

When screen time ends

A gentler transition plan for parents, carers, children and teens

Ending a game or video can be a difficult change of activity. This pack offers practical things to try together. The aim is a more predictable ending and enough support to move on, not a promise of no tears.

Start small today

Choose one familiar screen session. Try one change, notice what happens, then adjust. You do not need to use every idea or complete every page.

Your five-step starting point

- 1. Ask before the session.** What is the activity, and where can it realistically finish?
- 2. Agree the ending.** Name a stopping point and a finish-by time that fit the day.
- 3. Choose the reminder.** A quiet prompt, picture or timer may help. Ask which feels least stressful.
- 4. Make the next step clear.** Offer a manageable bridge: a drink, a stretch, quiet company or another agreed activity.
- 5. Review later.** Notice what helped. If it was difficult, change the plan rather than judging your child.

Use the pages that help

2-3 Understand and prepare | **4** Words to try
5 Distress and repair | **6** A shared printable plan
7 One-week learning sheet | **8** Next steps and sources

Use age-respectful language and adapt the ideas to communication, sensory and support needs. A child can point, draw, type or tell you; writing is optional.

General educational support, not a clinical treatment or individual assessment. See page 8 if difficulties are frequent, severe or affecting everyday life.

What might make stopping hard?

Look at the situation before deciding what it means.

You do not have to identify one perfect explanation. Treat the possibilities below as questions to explore at a calm time, not labels to apply to your child.

The activity may be unfinished

Is there progress to save, a live match that cannot pause, or another person waiting? Ask your child to show you how finishing works.

The change may feel sudden

Did the ending arrive without a clear cue? Would fewer spoken reminders, a written plan or a visual sequence feel easier? Some autistic children find predictability especially helpful. [2]

Something important may be ending

Does this session offer friendship, enjoyment, a familiar interest or time away from worries? Understanding its role can make the next conversation more useful. [1]

The next step may feel too big

Does stopping lead straight to homework, a noisy room or several instructions? Could you break the next task into one manageable action?

Try asking one question

"What is the hardest bit about finishing?" If talking feels like too much, offer choices: **losing progress / leaving friends / not knowing what is next / something else**. Leave room for "I don't know".

Avoid jumping to a diagnosis. One difficult ending does not establish addiction or a mental health condition. Look at the wider pattern and seek help if you are concerned. [1]

Set up the ending beforehand

Make a plan when nobody is being asked to stop.

Know what the session involves. Ask how long a round usually takes and whether progress can be saved. Agree not to begin a new round if it is unlikely to fit the available time.

Use an ending your child can recognise. For example: "Save after this build, then finish by 5.30." A natural stopping point still needs a realistic outer limit. [1]

Explain the reason briefly. "We need time to eat and get ready." Avoid a long debate about whether screens are good or bad.

Choose one reminder style together. Try a quiet reminder, a note or a timer. If countdowns increase stress, use a predictable sequence instead: **finish / save / put down / next step**. [2,3]

Prepare a bridge. Ask: "Afterwards, would you rather have a drink with me or take a quiet few minutes?" Offer genuine choices you can honour, including space where safe.

Make saving and leaving possible. Allow time to save, sign out or say goodbye. Decide where the device will rest. Keep communication aids available if the device also supports communication.

If a match runs over

Agree a backup in advance: "No new match after 5.10. If this one is still going at 5.30, we use our agreed finish plan." Review the schedule later if overruns keep happening.

Try it once, then adjust. Different days may need different support. Younger children may need an adult alongside them; teenagers may prefer a discreet reminder and more involvement in planning.

Helpful words for the moment

Examples to adapt, not a script you have to get exactly right.

Before the session

"What are you hoping to do today? Let's work out where finishing will fit."

When the agreed cue arrives

"This is our finishing cue. Do you need help saving or saying goodbye?"

When they say "one more"

"I hear you want to carry on. We agreed no new round now. Let's use the finish plan."

When disappointment is building

"You really wanted more time. I can stay nearby while you finish."

When the next step feels difficult

"You don't have to do everything at once. First, put the controller in its place. Then we can choose the next small step."

