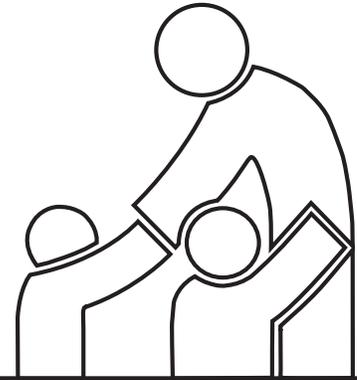


Family Times

NEWSLETTER



A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

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Children and Small Screens . . . TV, Video Games, and Computers

Millions of parents are concerned about the amount of time their children spend in front of small screens. How much does your child watch TV, play video games, and use the computer? TV is a babysitter, friend, entertainer, and means of escape for many kids. A typical U.S. child watches 28 hours of TV weekly, seeing as many as 8,000 murders by the time he or she finishes elementary school at age 11. What's worse, the killers are depicted as getting away with the murders 75% of the time while showing no remorse or accountability. While the explosion in electronic entertainment is good in many ways, too much viewing is unhealthy and can be dangerous.

What About Content?

Television

According to the American Psychological Association, violence on TV may make children less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, more fearful of the world around them, and more likely to behave in mean and harmful ways. Kids tell us that TV encourages them to talk back to parents and makes them think people are dishonest, selfish, and care more about money than other people.

Computer/Video Games

Research shows that playing violent video games can increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behavior in actual life. In fact, it has been suggested that violent video games may be more harmful than violent television and movies because they are interactive and very interesting and they require the player to identify with the invader.

How Are Kids Affected?

Many people see TV content as real, forgetting that much is imaginary. Children will be affected differently by violence at different ages and



To Make a Difference

- Make TV positive!
- Watch TV as a family.
- Explain to your children which programs are acceptable and which are not.
- Let your child earn small screen time for good behavior.
- Tape good programs to view later.
- Develop small screen rules as a family, and enforce them consistently with logical consequences.
- Introduce your child to other fun activities.

by different types of content. Children under age 8 may get the message that violence wins. Cartoon heroes use violence to solve problems. Many cartoons bring toys to life, promoting violent play. Young kids are as likely to be affected by violent animation as by live action. Older children have the ability to imagine that violent events could happen to them. Children most likely to be affected by viewing violence are the younger ones, boys, children from violent homes, kids who are insecure, and those who view more than three hours of TV daily. If youngsters spend lots of time

in front of the small screen, they have little time to develop other interests and hobbies. They may fail to develop important social skills. Meaningful "family times" may be lost. Health and weight problems may result from little physical activity. Reading, which helps a child achieve in school, may be sacrificed. Studies show that children who learn best in school have families who limit TV time and select the shows to watch. Kids may begin to expect that life should deliver easy, instant entertainment. Childhood should include a balance of feeling, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling, fearing, loving, dreaming, and imagining for kids to develop into healthy, independent adults.

What Can Parents Do?

To make sure viewing time is productive, parents need to be involved. Reducing viewing time begins with small daily decisions. How much small screen viewing will be allowed on weekdays and weekends? What's off limits and why? What else should fill your child's free hours?

Introduce kids to activities to make the small screen less attractive.

List 101 fun and simple things your family can do together. Involve grandparents in searching for activities. Do you know how to play games with children, or were you raised on television yourself? Encourage art, music, storytelling, reading, imaginative play, sports, and nature activities; these interests



The Book Nook

The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV

by Stan and Jan Berenstain
is a good book to read with your child.

are easiest to introduce when children are very young. After four to six weeks of involvement, children can be expected to shift to these activities. Allow your child to earn small screen time for completing their homework and chores, behaving well, interacting and playing directly with other children, reading, and being involved in games, sports, and music. Kids who stick with new activities deserve plenty of praise and rewards.

We want our children to be active adult participants in our society; this will require self-confidence, social skills, courage, optimism, and the will to try. Television, videos, and computers have a lot of good to offer. Only parents can separate the good from the bad. Childhood is short. How much of your child's time is worth devoting to the small screen? There are trees to climb, friends to meet, books to read, and a world to explore!

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Parents can . . .

- Limit TV viewing to less than two hours a day.
- Use TV to teach values, overcome stereotypes, support positive messages, challenge violence, and open conversations on sensitive topics.
- Encourage children to describe how TV affects them.
- Consider keeping children's bedrooms and the kitchen free of all small screens.
- Always know what your kids are viewing on TV, what video games they're playing, and what they're exploring on the computer.
- Preview programs first using a rating system, if possible.
- Choose times to turn off every small screen in the home; enjoy conversations and meal time.
- Enroll your child in an after-school program when you can't be home.
- Establish homework or chore requirements.
- Develop a trust level so your kids won't break viewing rules.
- Set an example. Watch only family programs and spend your free time doing alternative activities.

This issue was written by Lorella Lee Nelson-Mitchell, Pendleton County WVU Extension Agent. Reviewed in 2007.

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