

# The 30-Day Blackout

by Stacy Jagger, LMFT, RPT

Back in the early days of electronics, in the 1920–30s, families would huddle around the radio and share the experience of listening to their favorite programs. Then in the 1940s, television became the social centerpiece of the family. These TV shows were not daily events, rather, they were special occasions when the family gathered 'round for a short break after a long day of work, a respite from life to huddle up on the couch and laugh together, cry together, and share the experience of being entertained together.

Gradually, that all changed. Families acquired more and more TVs, to the point where each family member had their own and could watch it in isolation. Then the screens became smaller and wireless and could fit into one hand. The internet brought us 24-hour access to solo entertainment. Today, we are so bombarded with screens that we are hard pressed to find a classroom, a restaurant, or even a gas pump without a screen glaring at us.

As adults, screens now consume a significant portion of our days and our attention. Sadly though, it's not just adults whose attention is being monopolized by glowing screens. Screens are now dominating the attention of our children, too. And not just occasionally. Recent studies show that children are facing screens an average of seven hours every day. Seven hours!? That's nearly the equivalent of a full-time work day. And at what cost? A truly sobering one.

My name is Stacy Jagger, and I'm a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Registered Play Therapist. I've been working with families for many years now, treating complex cases in children with a variety of behavioral and relational problems. Problems such as a child who is brokenhearted from a divorce; a preschool child who is biting or hurting her friends; a boy who has seen pornography on a tablet and was found acting out what he saw with a neighbor; and a young girl who is depressed because she is being bullied at school.

In deep concern for my clients, my training and clinical intuition led me to develop a radical solution. What if I could convince everyone in the family to turn off all their screens for 30 days? Every iPad, smartphone, computer, TV and video game. What might happen if these families unplugged from electronics and instead plugged into each other?

I am in my sixth year of walking hundreds of families through the **30-Day Blackout**, and the results are glorious. This is the path my clients choose in order to make meaningful change in their lives, and you can, too.

The first step in modifying your family's screen time is to apologize and have "The 30-Day Blackout Talk." It can begin with something like this:

"Guys- I have realized that we are all spending too much time on our screens, and I am truly sorry. The screens have isolated and insulated us from each other, and we are not connecting the way we should. For those reasons, we are going to turn off all our screens and do something called the 30-Day Blackout."

This is when you can expect to hear gnashing of their teeth.

I typically recommend parents blame the whole thing on me, make me the scapegoat. You are welcome to point the finger at me and tell your family that the Blackout is under my direction.

When your family begins the Blackout, the first five days are total hell, so be prepared. Around day five the children walk through what I refer to as "The Door of Boredom and The Pit of Despair." This is when kids think boredom is going to kill them. But I'm going to tell you a secret- no child has ever died from boredom. The children are beginning to experience internal peace, but they don't realize it because many of them have never experienced it before.

During days six and seven, the children typically become willing to do things they were not open to doing before, like chop vegetables with mom in the kitchen, go for simple family walks, and have more connecting conversations.

Over the next three weeks, I coach parents to use connecting activities to replace what used to be entertainment activities. I recommend things like playing puzzles, taking trips to state parks, going on family hikes and bike rides, dusting off board games and actually playing them, doing crafts, reading together, or going to a children's museum or the library as a family.

And miraculously, almost too simply, because you have put the bond before the behavior, the children's behavior problems begin to trickle away. They really do. This is because all humans are designed to connect, from the cradle to the grave. It's ingrained in all of us to crave connection. And no screen will replace the eyes of a loving other, no matter how much we want it to.

Many families ask, "How do we pull this off with the need to use computers at work and school?"

What I recommend is for the entire family to do the Blackout together (the parents and the children), or don't do it at all. And yet I realize there are modifications that may be necessary for families to continue to succeed in work and school.

This is what I recommend:

1. Make a one-page document that everyone signs committing to the Blackout.
2. All social media apps and gaming apps come off the phones. Teens are allowed 30 minutes to an hour per day of texting or Facetiming with their friends, preferably away from younger siblings.
3. From 6:30pm and until 6:30am, parents keep their phones out of sight (I keep mine in my car), only working during normal business hours and keeping screens off at all times around the children. Parents should text and email at specific times during the day while away from the children.

You may be wondering how the Blackout positively impacts the behavioral problems in children. In short, it's because by taking away the stimulation of the screens, the brain resets to a new normal and parents begin to "see" and "find" their child again. The child begins to connect with others, maintain healthy eye contact, regulate their emotions, and concentrate on one thing at a time for longer periods of time.

At the conclusion of the 30 days, many families see such improved connection within their family that they choose to do another Blackout. Whether you do two Blackouts or one, moving forward all screen time must be regulated as the "dessert" of your lives instead of the main course.

I suggest the Screen Time app for all of your children's phone and iPads, which will allot 1-2 hours per day for your child to access to his/her phone before pausing the phone until the next day. I also recommend the Net Nanny program for filtering out any violence or pornography from your children's devices.

For young children 10 and under, I recommend a practice called Screen Time Marbles. This is where you simply give the child seven marbles in a jar for the week, with each marble equaling 30 minutes to one hour per day of screen time. They get to cash in their marbles as they wish. If they are having a behavior problem, you have the option of removing a marble. If they are having a great day, such as helping with chores and being obedient, you have the option of adding a marble to their jar to reward good behavior.

I have yet to have a child not say, "Thank you" at the conclusion of a Blackout. We owe it to our children to provide them with the connection they need.

I am here to guide you if you need further assistance on your journey to restoring your family's connection. Testimonials, further encouragement and education can be found at [www.stacyjagger.com](http://www.stacyjagger.com).

In health,

Stacy Jagger

## Stacy Jagger Bio

Stacy Jagger is passionate about healing broken women, children and families. She is a leading authority in restoring connection between children and their parents. A Nashville-based therapist, author, guest speaker and mentor, Stacy draws on a decade of experience in treating families to help them heal and reconnect.

Stacy is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and Registered Play Therapist (RPT). She is the founder of Sunnybrook Counseling, a unique counseling practice that specializes in integrating play and expressive arts therapies for women, children and families.

Stacy is the author of the children's book, *Ladybug Sings the Blues*, a cognitive-behavioral resource for children and their parents, and *A Letter from Emma*, a critically acclaimed abuse prevention resource for children and families in faith-based communities. She developed *Music with Mommie*, a high energy, interactive mom-child program that strengthens relationships while teaching important life skills through music, movement and creative play. Stacy also leads workshops and offers continuing education courses.

One of her primary focus areas is connection between children and their parents. Research shows that kids today feel less connected than ever before, despite all the time they spend interacting with friends on social media. She has developed a proven method to address and remedy children's behavioral problems created by excessive screen time – the 30-Day Blackout.