

## ***Parenting Pointers***

### ***Parenting Tips on: The good the bad and the inevitable....effects of TV viewing on children.***

Nancy Almond, EVICS Coordinator

Last Thursday night parents, kids and community members braved the elements and came out to the Library for our *Screentime Presentation*. The interactive discussion provided many of us with a chance to listen and reflect on the “good, the bad, and the inevitable” effects of TV viewing on children. Lots of great information and opinions were shared, and these are some of the highlights:

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the average child in America watches about 4 hours of TV a day. AAP guidelines say children over 2 should be limited to 1-2 hours a day of quality programming, and children under 2 should have “no screentime”. The first 2 years of life are a critical time for brain development and very young children need to be interacting with parents and caregivers in order to acquire the skills they need for healthy growth and development. For children over 2, if supervised and moderated properly, TV can offer some educational and entertainment value. However, too much TV can be detrimental. Children who spend more than 4 hours a day watching TV are more likely to be overweight. Kids who view violent events on TV are more likely to believe that the world is scary and that something bad will happen to them. TV also consistently reinforces gender, racial, and cultural stereotypes.

According to the AAP, the average American child will witness 200,000 acts of violence on TV by the age of 18. When violence is depicted as an acceptable and effective way to get what you want, children often will imitate what they have watched. Very young children can be easily frightened by “scary” stuff on TV, and developmentally they are incapable of distinguishing between what is real and what is fantasy. Simply telling a young child something “is not real” has no meaning for them.

TV glamorizes risky behaviors such as sex and substance abuse, and studies have shown that teens who watch repeated sexual content on the screen are more likely to engage in sexual activities earlier than their peers who do not watch sexually explicit TV. Children are also inundated with marketing messages of all kinds from a plethora of TV commercials, from junk food ads to toys, clothing, electronics and alcohol. Young children cannot distinguish between program content and commercials and do not understand that commercials are for selling products.

So, short of unplugging the TV and throwing it out, what is a parent to do? Most importantly, limit the hours your children watch TV. Make family rules around when TV can be watched and which programs are OK. Make sure you have plenty of other hands-on activities available for children, such as games, art materials, puzzles and books. Do not allow TV's in children's bedrooms, during mealtime, or while doing homework. Know what your child is watching and watch with your child, especially when it is a new program. If you can't sit and watch the show, check in during the show and talk afterward

about what they watched. Don't be afraid to turn the TV off if the content is inappropriate, and use the opportunity to discuss your beliefs and values. TV can generate good family discussion over difficult topics such as sex, substance abuse, love, behavior, family dynamics, etc. Teach your child to question and learn from what they see on TV. Offer fun alternatives to TV. Play a game, go on a bike ride, invite a friend over, read together, build an indoor fort, go to the park. TV is no substitute for spending quality time with your child...and time spent with your child is an investment with positive payoffs down the road!

Information in this article was provided by *Estes Valley investment in Childhood Success (EVICS)* EVICS offers free childcare referrals, parent information and resources, and childcare provider support and training in the Estes Valley. For more information contact 586-3055 or [evics@fvii.com](mailto:evics@fvii.com) Check out our website at [www.evics.org](http://www.evics.org)