

Oprah's
“What Can You Live Without?”
Survival Guide

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The Ground Rules

It's time to get back to basics. Cut out the noise and simplify your life with Oprah's "What Can You Live Without?" Challenge. "It's all about disconnecting from all the stuff and all the technology and reconnecting as a family," Oprah says. "You're going to have a great time. You're going to reconnect as a family. You're going to find out what each other's real interests are, what everybody's been thinking, what everybody's been feeling. You're going to feel a lot of love."

So let's get started! For the next seven days, follow these guidelines:

1. Cut out all technology—no televisions, video games, cell phones, computers, MP3 players or any other technology you use on a daily basis.
2. No eating out. Everyone must eat dinner at home as a family and brown-bag it for lunch.
3. Curb your spending. The only items you can buy are groceries. Try to stick to a budget of \$125 for the week.
4. Plan an inexpensive, creative family outing. You may spend a small amount of money on this if necessary.
5. Choose one family activity that gives back to others.
6. Mom and Dad: Plan one date night so you can connect as a couple.
7. No working late.



“What Can You Live Without?” Pledge

Print out one copy of this pledge for each of your family members. Have everyone identify the vision they have for the family, then share these thoughts with one another on the first night of the challenge.

Today, I _____, commit to the ground rules of Oprah’s “What Can You Live Without?” Challenge. I commit to focusing on the quality of my relationships, not the stuff I own. I further commit to living a healthier lifestyle, having meals with my family and sharing my fortune and talents with the rest of the community.

I also resolve to share more of my feelings with my family, starting with expanding on the following statements:

I feel nervous about this challenge because:

I feel excited about this challenge because:

I would like start doing the following activities with my family:

I would like to help the community in the following ways:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Your Guide to the First Night

You're offline, unplugged and probably wondering what to do with yourself. (Can you hear the crickets chirping in the background?) Instead of staring blankly at one another or heading to bed early, use this time to ease into a new routine.

Here are five things you can do together:

- **Complete and sign your pledges.**

Take turns reading your hopes and fears about the challenge aloud. Take advantage of the silence that comes from turning off all that background noise and start hearing one another.

- **Create a few rules of your own.**

Are there other lessons you'd like to teach your family this week? Maybe it's to donate unused toys to kids who are less fortunate or to start using your car less. Your kids may want to change a few things about your behavior too, so allow each member of your family to have some input.

- **Bust out the family photos.**

Stop saving those baby pictures for when future boyfriends and girlfriends come to visit. Chances are, these albums have been stored in a safe place for years. Spend time as a family reliving funny moments from your past. If you have stacks of pictures that need to be organized, work as a family to put them into albums.



- **Go dark, *really* dark.**

If your family thinks living without the television is hard, try living without electricity for a night. Together, figure out a way to cook without using the stove or microwave, and have dinner by candlelight. This is a great excuse to tell a few ghost stories or make shadow puppets.

How to Beat Television and Video Game Withdrawl

According to the A.C. Nielsen Company, the average American watches more than four hours of television each day—equivalent to two months of nonstop television watching per year. Think about your television-watching and game-playing habits before the challenge. How much of that was simply to pass time—or used as a distraction? Were any of the shows or games educational? At some point this week, someone in your house will be singing the big-screen blues. Here are five ways to help your family change their couch potato ways:

- **Create your own television show.**

Who needs a network to tell you what's entertaining? Turn your living room into the writer's room, wardrobe department and soundstage! Come up with your own idea for a show, write a script as a family and have everyone take a role

- **Go outside!**

It may have been awhile since your entire family has spent time in the great outdoors. Check out the local nature center, fly a kite or organize a neighborhood sports tournament. Anything that gets you out of the house is a good thing!

- **Volunteer at a children's hospital.**

Work with your local children's hospital to see how your kids can lend a hand. Whether it's playing a game with patients, organizing a party or just lending an ear, it's a win-win situation for everyone involved.

- **Sketch out a comic book.**

If your kids are mesmerized by the graphics and storylines in the video games and movies based on classic comics, inspire them to create one of their own! Stock your house with fresh paper, crayons and markers, then encourage them to sketch new characters and worlds. Have them introduce their characters, then draw the worlds in which they'll have amazing adventures. When they're done, hang their sketches on a wall in your house so everyone can see their creations!



Cell Phone Crazy?

