

Six Steps to a Great Turnoff



Step 1. Getting Started!

In workshops on organizing Turnoff Week, participants may hear about the steps to organizing a Turnoff, but in the discussions that follow, many believe that they can do it all by themselves. It is for that reason we encourage you to get friends, coworkers and others to join you; after all, building community is a big part of Turnoff Week. The more people involved, the more possibilities exist...take advantage of the talent around you!

So, when you start planning Turnoff Week, by all means have fun planning alternative activities, but don't forget to lay the groundwork ahead of time and don't forget that all the steps are equally important!

Your commitment to hold a Turnoff Week is your first step to a great Turnoff! So, mark all of your calendars for the Week, April 21-27, 2008. Talk to your family, class, office, and friends about the week.

Decide as a group about how you want to get organized and ask for their help. Tell them that you want it to be fun for everyone. Together, identify times that all of you would normally watch television, play electronic games or watch a video. Ask them to help brainstorm about all the activities you can plan for those times of the day. It is important that you have alternatives planned, so that you don't miss all the screens in your life. Plan lots of interesting activities to occupy that time, too. Plan to get out a jigsaw puzzle, cards, board games, crafts, or other things to work on together, put music on – or call friends to see if they would like to help you organize alternative activities. Ask for ideas from your organizing team and ask children for advice about planning for the week. The more they feel involved the more active they will be.

Even before Turnoff Week starts, you may find yourself doing some of the alternative activities instead of spending time with screens, and you will find that a "real life" is always more interesting than a "virtual" one.



By Morgan Rose Bullard, 5th Grade, UT

Step 2. Build an Organizing Team

It's easier -- and more fun -- to organize a Turnoff when you have a team!

Form a Turnoff group in your community. Talk to friends, family and neighbors and find out who is interested. Call or visit your school principal, school and community librarians, PE teachers, art and music teachers, school nurses, scout leaders, coaches, or religious leaders and ask for their support and participation. Your organizing team can be any size, but there is strength in numbers!

As the committee leader, you'll set the tone for your committee. Be prepared and be direct. Let people know that they can contribute in a variety of ways; different kinds of expertise and ability are always welcome. Also, ensure that people have a sense of the time commitments you're seeking; open-ended commitments can scare people off. Emphasize that their involvement will be fun, and that cutting back or giving up screen-time gives people more time and energy to do the things they've always wanted to do.

Give your "team" a name because when your group has a name, your community will know that you are organized and serious. If there are young people involved in your group, make sure your name reflects that — the press is always interested in what young people are doing! Some examples include LimiTV, which was chosen by an active group in North Carolina, or Parents Opposed to Excessive Television (POET). Picking a name is a great way to be creative!

The goal of meetings is not to chat, brainstorm, or plan other meetings -- it's to come up with specific tasks, responsibilities, and timelines. Make sure that, at the end of each meeting, people know who is responsible for what, and when it's due. This kind of planning saves a lot of headaches later on!



Turnoff Week 2007 in Mexico

Center for Screen-Time Awareness

1200 29th Street, N.W.
www.screentime.org

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Step 3. Identify and Inspire Participants

Schools, libraries, religious organizations, colleges and universities, book stores and local businesses, doctors and pediatricians, environmental groups, museums, cultural institutions and literacy or tutoring organizations are among the strongest supporters of Turnoff Week.

Once you've identified your target groups, consider photocopying selections from this Organizer's Kit and assembling small information packets to hand out to prospective partners, fellow organizers and participants. There are no copyright restrictions as long as the materials are not sold.

Schools

Local schools are among the most important organizing hubs for Turnoff Week. Thousands of Turnoffs have taken place in schools during the last ten years. Principals, teachers and school librarians traditionally support the Turnoff concept and will often organize a Turnoff in their class or institution. Organizing schools is also a good way to reach the community because students will often involve their parents and siblings. When approaching schools, be sure to cite the many education and health associations endorsing the event.