When you need to repair

"I raised my voice. I'm sorry. That wasn't helpful. When we're ready, we can make the ending clearer."

Keep the message short. You can acknowledge disappointment and keep an agreed boundary. If language is adding pressure, pause the conversation and offer support without more questions.

If it becomes overwhelming

Safety and recovery first. Teaching and planning can wait.

Reduce the load

Lower your voice and reduce repeated instructions. Give physical space where safe. A quieter environment or a familiar comfort may help; offer rather than insist. Avoid demanding eye contact, an explanation or an immediate apology. [2,3]

Keep people safe

Move other children and hazards away if needed. Avoid a tug-of-war over the device. If there is harmful content, unsafe contact or an immediate danger, act to protect your child; safety may require interrupting the activity. This pack is not a restraint or crisis-management guide.

One short message can be enough

"This feels really hard. I'm here. We'll work out the next step when we can."

If touch or close company is unwelcome, respect that and remain available at a safe distance.

Return to the plan after recovery

Offer water, rest or a familiar activity if wanted. Later, ask one specific question: "Was it the warning, saving the game or what came next that was hardest?" Do not turn the review into a replay of everything that went wrong.

Repair without blame

Own your part if you shouted or changed the plan unexpectedly. Name unsafe actions calmly once everyone is ready, and agree what help will be available next time. Do not remove a communication aid or essential support as a consequence.

A difficult day is information

Were they tired, hungry, in pain, worried or already overloaded? Did the plan ask too much? These are things to explore, not excuses you need to prove.

Get support if there is repeated injury, frightening conflict, severe distress or a significant effect on daily life. Speak with your GP or an appropriate professional. For immediate danger, call **999**.

Our plan for finishing

Complete together when calm. Point, draw, write or ask someone to help.

The screen activity I want to plan for:

My stopping point and finish-by time:

My reminder will be:

To save, finish or say goodbye, I need:

My first small step afterwards will be:

When finishing feels hard, I would like...

- ☐ A quiet reminder or picture
- ☐ Help saving or signing out
- ☐ Someone nearby, without lots of talking
- ☐ Some space, where it is safe

Something else that helps me:

If the plan cannot work today, our backup is:

We will check how this plan is working on: _____
This is a shared support plan, not a test or a behaviour contract.

One week of noticing

Look for patterns and support needs, not a perfect record.

Try one change for a few sessions. Keep notes private and brief. Your child can help if they want to; avoid using the sheet to score, shame or compare them.

Day	What was happening?	What support helped?	One thing to try next
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

At the end of the week

The ending was easier when...

My child would like us to change...

One small thing we will keep doing...

Progress might be a clearer cue, less confusion or a quicker recovery. A child still feeling disappointed does not mean the plan has failed.

Keep what helps. Change what does not.

A practical review and places to find more support

The timer makes things worse? Try one agreed visual cue or a short sequence. Let your child help choose the cue. Avoid turning reminders into a stream of warnings.

Every ending becomes a negotiation? Make the finishing point more precise before the next session. Check whether the time allowed fits the activity and the next task.

The next activity is always a struggle? Reduce it to one step, offer a brief bridge and check for sensory or other barriers. Extra support may be needed beyond a screen plan.

You are exhausted too? Agree who will support the ending where possible. Use a short phrase you can remember and seek support for your own wellbeing.

When to ask for more help

Talk to your GP or a relevant professional if distress or conflict is persistent, or if sleep, eating, school, relationships or other parts of life are significantly affected. Describe what happens and what you have tried. A screen plan should not delay help. [1]

Sources and further reading

The guidance below informed this pack. The scripts, planning page and review sheet are original Little Big Minds suggestions, not a validated clinical programme. Sources checked 20 October 2026.

[1] [YoungMinds: Gaming and mental health](#)

[2] [National Autistic Society: Predictability and routine](#)

[3] [Parent Club: Dealing with tantrums around screen use](#)

Parent Club uses the term "tantrums" in its article title. This pack does not assume that every distressed response is a tantrum or deliberate behaviour.

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