

The Good Things About Television

Television is an inescapable part of modern culture. We depend on TV for entertainment, news, education, culture, weather, sports and music.

With the recent explosion in satellite and digital specialty channels, we now have access to numerous both good quality and inappropriate TV content. In this crowded television environment, the key for parents is to search out high quality TV programs for their children, and whenever possible, enjoy them together as a family.

Because of its ability to create powerful touchstones, TV enables young people to share cultural experiences with others.

Great television can teach kids important values and life lessons.

TV programs often explores controversial or sensitive issues, which can make it easier for parents and kids to discuss them.

Educational programming can develop young children's socialization and learning skills.

News, current events and historical programming can help make young people more aware of other cultures and people.

Documentaries can help develop critical thinking about society and the world.

Cultural programming can open up the world of music and art for young people.

Resources:

www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/television

Mommy, I'm Scared, by Joanne Cantor

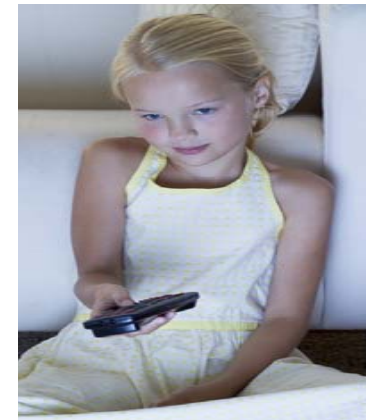
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Our mission is to promote family involvement by providing information on topics of interest in early childhood education to the parent as the child's first and most important teacher.

Television and Young Children



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TELEVISION AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Television has become the everyday companion of today's child. We are told that most young children watch between 25 and 54 hours of TV each week. This is more than any other single activity except sleeping. Is this unsettling to you? Just consider these findings about frequent and consistent TV viewing in young children.

Aggressiveness

Children act out and play roles they see on TV – actions, fears, violence, adult stupidity, social horrors. While adults can watch small amounts of this harmlessly, young children are extremely vulnerable and impressionable and will imitate behaviors they see hour after hour. Super-hero play can be a real problem for parents and teachers.

Language development

Children learn words and how to communicate effectively through real or firsthand experiences, not by hearing words and conversation on TV. Real learning experiences come from using language in real conversations with others.

Influence of commercials

Children who are exposed to false values through commercials are being exposed to an unnecessary and often harmful view of the world.

Under the age of six, children are easily influenced and are not able to sort out the real from the unreal that they view on the screen. Television also intensifies the confusion of the child's world through information overload – too much, too soon.

Parents of young children need to actively manage and control TV viewing in the home. Children need a variety of activities for healthy development. Television can be a fun and educational part of a child's daily routine, if managed properly.

Preschoolers (2-5 years)

Children in this age group should spend most of their day playing and socializing, not watching TV. The Canadian Pediatric Society suggests no more than one hour of television per day for preschoolers. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television for children under age two, saying that parents should focus on interacting with their children instead.

Because preschoolers are more prone to exhibiting aggressive behavior after watching shows containing violence, parents should restrict their exposure to violent programming, especially cartoons. Avoid buying action toys based on violent programs.

The good news for this age group is that there is a lot of wonderful programming for it, particularly on public television. Build up a videotape library of your kids' favorite shows. Preschoolers love to watch the same programs over and over again.

Because young children have trouble distinguishing make-believe from reality, parents need to safeguard them from violent or scary TV content. Research shows that children want to be protected from media images that are disturbing or frightening. It's important for parents to understand what is appropriate TV viewing for the various developmental stages of childhood.

How to choose good TV

Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Does the program actively engage my child, physically or intellectually?** Television watching doesn't have to be passive. It can prompt questions, kindle curiosity, or teach activities to pursue when the set is off.
- **Do I respect this program?** Parents don't have to like every show their children choose—in fact young people need their own distinct culture. But parents should trust that a program's creators understand and respect how children grow and learn.
- **Does my child see others like himself or herself on television?** Young children believe that television reflects the real world. To not see people like themselves—in race, ethnicity, or physical ability, for example—may diminish their self worth. A lack of role models should spark discussion about how TV portrays different types of people.

How do makers of this program regard my child? Some program creators see young people as consumers to be sold to. Others see them as students to be educated, as future citizens to be engaged in the community, or simply as children, whose work is play.

Whether we like it or not, television is here to stay. Will it be a controlling force in our children's lives? Will it eat into those first, precious early years of a child's life? Or can we see television as a helpful tool to provide some entertaining programming and quiet time to an otherwise exhausting and demanding day for parents?

The power and influence of television is in your hands. Use it wisely.