

Parenting Pointers

Parenting Tips on Children and Television

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Thousands of studies have been conducted measuring the impact of television violence on children and teens. American households have their televisions on an average of 7 hours a day. As a result, children are watching from 3 to 5 hours of television each day. By the age of 13, the average child has witnessed 100,000 acts of TV violence, including 8,000 depictions of murder. Prolonged exposure to TV violence has been shown to have the following negative effects on children:

- Children who watch violent TV shows, even animated and seemingly "funny" violent cartoons, are more likely to hit and use aggressive behaviors toward playmates, argue, and disobey.
- Children often identify with certain characters, victims and victimizers on TV and imitate the violence they see.
- Watching TV violence has been found to be the single greatest contributing factor to aggressive behavior in children.
- Watching TV violence has been found to desensitize children to real-world violence and reinforces that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems.

In addition, children who watch excessive hours of TV struggle to complete school work, exhibit poorer reading skills, demonstrate inadequate social skills, play less with friends, have fewer hobbies and are more likely to be overweight.

Should we throw out the TV? Not necessarily, but parents can and should control the negative influences of television with a few easy, yet firm guidelines. By setting limits on time spent in front of the TV parents can more easily encourage children to spend time with friends, on sports or with hobbies. Not allowing TV's and video recorders in children's bedrooms and setting certain times for "No TV", such as meal times, helps structure and limit TV watching. By watching shows with children, parents know what their youngsters are watching and have opportunities to discuss it with them. Parents can use TV shows as a basis for talking about difficult topics such as violence, sex, honesty and divorce. Parents sometimes forget they have the authority to ban or restrict programs that are inappropriate. Disapproving of violent shows in front of children and changing the channel, or turning the set off, models the behavior parents want their children to demonstrate on their own. Sitting down together and selecting appropriate TV watching times and programs, along with a balance of other activities such as playing with friends, reading,

outdoor activities and homework, empowers children and gives them practice in making good choices.

A word on advertising.....children under the age of 8 do not understand that the purpose of advertising is to sell products. Young children cannot distinguish between commercials and programming, yet most children see more than 20,000 TV ads each year. Parents can help children understand how to identify sales gimmicks and become wiser consumers. Better yet ~ make it a family habit to use the mute button during commercials and take up a conversation instead!

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