

# To Watch or Not to Watch, That is the Question.

## A Lesson on Television

### Playgroup #19



#### Materials Needed

- You may give the mothers in your group scratch paper and pencils for notes during the introduction and activity if you choose.

#### Handouts

- Learning for Better Living
- TV Tips for Parents

### Introduction

Form a couple of small groups and have the mothers discuss what they did for fun when they were kids. You can ask the following questions:

- What was your favorite TV show growing up?
- What did you learn from the shows you watched?
- How much time did you spend watching TV or using other forms of media?

Then have them discuss what they watch now, how long they watch now, and what the main messages of the shows they watch now are.

### Lesson Plan

#### Lesson Objectives

- Know the effects that television has on children
- Know what the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends regarding TV watching for children
- Know about resources that teach about television programs

We all know that children love television; it attracts them like a magnet. They are drawn to the sounds, colors, and motion. Because of these things children respond to its messages quickly. Quality programs for youngsters can have a positive impact on your child's behavior, thinking and language. *Yet even the best children's series require your participation to help kids get the most from what they watch.*

Watching television is an experience shared by the vast majority of children and adults. It is convenient, inexpensive, available, and attractive. Television can be enormously entertaining for children and can teach them some things, *but far too often it is used as a substitute for other activities that promote proper brain development, such as playing, reading, talking, singing, physical activity and many others. The Average child spends up to 6 hours watching television, playing video games, and surfing the internet each day.*

## Why Should You Limit TV time?

This is a difficult topic for many parents because television seems to have so many benefits. It provides a free in-home child care for many families and is often used to occupy a child when parents are trying to get something of their own done, such as cooking dinner or cleaning the house. However, with the increase in popularity of TV and media it has also been used as an alternative to playing outside which is considered dangerous. The following explanations explain why:

### **Negative Effects on Behavior and Health**

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the messages conveyed through television. Most young children cannot discriminate between what they see and what is real. Research has also shown primary negative health effects on violence and aggressive behavior, sexuality, academic performance, body concept, self-image, nutrition, dieting, obesity, and substance abuse.

*Early exposure to television is linked to attention problems in children.*

Researchers have found that television viewing at an early age may be associated with decreased attention span in children. They found that the more television very young children watched, the more likely they were at age seven to have attention problems. Their findings suggest, however, that parents could reduce the risk of such problems by limiting television viewing of children in the early years, when their brains are still rapidly developing.

*Increased amounts of television, increases the probability of obesity.*

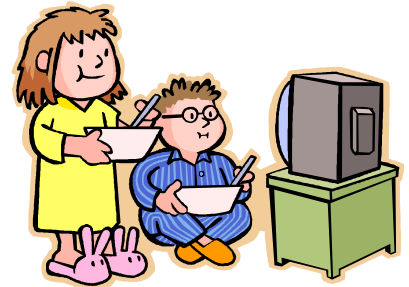
The average child is currently watching 6-7 hours of TV or other forms of media a day. Each hour of television a child watches increases the probability that they will become obese by two percent. This type of entertainment—watching television—is extremely passive which means that children are sacrificing physical activity, play, language development and much more to just sit and watch. There is little or no interaction with passive entertainment which is not good for children and their development. With this increase in watching the television there is an increase in commercials viewed which has now risen to more than 40,000 per year. A large majority of these commercials advertise for food, primarily candy, cereal, and fast food. These commercials attract their attention and encourage them to eat unhealthily which contributes to their own obesity.

*Watching television with a high level of sexual content is associated with earlier teen sexual behavior.*

Researchers have also found that adolescents who watch television with high levels of sexual content are more likely to initiate sexual intercourse at an early age, compared with peers who view relatively little sexual content. They found that youth in the 90th percentile of watching "television programs with a high level of sexual content" *were twice as likely* to initiate intercourse as those in the bottom 10 percent.

## Excessive television viewing may cause some of the following problems:

- Television is often a substitute for physical exercise, which is an important part of a healthy lifestyle and is crucial to *physical development*.
- Watching TV may take the place of *social interaction* with friends and family, depriving children of sharing ideas and feelings with others, and preventing parents from learning more about their kids.
- TV may take the place of reading in a child's day, which may contribute to *poor school performance and delayed literacy*.
- It is possible that exposure to violence on television may upset children or *may lead to more aggressive behavior*. However, a causal relationship between viewing violence on television and becoming violent in the absence of previous violent behavior has not been found.



## What Should We Do?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of 2 watch ***no television*** and that children over the age of 2 spend ***less than 2 hours*** per day with TV and other screen media. They recommend this because excessive viewing of television has been linked to a plethora of physical, academic, and behavioral problems.

## Tips to Establishing Appropriate Television Viewing in Your own Home:

1. Encourage alternative activities, especially physical activity.
2. Turn the television off during mealtimes, homework time, and other times of day during which social interaction and learning are going on.
3. Read to and with your children.
4. Set limits on television time, especially on school nights. Allow children to select the shows that they really want to watch -- this will encourage them to put thought into their viewing habits.
5. Watch television with your kids. By doing so you may help them understand what they're seeing, help them to resist negative commercial messages, and will make them feel more comfortable discussing issues with you.
6. Use controversial programming as a stepping-off point to initiate discussions about family values, violence, sexuality, and drugs.
7. Do not put a TV in a child's room
8. Set a good example by limiting your own TV viewing.
9. Know what your children are watching.
10. One way to limit TV viewing is to require children to earn "chore points" before they can watch TV. This approach can teach children to embrace household responsibilities and to self-limit TV viewing.