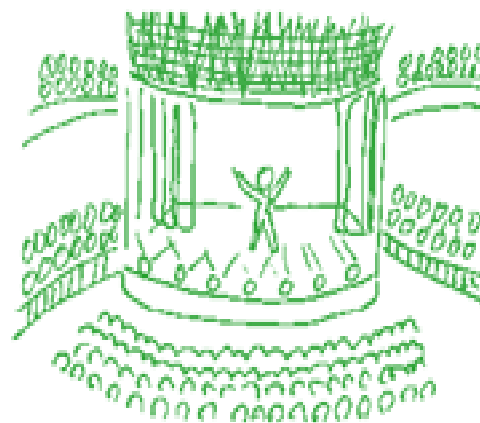
Teachers tend to be strong proponents of Turnoffs. Many have seen the cumulative effects of excessive screen-time on their students and are all too familiar with shortened attention spans and the decline of reading skills. They will likely need little prodding to join the campaign. Teachers are also great organizers!

Ask the PTA or PTO to endorse your local Turnoff Week. Members of these organizations are typically active in school governance, and their support will be of enormous benefit. Ask for names of potential parent and teacher supporters and request time to address a PTA or PTO meeting.

Once you have identified school organizers (teachers or other adults at the school), ask them to attend a meeting with you and school officials. Ask the principal or superintendent to issue a memorandum declaring Turnoff Week in the school or district.

Libraries

Visit or call your local public libraries to arrange a meeting with the head librarian or children's librarian. With the library staff, develop a schedule of special events during the Turnoff Week, such as evening workshops, storytelling or readings. Provide the staff with copies of the book list, pledge cards, brochure, screen-reduction ideas, and our poster. Suggest that they distribute and create a special display of books highlighting alternative activities and the problems of excessive screen-time.



Religious Organizations

Religious organizations are often active participants in Turnoff Week because much of the programming undermines religious values. Ask religious leaders to help spread the word about National Turnoff Week and to incorporate the theme of an “electronic media fast” into their sermons or readings, as Pope John Paul II did in March 1996. Encourage churches, synagogues and other congregations to promote the Turnoff to their members and organize alternative activities. Publish an announcement in the organization’s newsletter and calendar. Make a brochure or fact sheets available to the congregation. Because religious organizations usually meet only once or twice a week, stress the importance of publicizing the Turnoff Week early and often.

Colleges and Universities

All colleges and universities have organizations, clubs and residence halls that may be enthusiastic participants in a Turnoff. Consider staging the event as a “dorm challenge.” If the school has a campus radio station, ask the program manager to help publicize the event. Contact the campus newspaper and ask them to run a public service announcement (PSA). Organizers could also set up a table with literature and pledge cards in a central lobby or dining hall the week before and during the week.

Bookstores and Businesses

Call bookstores, roller skating rinks, sporting goods stores, gyms, recreation centers, dance/martial arts studios, coffee shops, restaurants, theaters and art galleries. Meet with the owners or managers and send them a version of the “Merchant Letter” (available in the Resources section). Ask them to support the local Turnoff Week by offering discounts or special activities for participants holding Turnoff pledge cards. As with libraries, request that bookstores offer story hours and create special displays of books or items that highlight the screen-time problem. Give them the Turnoff poster, some brochures, and articles to distribute.

Members of the medical and counseling communities are often acutely aware of the health problems caused by excessive screen-time. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association and American Academy of Family Physicians have all endorsed or supported Turnoff Week. Ask a pediatrician or local health professional to serve on your committee. Encourage him or her to distribute pledge cards and tips on screen-time reduction to patients and to hang up posters in the waiting room. If the waiting room has a TV set, it should be removed or covered. For parents, you could also arrange a presentation about the effects of screen-time on child development. Use the fact sheets that address this as a public health issue.

