



Hot Topic: TV and Kids

It's a hot topic, television and kids. TV can be positive and even educational, but most parents pay attention to the amount of time that kids spend watching, and they're also curious as to what influence television has on their lives. The statistics are staggering—approximately 83 percent of children ages six months to six years watch two hours of TV per day.

So much television watching is occurring that it is now widely recognized as a major contributing factor to childhood obesity. It takes time away from kids being active and creative, and, through exposure to advertising, it influences children to make unhealthy food choices. When kids watch TV, they often snack without paying attention to how hungry or full their tummies are. Cutting down on TV viewing is now used as a strategy for decreasing obesity.

Studies also show that when kids come from families where the TV is always on, they tend to read less and be read to less by other family members. In addition, when kids are watching TV, they are not



When kids are watching TV, they are not engaging all of their senses.

engaging all of their senses. Television presents information using two senses, and studies have shown that when young animals only watched other animals play, rather than being able to play themselves, their brain growth decreased in proportion to how much time they spent inactively watching others.

Another downside to television viewing is the violence portrayed in both the news and regular programming. It's difficult to keep kids emotionally safe when they're continually bombarded with violence and catastrophe. In one study, just having the TV on—regardless of the programming or whether the child was actively watching—was linked to more aggressive behavior in three-year-olds.

If you are trying to monitor or minimize television viewing, here are some guidelines and resources that

may help.

* Avoid using the TV as a babysitter when doing regular everyday activities, like cleaning or cooking. It's good for kids to learn to keep themselves busy or to help out with daily chores and responsibilities.

* Consider restricting TV to specific amounts of time or specific days. Letting kids know that they can

watch an hour on Saturday and a half hour after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays eventually minimizes the constant question, "Can I watch TV?"

* Keep televisions out of kids' bedrooms.

* Make a list of things kids can do when the TV is off and help them choose an appropriate activity. The Web site, www.simplemom.net/20-indoor-activities-for-kids-besides-tv/ includes a list of things that will keep kids busy.

* Take the time to check out what children are watching in order to determine if it's appropriate for their age level. The Web site www.common sense media.org is a great source for all media and is rated by professionals, parents, and kids.

PERSONAL PARENTING

Color and the Brain



You've probably heard that colors affect our moods. Research backs this up.

- Blues are calming, with sky blue being the most tranquilizing color.
- Greens are also calming.
- Reds and yellows are energizing and increase creativity.
- Browns promote relaxation.

Encourage children to notice colors.

- * What color is their bedroom or their favorite shirt?
- * What is their favorite color to paint or draw with?

All About Recycling

Children can understand recycling, and they like to help. It's best to explain it to them in simple terms by talking about how we need a healthy environment to live in. We want to save trees, animals, oceans, land, and the air we breathe.

They can also understand the concept of the three Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle. The question is, What can kids do? They're probably doing a lot already. If they say "No, thanks" when offered a plastic bag in a store, that's reducing waste. If they save a piece of paper to use it again, that's reusing. If they put an empty plastic bottle in the recycling bin, that's recycling. Check out the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences



Web site:
<http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/explore/reduce/index.htm> for all kinds of activities for children.

Magic Wand Pretzels

This fun and nutritious snack couldn't be easier.

What you need:

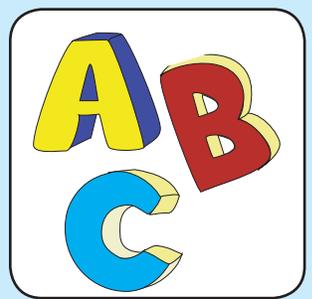
- Chopped-up dried fruit such as apricots
- Chopped nuts (optional)
- Peanut butter or nut butter
- Stick pretzels
- * Place the dried fruit and nuts (if using) on a plate with a spoonful of peanut butter. Roll the end of the pretzel in the mixture. Presto—a magic wand to gobble up!

Touchable Letters

Children are always touching things. Letters become easier to recognize when children can not only see them but also manipulate them.

Try these activities:

- Make rough letters: Print a letter on cardboard, and sprinkle sand on top.
- Make smooth letters: Mold letters from play dough.
- Make edible letters: Make letters out of cookie dough.



Rainy Day Shrink Art

It's raining, it's pouring, and the day is very boring. If you need an idea to spice up the day when kids can't go outside, here's a good one.

* For this activity, you will need a few clear plastic lids (from deli or salad bar containers, or bakery cake lids), a hole puncher, markers, scissors, and ribbon. Cut a circle, heart, or any shape from the lid. Punch a hole in the top of the lid so it can be hung in a window. Let children color a design on the lid. Put the lids on a cookie sheet, in a preheated 350-degree oven. Bake for 1 to 5 minutes, keeping an eye on them so they don't shrink too quickly. Kids like to watch the shrinking take place, so turn on the oven light and let them watch. Then hang up their art.



Simplify Your Life

What if you could simplify your life just by concentrating on a few key routines and lifestyle choices? It can be done. Here are some suggestions for slowing things down, getting more out of life, and creating more time for leisure.

Work On Routines

Create a calm morning. You're setting the stage for the entire day: If you plan it well, other things fall into place much better. Getting up just minutes earlier saves time—less nagging, less rushing, fewer wasted minutes looking for lost keys and lunch bags. Laying out clothes the night before will minimize hassles over misplaced socks, shoes, shirts, and jackets. Plan simple breakfasts, and expect children to eat after they have dressed—it's a kind of reward for getting up and rolling. Eliminate morning phone calls, and if kids have extra time, provide them with books instead of letting them watch TV. If you must leave in the middle of their reading, all they have to do is mark the spot with a bookmark and continue when they get home.

Create a calm bedtime. