

TELEVISION: REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACT

Television has a tremendous influence on how children view our world. Many youngsters spend more hours watching television from birth to 18 years of age than they spend in the classroom. The positive aspects of television viewing include seeing different life-styles and cultures. Children today are entering school more knowledgeable than children before the era of television. In addition, television has great entertainment value. Although television can be a good teacher; many children watch it excessively and therefore experience some of the negative consequences described below.

HARMFUL ASPECTS OF TELEVISION

1. **Television displaces active types of recreation.** It decreases time spent playing with peers. A child has less time for self-directed daydreaming and thinking. It takes away time for participating in sports, music, art, or other activities that require practice to achieve competence.

2. **Television interferes with conversation and discussion time.** It reduces social interactions with family and friends.

3. **Television discourages reading.** Reading requires much more thinking than television. Reading improves a youngster's vocabulary. A decrease in reading scores may be related to too much time in front of the television.

4. **Heavy television viewing (more than 4 hours per day) definitely reduces school performance.** This much television interferes with study, reading, and thinking time. If children do not get enough sleep because they are watching television, they will not be alert enough to learn well on the following day.

5. **Television discourages exercise.** An inactive lifestyle leads to poor physical fitness. If accompanied by frequent snacking, watching television may contribute to weight problems.

6. **Television advertising encourages a demand for material possessions.** Young children will pressure their parents to buy the toys they see advertised. Television portrays materialism as the "American way".

7. **Television violence can affect how a child feels toward life and other people.** Viewing excessive violence may cause a child to be overly fearful about personal safety and the future. Television violence may numb the sympathy a child normally feels toward victims of human suffering. Young children may be more aggressive in their play after seeing violent television shows. Although television violence does not increase aggressive behavior toward people in most children, it may do so in disturbed or impulsive children.

PREVENTION OF TELEVISION ADDICTION

1. **Encourage active recreation.** Help your child become interested in sports, games, hobbies, and music. Occasionally turn off the television and take a walk or play a game with your child.

2. **Read to your children.** Begin reading to your child by 1 year of age and encourage him to read on his own as he becomes older. Some parents help children earn television or video game time by spending an equivalent time reading. Help your child improve his conversational skills by spending more of your time talking with him.

3. **Limit television time to 2 hours per day or less.** An alternative is to limit television to 1 hour on school nights and 2 or 3 hours per day on weekends. You occasionally may want to allow extra viewing time for special educational programs.

4. **Don't use television as a distraction or a babysitter for preschool children.** Preschoolers' viewing should be limited to special television shows and videotapes that are produced for young children. Because the difference between fantasy and reality is not clear for this age group, regular television shows may cause fears.

5. **If your child is doing poorly in school, limit television time to ½ hour each day.** Make a rule that homework and chores must be finished before television is watched. If your child's favorite show is on before he can watch, try to record it for later viewing.

6. **Set a bedtime for your child that is not altered by television shows that interest your child.** Children who are allowed to stay up late to watch television are usually too tired the following day to remember what they are taught in school. By all means, don't permit your child to have a television set in her bedroom because this eliminates your control over television viewing.

7. **Turn off the television set during meals.** Family time is too precious to be squandered on television shows. In addition, don't have the television always on as a background sound in your house. If you don't like a quiet house, try to listen to music without lyrics.

8. **Teach critical viewing.** Turn the television on only for specific programs. Don't turn it on at random and scan for something interesting. Teach your child to look first in the program guide.

9. **Teach your child to turn off the television set at the end of a show.** If the television stays on, your child will probably become interested in the following show and then it will be more difficult for your child to stop watching.

10. **Encourage your child to watch some shows that are educational or teach human values.** Encourage watching documentaries or real-life dramas. Use programs about love, sex, family disputes, drinking, and drugs as a way to begin family discussions on these difficult topics.

11. **Forbid violent television shows.** This means you have to know what your child is watching and turn off the television set when you don't approve of the program. Develop separate lists of programs that are acceptable for older and younger kids to watch. Make your older children responsible for keeping the younger ones out of the television room at these times. If not, the show is turned off. The availability of cable television and video-cassette recorders means that any child of any age has access to the

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uncut versions of R-rated films. Many children under 13 years of age develop daytime fears and nightmares because they have been allowed to watch such vicious movies.

12. **Discuss the consequences of violence if you allow your older child to watch violent shows.** Point out how violence hurts both the victim and the victim's family. Be sure to discuss any program that upsets your child.

13. **Discuss commercials with your children.** Help them identify high-pressure selling and exaggerated claims. If your child wants a toy that is a look-alike version of a

television character, ask how he or she would use the toy at home. The response will probably convince you that the toy will be added to a collection rather than become a catalyst for active play.

14. **Discuss the differences between reality and make-believe.** This type of clarification can help your child enjoy a show and yet realize that what is happening may not happen in real life.

15. **Set a good example.** If you watch a lot of television, you can be sure your child will also. The types of programs you watch also send a clear message to your child.