Museums and Cultural Institutions

Museums make terrific partners for a Turnoff Week. Each museum could offer special activities such as tours or lectures for kids or nature walks as part of the week’s official events. Meet with the director of education or community outreach and see if she/he would like to serve on the local committee.

Literacy or Tutoring Organizations

Many communities have adult literacy programs and tutoring or mentoring programs for the young. Locate these organizations through libraries, the phone book or religious congregations. Find out if there is a local chapter of Literacy Volunteers of America or Big Brothers/Big Sisters in your area.

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Step 4. Work with the Media



Media coverage boosts the impact of your activities. It lets a broader circle of people know what you are doing, and spreads the word about why you are doing it. Even if you have not planned press events in the past, with a little preparation you can help reporters find news to cover while they help you spread the word about Turnoff Week.

Even if you aren't sure whether there will be press coverage of your events, make a simple media plan in advance. You have a lot of influence that can get your message, and your event, into the news! Prepare materials for reporters and contact them a week or ten days before Turnoff Week. News stories about the week are most likely to run on Monday or Tuesday of Turnoff Week, so make sure that reporters have fact sheets, background information, names and phone numbers of organizers to contact, and even names of children who would be willing to be interviewed well in advance.

The Week provides many opportunities for you to generate media coverage. These include a kickoff event, before the Week begins or at the Week's beginning, a ceremony for those who succeed at the end, and a variety of mid-week activities, including family game nights, sports days, and story telling. Be creative and remember that your event can send two messages: celebrating all there is to do beyond the screen, and calling attention to our screen-time addiction during the 14th annual Turnoff Week.

Send a strong message – plan in advance what important piece of information you want every reporter to know. Make sure that everyone involved in your project knows what your message is. For example, “Smithville students Turn Off the screen and boost physical activity.”

Media Relations: Overview

A **press release** should answer the following questions:

- > *Who* is promoting Turnoff Week in the community?
- > *What* is Turnoff Week?
- > *Why* is the Turnoff important?
- > *When* does Turnoff Week occur?
- > *Where* is the Turnoff taking place (schools, organizations, etc.)?

Include a phone number and the name of a contact person whom reporters may call for more information.

Send the press release to both the assignment desks and metro news editors of local newspapers and radio stations as soon as possible. Make follow-up phone calls to the recipients of the press release to encourage them to cover the story. Encourage radio stations and newspapers to interview school children. Keep a list of the names and phone numbers of reporters who call. Don't be afraid to tell your local cable or television station either.

You may also want to consider staging a public event to announce your local Turnoff campaign. Inform the press about the time, place, topic and expected speakers. Find a suitable location for the press conference, such as a public library, and reserve the area in advance. Have committee members and notable endorsers make short speeches of five minutes each. Have extra press releases and Turnoff Week information on hand at a table near the entrance of the room. Remember to call us if you have questions or want to share how your event went.

Working with the Media

Contact reporters via phone ahead of Turnoff Week to follow up your press release. Make sure that school papers know to cover the events as well – this can be a great exercise both for young journalists and any young organizers working with you!

Take a few minutes to relax and prepare yourself for each conversation. Decide on 3 main points you want to make sure the reporter remembers.

When you reach a reporter, introduce yourself and ask if he/she has time to talk. If not, ask when might be a better time to call back – don't take it personally, they may be on a tight deadline!

Know the goal of your call – do you want the reporter to write a story? Schedule a meeting with you? Attend a press conference? Tell the reporter the purpose of your call early in the conversation.

Speak clearly and concisely – be able to explain your story in two brief sentences. Be prepared and be helpful. Give the reporter the fact sheets on screen-time and reading, obesity, and on Turnoff Week itself.

Be honest. If a reporter asks you something you aren't sure of, don't guess. If you can help him or her find the information, that is great – otherwise, refer them to www.screentime.org for more information, or suggest that they call Center for SCREEN-TIME Awareness at 202-333-9220.

