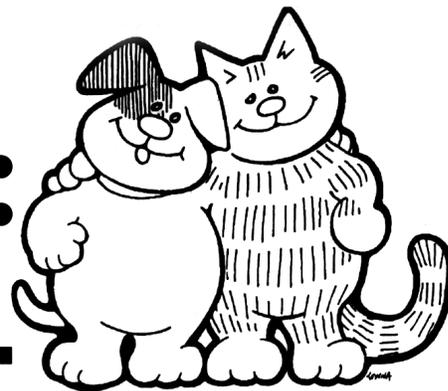


Getting Along: Taming the TV



Does your TV spend more time with your kids than you do?

Are you worried about what they see and learn? If so, it may be time to rethink your family viewing habits.

TV Facts

- Most 2- to 5-year-olds watch TV an average of 31 hours each week, or more than 4 hours each day.
- Only 10 percent of children's viewing time is spent watching children's television; the other 90 percent is spent watching programs designed for adults.
- Children who watch TV 4 or more hours per day are much more likely to be obese.
- Prime time TV has an average of 6 violent acts every hour; children's programming has an average of 26 violent acts every hour.
- The average American child witnesses 45 acts of violence on TV each day.
- Children watching TV may see 50,000 TV commercials each year.
- The average American family has the TV on for 6.2 hours every day.
- Forty-five percent of American homes watch news during dinner.

Understand how TV violence impacts your children

Hundreds of research studies show that TV violence has serious effects on children and teens. Children may

- develop strong emotional fears;
- become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others;
- become "immune" to the horror of violence;
- gradually accept violence as a way to solve problems;
- imitate the violence they observe on television; or
- identify with certain characters, victims and/or victimizers.

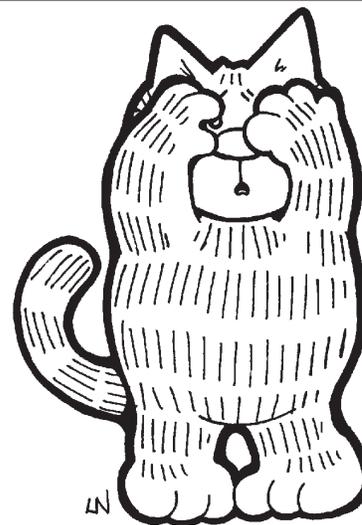
Say no to TV violence

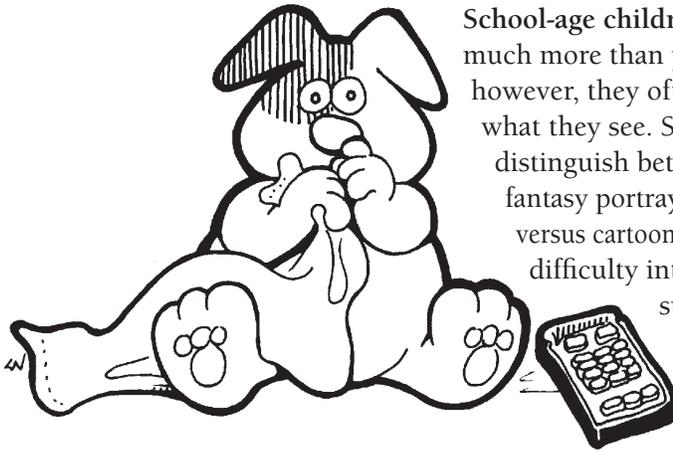
- Refuse to let children see shows known to be violent.
- Refuse to buy violent videos or DVDs.
- Change the channel or turn off the TV when something offensive or violent comes on.
- Verbally show disapproval of violent episodes.
- Emphasize the belief that violent behavior is **not** the best way to solve a problem.

- Contact parents of your children's friends and agree to enforce similar rules about the length of time and type of program or video the children may watch.
 - Contact TV stations and major advertisers and express concern about violent programming.
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Take control of the remote!

Most TV remote controls now have a parental control option that allows parents to program in only the TV stations that they approve of. This is especially important for families who use cable TV. In some communities the local cable station also can install a device that will block unwanted programming at little or no charge.





School-age children understand much more than preschoolers; however, they often misinterpret what they see. School-agers can distinguish between reality and fantasy portrayed by live actors versus cartoons, but may have difficulty interpreting more subtle messages.

Who is watching?

Use your child's age and development to guide you in choosing TV programs.

Infants and toddlers are interested in the bright, colorful, moving objects that are on TV. They also enjoy the music and may "dance" to a favorite commercial jingle. Commercials generally hold their attention well, but during most programs you will find them crawling or toddling off to another activity.

Preschoolers have longer attention spans and are able to watch short programs. However, they often are not able to understand the whole story of a program. They can remember only small pieces of what they see and often cannot tie everything together. Much of this is because they do not yet have a good understanding of cause and effect.

Preschoolers who watch adult TV shows (even good family programs) often get confused. They may see someone singing and then a few seconds later see someone sick in bed and conclude that singing makes people sick. Preschoolers also may become frightened by something as simple as a man's face in a cereal box or a talking shoe.

For example, they may wholeheartedly believe that a certain brand of shampoo will truly make their hair shine like the commercial model's hair, or that Brand X of soda pop will make their life more exciting. TV violence also has a real impact on school-agers. Many children will develop strong fears of being attacked, killed, or kid-napped. Images of war or domestic violence on the evening news can be just as frightening as a fictional show during prime time.

