tracks
- Marble run

Puzzles and Games



- Wooden puzzles
- Floor puzzles
- Foam puzzles
- Board games
- Card games
- Memory



Science and STEM

- Slime kits
- Rock kits
- Fossil kits
- Bug kits
- Microscope
- Telescope
- Ant farm
- Butterfly growing kit

Sensory and Fine Motor



- Play dough
- Play dough tools
- Play dough kits
- Kinetic sand
- Sand box
- Sand toys
- Water table
- Sensory table

Toy Category Ideas



Arts and Crafts

- Easel
- Stamps
- Perler beads
- Paint sticks
- Smelly markers
- Watercolors
- Fun paper
- Paint
- Aquabeads
- Stickers
- Chalk



Pretend Play

- Pretend food
- Play kitchen
- Doctor kit
- Hairstyling head and tools
- Vet kit
- Dress up clothes
- Dolls
- Dollhouse
- Puppets
- Magic Set
- Cardboard tools



Gross Motor Skills

- Bike
- Scooter
- Tricycle
- Plasma car
- Balls
- Balance board
- Tunnel
- Stepping stones
- Swing
- Trampoline
- Slide

Podcasts for Young Kids

STORIES

- Reading Bug Adventures
- Julie's Library
- Story Pirates
- Stories Podcast
- Circle Round
- What If World
- Girl Tales
- Molly of Denali
- Thomas & Friends Storytime
- Blue's Clues & You
- ABC Story Sisters
- Alien Adventures of Finn Caspian
- Little Stories for Tiny People
- Fun Fables: Bedtime Stories for Kids
- Bottle Ship Adventures
- African Folktales
- Story Seeds

MUSIC

- Noodle Loaf
- The Music Box
- Your Classical Kids Storytime
- Ear Snacks

EDUCATIONAL

- Earth Rangers
- Tumble Science Podcast
- Wow in the World
- Smash Boom Best
- Imagined Life Family
- But Why
- Brains On
- Curious Kids Podcast
- Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls
- Who Smarted?
- The Past and the Curious
- Eat Your Spanish
- Spanish to English
- Mystery Recipe
- The Big Fib
- Chompers (2x daily 2 minute stories specific for teeth brushing time)

MINDFULNESS

- Bedtime Explorers
- Peace Out
- Like You: Mindfulness for Kids
- Mind Yeti
- The Big Life Kids Podcast

This list is good for 2-10 years old. Some are geared for younger kids and some are for older kids - but it really just depends on your child! You'll have to give them a try and see if it keeps your child's interest!

All of them are available where podcasts are streamed (Spotify, Apple Music, etc.)

Put on a podcast **instead of screens** when you...

- want to sleep longer
- are getting ready
- are feeding the baby
- are putting younger kids down for a nap
- are cooking dinner
- just want to relax for a bit
- have work to do
- want to transition away from watching shows during meal times
- are in the car
- want a calm activity before bed

Ways to listen:

- Play it on your phone, but use a Bluetooth speaker your child can listen with.
- Smart TVs have Spotify and Apple Music apps (it's like screen time without the visual stimulation!)
- Get an audio player like Yoto or Storybutton that plays podcasts.

Pair it with coloring or building blocks
or snuggling on the couch!

Now for the Activities

I strongly believe that kids need time and space to play and figure out what they want to do.