Studies find that kids aren't necessarily talking on the phone more—but they are burning through your family text plan. A recent A.C. Nielsen survey found that 77 percent of teens have their own cell phone, and they're sending and/or receiving an average of 96 texts a day—that's almost 2,900 a month! Imagine how your kids are itching and twitching to get back to that phone. Here are a few ways to wean them from their cell phone habits:

- **Play telephone.**

If you think this idea sounds corny, you've never been in a high stakes game of telephone. You can take the lead on the first round. Have everyone sit in a circle and then whisper a word or a sentence into the ear of the person next to you. Each person goes down the line repeating what they heard. The last person must announce what they heard to everyone else. It's not as easy as you think! Challenge your family by whispering the most detailed, outlandish story you can think of. Mix things up by starting out by whisper-singing a song and have the last person sing it out loud

- **Write a letter.**

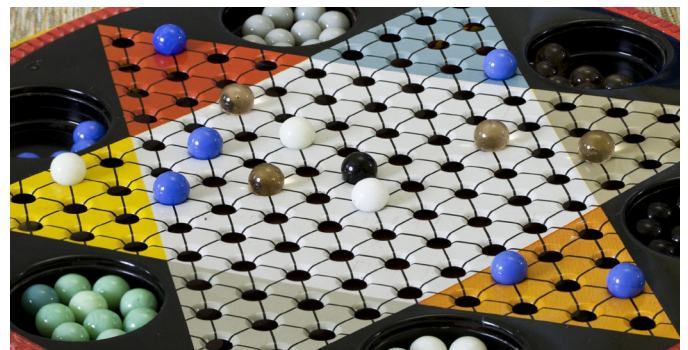
Most kids communicate through text, but just because they're without phone service doesn't mean they have to be cut off from the world. Have them practice the ancient art of letter writing. Encourage them to think through more than a few words at a time and put it to paper. Letters are a great personal touch and can be a nice exercise in improving communication.

- **Create a photo scavenger hunt.**

Cell phone cameras are improving, but they're no match for the real thing. Hit up your local drug store and buy disposable cameras for your entire family. Then, send them on the hunt! Challenge everyone to find items that look like the letters in your last name or the 10 coolest things they see that are red. When you're done, drop them off for overnight service. The next evening, spend some time comparing shots and decide where to display your new instant artwork.

- **Game on!**

Cell phone games can be a great way to pass time, but they're no match for a good, old-fashioned board game blowout. Early in the week, take out every board game in your house, set up a bracket sheet and have the mother of all board game tournaments.



Living Life Offline

Think most online addicts are teenagers? You may need to look in the mirror. According to Nielsen, teenagers spend an average of 11.5 hours online every month, while adults spend 42.5 hours!

Whether you and your family use the Internet for information or just to kill time, there are ways to fill those voids without being tethered to a keyboard.

- **Hit the books.**

How did we find information before Google? Oh yeah, that little thing called the card catalog. Most of what you're looking for on the Internet is available at the library. Hunker down in the travel book section and have everyone pick out their dream vacation spot. Or, start your own family book club. Who knew a library could be such fun?

- **Explore your local museums.**

The best thing about family time is getting to know your loved ones' interests. If your daughter loves art, visit the local art museum with the whole family. Have her act as a tour guide. If your husband has a passion for the past, tag along on a journey through his favorite era at the local natural history museum. Museums are also a great way to enhance school projects. Take some time to review your child's curriculum before you go!

- **Teach others how to use a computer.**

If you can't get your own fix, at least help someone else get theirs. Whether an after-school program is setting up a computer lab or a nursing home is going digital, there are plenty of opportunities to teach a computer newbie to surf, download and reboot with confidence.

- **Start a family history project.**

Creating a family tree is an excellent way to keep your children entertained and engaged in family history. For each branch you create, tell a story about the person it represents. Older children may enjoy creating a history book. Give them a tape recorder and send them off to interview members of your extended family. They can ask questions about where they grew up, their fondest memories—anything they like!



Missing: Your MP3 Player

With MP3 players becoming more of an all-in-one media experience, it's no wonder the Pew Research Center found that nearly half of all American adults own at least one. A Nielsen study finds that 39 percent of teens say their MP3 player is their primary source of music. Computers come in at a close second with 33 percent.

During the challenge, there's no need to go without. Here are a few ways to make sure some sweet sounds are still available:

- **Share your knowledge.**

Dust off that old piano or break out a guitar and teach your children the basics. Studies have found that children who study an instrument work better in teams, perform better in school and are less likely to drop out. Who knows, your rendition of "Chopsticks" could unlock a world of potential for your child.

