

Television

How to encourage good viewing habits

You & Your Child

Television is a powerful influence on a child. Young children tend to believe what they see. They cannot always tell what is real and what is make believe.

American children watch a great deal of television. By the time the average child graduates from high school, he or she has spent more time watching TV than going to school or doing anything else, except for sleeping.

It is important that you know what your child is watching. Some programs depict violence as the way to solve problems, and feature characters who use bad or nasty language, lie, cheat, steal, and practice other behaviors we don't want children to learn. Some depict characters who use violence to achieve their goals as heroes.

Those kinds of programs send the wrong message. Studies show that after watching violent programs, children tend to become more aggressive at play. Watching violence may also lead to nightmares.

Television can be good or bad for your child. It is up to you to choose what your child watches and to balance television and other activities.

On Back

Tips on encouraging healthy television viewing habits.

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How to encourage good viewing habits

Be a role model

If you watch a lot of television, it will be difficult to convince your child not to. If you want TV to play only a small role in your child's life, set an example and watch less yourself.

Do not use TV as a babysitter

Good television viewing habits start when your child is young.

Do not use the television as a babysitter. Limit the number of hours young children watch TV. And choose the programs they watch carefully. Watch the programs yourself first, then decide which are appropriate for your child.

If you have very young children, consider not letting them watch TV at all. The American Academy of Pediatrics recently recommended that parents should avoid having children under the age of 2 watch television.

Substitute other activities for TV

Rather than sit your child in front of the television, take a walk or play together. Reading storybooks together is another very good activity to substitute in place of a television program. Most people who grew up 70 years ago never watched TV and they found plenty of things to do.

Leave the set off, not on

Leaving the television on when no one is watching is a bad habit found in many homes. Keep the set turned off when no one is watching. Turn it on only when you want to watch a specific program.

Keep TVs out of the bedroom

Children should not have televisions in their bedrooms. A bedroom TV encourages them to watch more, and prevents parents from monitoring what they watch.

Choose appropriate programs and videos

Watch programs yourself and pick out those that you think promote a positive, healthy message.

Watching television can help teach your child important lessons and values. But it is up to you to select the messages you want your child to receive.

Watch TV together

Choose an appropriate program and watch it with your child. Ask your child questions about it. Help your child learn the difference between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy. If something on the program is inappropriate – such as violence or bad language – tell your child that you don't approve. If a character uses violence, for example, say, "I don't like that. It was a mean thing to do. We don't do that."

Breaking the Habit

If you are concerned that your children watch too much television, or they watch inappropriate programs, take action. Here are a few steps you can try:

Unplug the TV and call a meeting

You need to have a plan. But first, you need to get the attention of your family.

Try unplugging the television for one week. Call a family meeting to discuss your concerns. Then, plan together how your family will spend the free time away from the television. Ask for suggestions and plan activities.

Set rules and stick to them

Set a schedule for watching television. Decide how much time your children will be allowed in front of the television. Decide together which program your children will watch. It is okay to let them choose, but you have the right to refuse.

Make sure the rules are clear and that all members of the family understand them.

You should decide which rules best suit your children. One you should consider is not allowing children to watch programs that run over into their bedtimes.

Treat TV as a privilege, not a right

Be sure that your children understand that watching television is not something they are entitled to do. It is a privilege.

Use the privilege of watching TV to help enforce rules. For example, if children argue over what shows to watch, or they do not follow the viewing plan, unplug the television for a day.