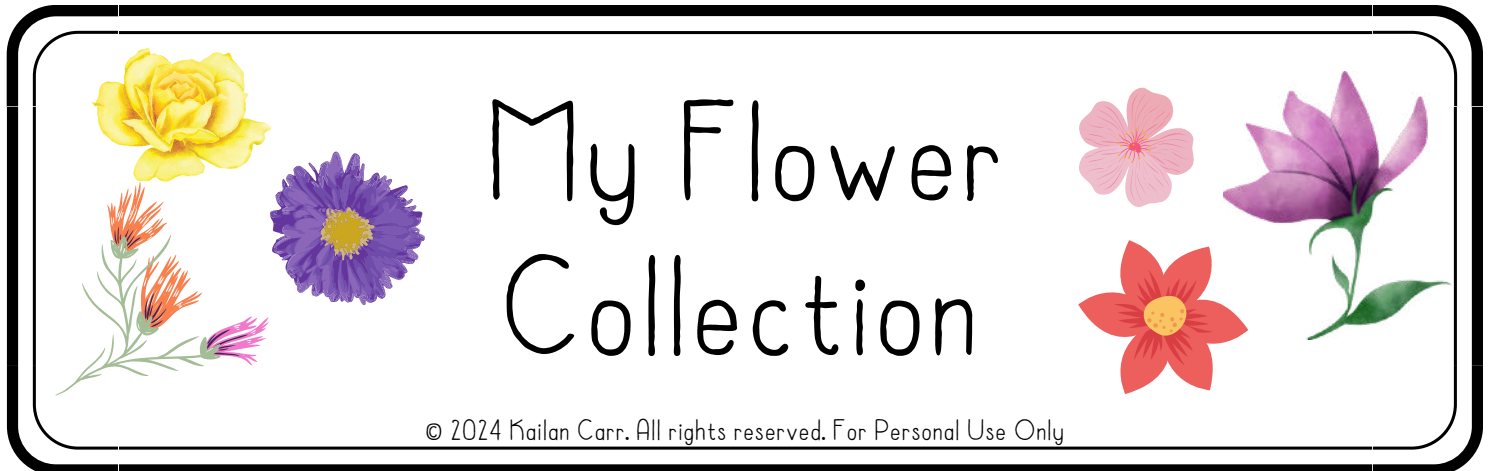
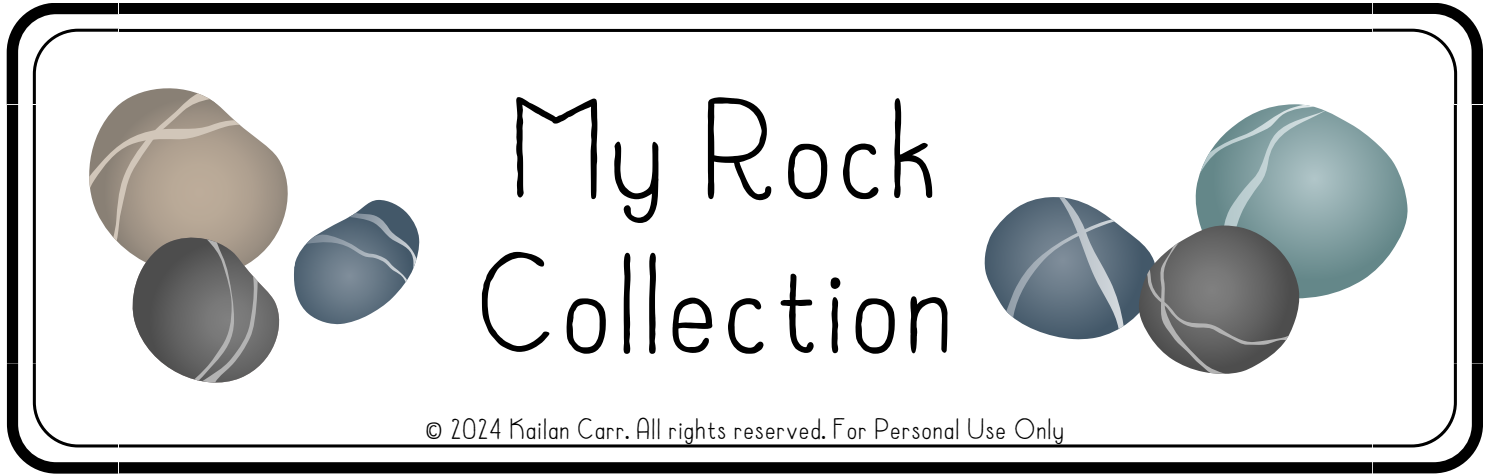
But, there are certain pockets of your day where a printable activity comes in handy. And they are fun!

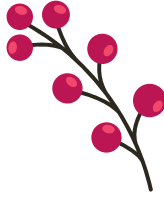
You can use these as an opportunity to connect, or kids can do them on their own if they have the skills. Either way, they will encourage outside time and practicing fine motor skills.