- **Host *American Idol* in your living room.**

Too old, too young or just not confident enough to face Simon, Kara and Randy? No matter. Gather your closest friends and host a killer karaoke contest.

- **Enjoy a free concert.**

Many communities host free family concert nights. Check with your local park district and arts council to find out who's playing. Use the free shows as an excuse to study up on blues, jazz or classical tunes!

- **Oldies, but goodies.**

There's nothing like the crackle of an old record or the satisfying snap of putting an 8-track in the player. Bust out your old equipment and show the kids what you listened to back in the day. The entire family will have fun jamming to classic bands.



Silencing Your Inner Shopaholic

The things that have been consuming your family's attention didn't just walk into your home on their own. *Someone* had to pick them out and pay for them. Here are five ways to beat the urge to spend:

- **Declutter.**

Have the sneaking feeling that you've bought the same item over and over? It's time to clear out your closets! Start sorting through the piles you just don't notice anymore. You can even choose a room for the family to tackle together. Clutter expert Peter Walsh suggests grabbing three garbage bags—one for trash, recycling and donations. Don't be afraid to introduce some healthy competition, either. Compete to see who can clean their section the fastest or finds the most stuff to donate to charity.

- **Have a family swap meet.**

Have each family member go through their personal items for things they can live without...then swap! Your daughter could have the perfect black clutch you've been looking for, or your son may have a book your toddler would love. Set a limit to keep three items total, then donate the rest to a good cause.

- **Walk your own runway.**

Whether you have a wedding to go to or your daughter is dying for a new school outfit, chances are you already have something that will work. After you've sorted through your closets, make a pile of the clothes you haven't worn in a year. If you still think something's usable, find a new way to wear it. Then, host your own fashion show and show off your new looks!

- **Hold a neighborhood drive.**

Talk to your family about causes and organizations they think are important—and do something to help! If your family loves pets, ask your friends, relatives and neighbors to drop off old food bowls, towels, blankets and toys for the local animal shelter.



Make Family Dinners Fun

Takeout is an easy solution to a busy night, but it could cost you more than you think. Dining out consumes about half the average family's food expenditures, according to MSN columnist Liz Pulliam Weston. Cooking for your family doesn't have to be time consuming or expensive. Shopping sales and planning menus is easy compared to making mealtimes really count. Use these ideas to make dinnertime the best part of everyone's day:

- **Cook from your culture.**

In every culture, food is a way to foster togetherness, pride and identity. Use dinnertime to teach your family about their heritage. Choose foods from your culture, and cook them together. As you're eating, share stories about what you remember from growing up. Maybe it's your grandmother's tortillas or your grandfather's famous borscht recipe. Explain how your background came to depend on certain foods, and be open to many questions. After studying your own history, start exploring the rest of the globe! Each week, incorporate dishes from a different nation.

- **Come in character.**

Create a fun environment for your kids by hosting a theme night! Each night can be something new: Wear your craziest hat to the table, dress up in a favorite Halloween costume—anything goes! If you're feeling ambitious, create your own "whodunit" dinner. Cast each member of your family as a different character. Dinnertime will fly by if your family has a caper to solve!

- **Let the kids be the chefs.**

Turn over menu planning to your children. Even if you just dine on the finest PB&Js this side of town, your kids will be proud of what they've accomplished!

- **Volunteer at a soup kitchen, food pantry or Meals on Wheels.**

Helping others is a great way to teach your children responsibility. Whether you're knocking on doors to deliver a tray of food or are stocking a food pantry, your children are sure to reflect on how fortunate they really are—and how they can continue to help others in the future.



Your Pledge

The goal of Oprah's "What Can You Live Without?" Challenge is to reconnect with your family. But that doesn't mean you should fall back into your old habits when it's over. Use the following charts to help create a new plan for the future.

Technology Usage Chart

As a family, decide what can be used each night and for how long.

Item	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
TV and DVD Player							
Video Games							
Cell Phone							
MP3 Player							
Computer							
Internet							
Other: _____							
Other: _____							

Family Time

You've spent a lot of great time together over this past week—keep it up! Use this chart to decide on one thing to do as a family every night. Whether it's taking a walk or volunteering at a shelter, there are hundreds of ways to keep your connection going.

	What:	Where:	When:
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

“What Can You Live Without” Journal

Print out copies of this page and give them to your family. Use this space to express your feelings about how the challenge is going, the difficulties you've faced, your temptations and your successes.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.