Make sure the reporter has your name and phone number in case he or she has any additional questions. Be sure to thank the reporter for his or her time. Make sure you record the reporter's phone numbers and email for future reference.

Holding a Press Conference

Holding a press conference is a great way to highlight your Turnoff Week activities.

Set the date and time – mid-morning Tuesday or Wednesday are usually the best time to get press to attend.

Determine who will speak and how long it will be (15-30 minutes should be sufficient).

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Invite VIP guests, such as the mayor, well in advance. A VIP guest can help draw reporters to cover the story.

Have a banner or other visual aid on the podium or in the background behind a speaker that would make a good newspaper photo. Student posters make a good visual aid. Groups of students also provide a different, and fun, atmosphere to events.

Give an agenda to everyone who attends, including timing for the event and noting key speakers.

Let reporters know about your press conference by sending out a one page news advisory for them to receive one week before the event. Include time and place of the event, and some general information, but save your most important news for the actual event!

Writing a Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor that is printed in the paper can raise awareness of Turnoff Week because it will be read by so many people. A letter to the editor should relate to a recent story that the paper has run, or other current events. Your letter about Turnoff Week could be in response to a story about children and media, an article about obesity, or an article about some facet of family living.

Letters should be brief (less than 250 words), as newspapers print many letters to the editor and space is a concern for them. Include your name, address and phone number on the letter. Students writing a letter to the editor may also want to put their age on the letter.

Crafting an “Op-Ed”

An op-ed is longer than a letter to the editor, but still usually fewer than 700 words, and gives the writer a chance to express an opinion. An op-ed piece, supported by facts, can stimulate others to think about the effects of excessive screen-time and Turnoff Week. Op-ed pieces are sometimes printed several weeks or months after they are submitted, so do not use date-specific information in your op-ed that could reduce your chances of being published. Call your newspaper to find out length requirements and to whom you should send your op-ed.

Your Media Relations Toolbox

Your media relations toolkit includes the following tools:

Press Release

- > Who, what, when, where, and why
- > The most common method of mass communication

Media Advisory

- > To alert the media of an event

Phone Call

- > Keep it short! Think through your message before you call

Letter to the Editor

- > Keep these under 250 words, and relate them to a community event or a news story

Op-Ed

- > An opportunity for you to address an issue or issues in a longer and more in-depth format

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Step 5. Promote Screen-Free Activities



As an organizer, one of the questions that you will hear most frequently is: “But what will I/we do instead?” The answer, of course, is: Almost anything!

Once the screens are off, the possibilities are limitless. A little creative brainstorming will yield a tremendous variety of good ideas. To help get you started, there are lists of screen-free activities throughout the Organizer’s Kit. Of course, these lists are by no means comprehensive.

Remember, you do not need to plan activities for every moment of the week. Quiet time for reflection and contemplation is valuable in itself. For children, boredom is often the wellspring from which creativity flows. Furthermore, a Turnoff Week chock-full of exciting activities may make the weeks following seem dull. To avoid any potential letdown, try to develop substitute activities that will be enjoyable over the long-term, even when the week is over.

Step 6. Celebrate -- and Stay in Touch!

Enjoy your week without screens, and congratulate yourself and your family, school or community when the week is complete. Have a party or awards ceremony to celebrate!

How’d your Turnoff go? We’d like to know!

Please... Send us copies of all news clippings about your Turnoff Week. Also include any materials you created and distributed.

Share with us any high-quality Turnoff action photos for possible reproduction in our publications.

Your “stuff” can help us make future Turnoffs even better!

Beyond your “stuff,” we also want to get your ideas and input. Let us know what worked well and what did not. You can e-mail us at email@screentime.org. We depend on your feedback to help measure the success of the Turnoff Week nationwide -- and to improve the event for years to come. You can mail materials to the address below. Thanks!

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And don’t forget...

If you are on a roll with reducing your screen-time, stick with it! There are so many activities to enjoy and discover. Have fun!

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