Nature Collection Labels

Cut out and glue to the top of an egg carton (outside or inside).
Then your child can put nature treasures they collect in the compartments!





My Nature Collection



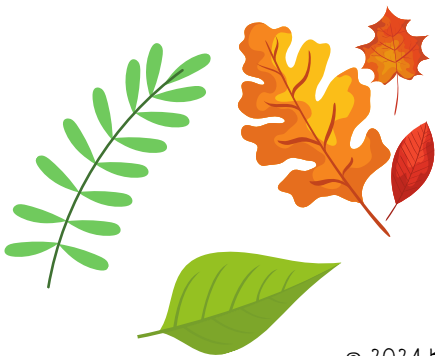
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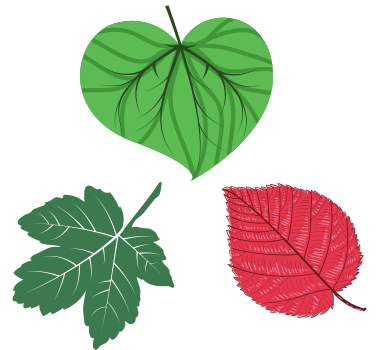
Nature Treasures



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My Leaf Collection



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Sound Hunt

Sit outside or go for a walk and check off what you hear.



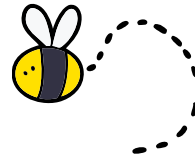
car



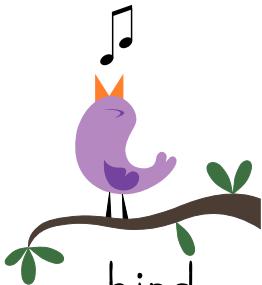
dog



children



insect



bird



siren



airplane



wind



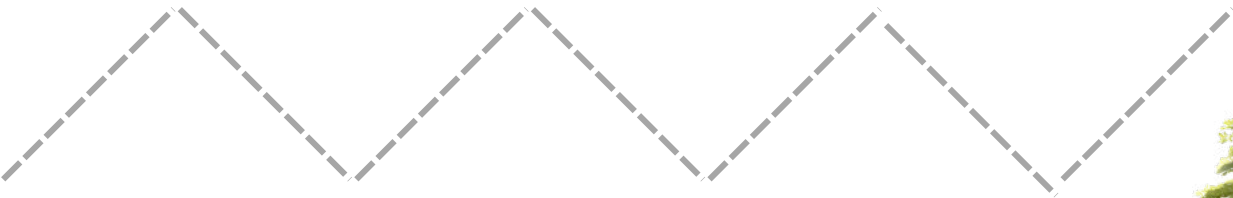
music



construction

CUTTING PRACTICE

Cut along the dotted lines to get strips. Then cut along the dotted lines of each strip to practice using your scissors.



Add candles to the cake (using play dough or crayons)!



Get NEW monthly brain-building activities for your screen-free stash.

“ Perfect for mamas who want to do fun activities with their kids, but don't want to think about it!
- Emily

Unplug & PLAY CLUB

“ I just had to reach out and tell you thank you SO much for the printables. My girls love them more than their Highlights books!
- Elaina

Making it easier for you to create memories with your little ones or keep them busy when you need a minute!



Best for kids aged 3-7!

[CLICK HERE TO JOIN](#)

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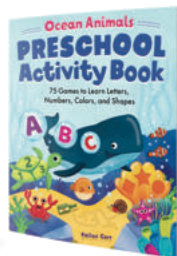
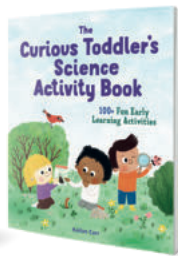
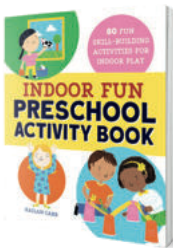
Reclaim childhood with less screens and more play!

Here's how I can help:

Quiet Book page kits and patterns for those who sew.



Published books with activities and ideas.



Unplug & Play Club for new screen-free activities each month.





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If you have any questions, concerns, or comments please email:
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