How do you know if children need reassurance?

Observe their expression while they watch TV. Look for signals of fear, admiration, excitement, or anger. Also be prepared to answer questions about sex, domestic violence, abortion, and other topics that may worry children.

TV should be a choice, not a habit

For TV to be an effective tool, it should be a choice, not a habit! Choose from the TV schedule each week and take note of TV ratings.

TV – Ratings

TV-G: General Audiences – suitable for all ages

TV-PG: Parental Guidance Suggested – may be unsuitable for younger children

TV-14: Parents Strongly Cautioned – may be unsuitable for children under 14

TV-MA: Mature Audiences Only – may be unsuitable for children under 17

Some ratings may be followed by initials describing the nature of the mature content:

L = Language

V = Violence

AS = Adult situations

N = Nudity

S = Sexual content

Explain to your child the three kinds of TV programs—the kind they can watch alone, the kind they watch with parents or parental supervision, and the kind that is absolutely off limits. Prevent arguments by letting each child choose one or two programs at appropriate times, and mark their choices with different colored markers. Also, help your child avoid the TV "glut rut" by encouraging them to watch a variety of shows: comedies, sports, nature films, documentaries, and news. Even the news may need adult interpretation as real life can be as frightening as make-believe.

V-Chip

All TVs made since 2000 have a V-chip installed that can be activated when you set up your television set. The V-Chip reads information encoded in the rated program and blocks programs from the set based upon the rating selected by the parent.

Put TV in its place

Keep TV sets in family areas for family viewing. A TV in a child's room is not as easily monitored and may be given more importance than homework, reading, and physical exercise. A TV in the kitchen or dining room is sure death for family communication. If you want to stay in touch with your kids, put the TV in another room.

Talk back to the TV

Take some time to watch TV with your kids. Look for examples of how people treat each other. Be sensitive to examples of cultural diversity, spiritual values, and political behavior. Talk back to the TV. Challenge ideas and statements made. Often, a few well timed comments about your family beliefs or values can be more effective than a month of lectures.

Talk about the difference between real life and make-believe.

Be sure to point out that in real life, solving problems generally takes much longer than 30 minutes and can be done in a peaceful manner. When watching commercials, challenge the kids to figure out what gimmicks and techniques advertisers use to sell their products.

Limit music videos and talk shows

Many children now have opportunities to view music and rock videos on TV. After-school viewing of TV talk shows is also a growing concern of many parents.

The following themes are troublesome for children:

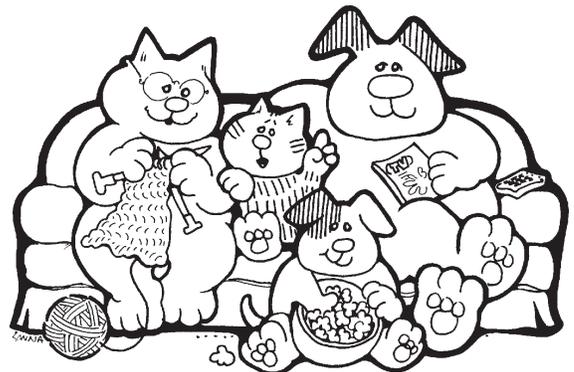
- Advocating and glamorizing abuse of drugs and alcohol
- Pictures and explicit lyrics presenting suicide as an "alternative" or "solution"
- Graphic violence
- Preoccupation with the occult: songs about satanism and human sacrifice, and the apparent enactment of these rituals in concerts
- Sex that focuses on controlling: sadism, masochism, incest, devaluing women, and violence toward women

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has expressed serious concern over the effects of this material on children and suggests that parents carefully monitor their children's viewing. A good general rule is "when in doubt, pull the plug out!"

Teach children to be TV critics

One of the most helpful things you can do as a parent is to teach children to question and think about what they watch. Each time you watch TV with your children make at least one critical viewing comment. Soon your children will catch on and may start making a few comments of their own. For example:

1. "I wonder if they could have solved the problem without using a gun."
2. "If the cereal tastes so good and is so good for you, why do they have to put a toy in it to get you to buy it?"
3. "She's pretty, but I wonder what she really looks like when she wakes up in the morning? I bet she doesn't wear makeup to bed."
4. "What would happen to that guy if he crashed all those cars in real life?"



Speak out

Concerned about the quality of television? Your voice does make a difference. The most effective way to change commercials or programs is to call your local television station. When you are offended or pleased by something on television, let the station manager know. Letters about programming or advertising also can be sent to networks, government agencies, and the broadcasting industry's trade organization. Federal commissions that regulate media members include:

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)
www.pbs.org

CBS Inc.
www.cbs.com

National Broadcasting Company (NBC)
www.nbc.com

ABC, Inc.
www.abc.go.com

Fox Broadcasting Company
www.fox.com

General concern about cable can be addressed with NCTA, and they also can be helpful in getting specific addresses of cable networks such as HBO, CNN, Disney, USA, etc.

National Cable Television Association, Inc. (NCTA)
www.ncta.com

Other groups involved in improving TV programming for families include:

National TeleMedia Council
www.nationaltelemediacouncil.org

Federal Communications Commission
www.fcc.gov