## Where to Get Help





### **The Parents Television Council**

The Parents Television Council is a wonderful resource for parents of children of all ages. It provides a place where you can find out more information about the shows your children are watching and see if the content is depicting the values you want your kids to be watching.

The Parents Television Council (PTC) is the nation's most influential advocacy organization protecting children against sex, violence, and profanity on television and in other media because of their documented and long-term harmful effects. Founded in 1995 to stem the dramatic rise in indecent programming, the PTC today has become one of the strongest watchdog organizations of the entertainment industry. It is a wonderful resource to help you find out more information about the TV shows you and your children are watching.

It is the most comprehensive study of this year's network prime time fare -- from a family-values perspective -- and it is the only content-based guide in existence. This resource contains the facts you need to make informed viewing decisions for your family. Within the web pages of the Family Guide to TV is a brief background and thematic summary of every entertainment television show currently appearing on ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, *i* (formerly PAX), and CW. To prepare this Family Guide to TV, the PTC has evaluated each series on the basis of its suitability of content for viewers of *all ages*, not on its artistic merits. An easy to read traffic-light rating system it used to distinguish the quality of the show.

### **Ratings Legend**




-  **RED:** Show may include gratuitous sex, explicit dialogue, violent content, or obscene language, and is unsuitable for children.
-  **YELLOW:** The show contains adult-oriented themes and dialogue that may be inappropriate for youngsters.
-  **GREEN:** Family-friendly show promoting responsible themes and traditional values.
-  **BLUE:** Not yet rated by the PTC.

Parents often assume that children's programs are by definition child-friendly; however, this is not always the case. Unfortunately this faulty assumption has led many parents to let their guard down and allow their children to spend hours watching television unsupervised. Young children are especially impressionable, and they learn social norms and behaviors as readily from television as from their peers or parents. It is crucial to realize that children's television is not a safe haven. Parents must be extremely vigilant as to what their children are watching. Know what they are watching, what messages are being conveyed, and what language is being used. Do all you can to provide alternative forms of entertainment that will be more beneficial to their development.

When the PTC looked at programs directed for young children on ABC, Fox, NBC, WB, ABC Family, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel and Nickelodeon, focusing its analysis on before-school, after-school, and Saturday morning programming they found there was an average of **7.86 incidents of violence per hour**. This is shocking, especially when compared to the violence found during prime time programming for adults which averaged **4.71 instances of violence per hour**. **This means that there is almost twice as much violence aimed directly at young children than at adults on television today.** It is also important for parents to recognize that violence is not the only thing present in today's programming for children. Sexual innuendo, adult language, trash talking, bullying, and disrespect are all present. This is why it is crucial for parents to know well what their children are watching. Parents need to be sure that they remain their child's primary teacher and not the television.

### Activity

Review the following list taken from the most recent report from The Parents Television Council. They the twenty most popular prime time broadcast shows among children ages 2-17, ranking the programs according to their suitability for young viewers not by popularity. Examine the list and think about the shows that are watched in your own home, are they suitable for young children? Why or Why not? Discuss ways you can implement good habits of television watching and how you will apply them into your own home

Most Suitable (Best to Worst)	Questionably Suitable (Best to Worst)	Not Suitable (Best to Worst)
 <p><b>1. <i>Extreme Makeover: Home Edition</i></b> ABC/8:00 p.m. ET Sundays</p> <p><b>2. <i>NBC Sunday Night Football</i></b> TMNBC/8:00 p.m. ET Sundays</p> <p><b>3. <i>Deal or No Deal</i></b> NBC/8:00 p.m. ET Wednesdays and Fridays</p> <p><b>4. <i>Are You Smarter Than a 5<sup>th</sup> Grader?</i></b> Fox/8:00 p.m. ET Thursdays</p> <p><b>5. <i>The Singing Bee</i></b> NBC/8:00 p.m. ET Tuesdays</p> <p><b>6. <i>Don't Forget the Lyrics</i></b> Fox/9:00 p.m. ET Thursdays</p> <p><b>7. <i>American Idol</i></b> Fox/Returning Spring '08</p> <p><b>8. <i>Supernanny</i></b> ABC/9:00 p.m. ET Mondays</p>	 <p><b>9. <i>America's Funniest Home Videos</i></b> ABC/7:00 p.m. ET Sundays</p> <p><b>10. <i>Dancing with the Stars</i></b> ABC/8:00 p.m. ET Mondays, TM9:00 p.m. ET Tuesdays</p> <p><b>11. <i>So You Think You Can Dance</i></b> Fox/Returning Spring '08</p> <p><b>12. <i>Amazing Race</i></b> CBS/Returning Spring '08</p> <p><b>13. <i>Survivor</i></b> CBS/8:00 p.m. ET Thursdays</p> <p><b>14. <i>The Simpsons</i></b> Fox/8:00 p.m. ET Sundays</p>	 <p><b>15. <i>House</i></b> Fox/9:00 p.m. ET Tuesdays</p> <p><b>16. <i>Grey's Anatomy</i></b> ABC/9:00 p.m. ET Thursdays</p> <p><b>17. <i>Heroes</i></b> TMNBC/9:00 p.m. ET Mondays</p> <p><b>18. <i>C.S.I.</i></b> CBS/9:00 p.m. ET Thursdays</p> <p><b>19. <i>American Dad</i></b> Fox/9:30 p.m. ET Sundays</p> <p><b>20. <i>Family Guy</i></b> Fox/9:00 p.m. ET Sundays</p>

## **Resources**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, [www.nichd.nih.gov](http://www.nichd.nih.gov)

National Institute of Health, [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)

American Academy of Pediatrics, [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

The Parents Television Council, [www.parentstv.org](http://www.parentstv.org)