Before I had a toddler, I had the smuggest and best intentions....

‘My son will only read books, do puzzles and play with hand crafted wooden toys’.

‘I’ll never hand over my phone to my offspring’.

‘I don’t believe in transforming children into square-eyed zombies’.

Ha.
And then little by little, like a cracker in a chubby fist, my resolve crumbled. An episode of Play School on my phone became a salvo to stave off a stealth nap until we safely got home from a morning at the park. It turns out it’s much easier to negotiate with plumbers and electricians 7 am when there’s Peppa Pig to co-supervise morning porridge consumption. Rainy days? Poorly mummy? Last minute conference call? Welcome to the slippery slope. At the grand old age of two, my son can now navigate an iPad with terrifying proficiency. He even will now say out loud to himself with tiny hands outstretched ‘WAIT, WAIT’ while an episode or activity buffers from the ether of the internet.

The problem is when it’s time to stop. Beware the wrath when the screen goes dark.

Hell hath no fury like 15 kilograms of cheek and chub when the battery of an i-device dwindles - or a parent decides it’s time to stop.

So, how can I bring him back into the light?

There are countless studies available to escalate my mother-guilt and remind me “the more television infants and toddlers are exposed to, the more likely they are to be inactive and obese, have difficulty sleeping, and show aggression. A study published in 2009 found that the more TV a three year old was exposed to (watching it or in the room where the television is on), the more likely he or she was to act aggressively.”

Oh dear. Meanwhile, there are plenty of earnest dispatches that urge me to model good behaviour as a first step. Yes, I should put my phone down. I should walk away from this lap top and get out in the fresh air. But sometimes, I need a little kick along.

So here are seven ways my son and I are experimenting with to spend our days
scrolling less and exploring more:

Use technology as a bridge. If your offspring is resistant to giving up custody of the ipad or phone, use it to take photographs outside; whether of blades of grass, the sunset, or shadows. You can then print, frame and set up an art gallery inside, or on one wall of their room.

Turn a wander through the neighbourhood into a treasure hunt (Pirate outfits optional). Collect your findings - whether shiny rocks, pine cones or special leaves in dedicated glass display cases. Indulge in some nostalgia. Try dipping into the memory bank and pull out some of the games which kept us entertained for hours as children. With some sidewalk chalk a hop scotch court or outdoor twister mat isn’t far away.

Eat out. Screens and meal times are an easy pairing. Try mixing things up and dining alfresco, whether laying a rug in your backyard, or pack up a simple picnic to dig into in a local park, or overlooking the beach.

Get your hands dirty. Gardening is a great anchor for an outdoors based day. Instead of turning the screens on straight on in the mornings go out and check on your seedlings and water them. Allowing children to muck about with dirt, herbs and vegetables can not only be lots of fun and broaden their palate, but has been suggested to strengthen their immune systems.

Play hide and seek - with a teddy. Leave a note inside from one of their favourite toys inviting them to come and find them. Hide the toy somewhere relatively safe and dry (try the mail box, in the peg basket of the washing line, or nestle them into a pile of leaves and dirt). Whatever you do- don’t forget where you’ve hidden them. Allow your child to explore outside with the objective of tracking them down.

If all else fails and your kids are old enough to understand, try creating a contract. Screen time is available and unlimited, but only if they complete the tasks you agree on first.