
INSIGHTS

FOR FAMILIES



Your Children & Television



❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from information provided by the University of Michigan Health Systems.

Television has its good side. It gives kids a chance to see educational shows, learn about different cultures, and be entertained. But let's look at some statistics:

- In a typical American home, the TV set is on for over 7 hours each day.
- The average child spends more time watching TV than in school.
- On average, kids spend about 20 or more hours each week watching TV, which is more time than is spent in any other activity besides sleeping.
- An average person will have watched 7-10 years worth of television by age 70.
- TV viewing starts earlier than other forms of media, often beginning before children are two years old.

If your children are typical, TV is playing a very big role in their lives. Here are some things to keep in mind as you decide what kind of role you want TV to play in your family:

- TV affects brain development.
- Most children's programming does not teach kids what parents say they want their children to learn.
- TV viewing is probably replacing activities in your child's life that you would rather have them do (things like playing with friends, physical activity, fresh air, reading, homework, chores, spending time with you).
- TV viewing can contribute to poor grades, sleep problems, behavior problems, and obesity.

Here are some tips for managing television:

- ❖ **Set limits on the amount of time spent watching TV.**
 - Make very specific rules about when children can and cannot watch television. For example, do not allow TV during meals, homework or when parents are not around.
 - Limit children's viewing to one to two hours per day at most.
 - Consider allowing a little extra viewing time for special educational programs.
 - If your children are doing poorly in school, limit TV time to half an hour each day, or eliminate TV entirely, except for a minimum amount of time on the weekends.
 - Make it a rule that children must finish homework and chores before watching television. If your children's favorite shows are on before the work can be done, record the shows for them to watch later.
 - You may find that the best rule is no TV during the week, and limited weekend TV. This ensures that kids are not rushing to finish their homework so they can watch a favorite show. It also frees up more time for family interaction during the busy weekdays. For example, instead of parking the kids in front of the TV while you fix dinner, have them help you cook.

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❖ **Minimize the influence of TV in your home.**

- Keep the TV off during family mealtimes. Eating in front of the TV starts a bad habit and reinforces kid's dependence on television.
- Make conversation a priority in you home. Interacting with your children will improve their conversational skills and go a long way toward keeping the lines of communication open.
- Read to your children. Let them see you reading to relax.
- Don't use TV as a reward or punishment. This gives the TV too much importance.
- Encourage your kids to take part in sports, games, hobbies, and music. Designate certain evenings for special family activities.
- Don't use the TV as a distraction or baby-sitter. Alternatives include jigsaw puzzles, play dough, board games, crayons, magazines, cutting and pasting, dress-up, reading, and making forts out of chairs and blankets or cardboard boxes.
- Get the TV sets out of your children's bedrooms.

❖ **Watch television with your children and talk about what you are watching.**

- Discuss the consequences of violence and other ways the conflict could have been resolved.
- Talk about stereotyping and prejudice in TV programs.
- Discuss commercials and help them recognize sales pitches given by commercials and evaluate whether the messages in ads are realistic.
- Discuss the differences between reality and make-believe, and explain differences between news and entertainment.

❖ **Share your own beliefs and values.**

- Pay attention to what is in the TV shows your children watch.
- Encourage educational shows. These include, for example, Sesame Street, other PBS kids' shows, concerts, plays, sports events, nature and wildlife shows, documentaries, and real-life drama.
- Forbid violent shows – keeping in mind that shows targeted to kids tend to be more violent than adult shows – especially cartoons.
- Consider installing and using a V-chip which lets you to block programs and movies that you don't want your children to see. Remember that news, sports, and ads are not rated, so they will not be screened out, but they often show violence.
- Use the TV Parental Guidelines rating system as one guide to help you determine which shows may be appropriate for your children.
- Limit late night television. Kids need to get to bed at a reasonable time, anyway.

❖ **Set a good example.**

- Don't leave the TV on all the time for background noise.
- Don't expect your children to have self-discipline if you don't.
- Don't watch adult programs while your children are present.
- Spend your free time reading, exercising, and playing or talking with your children.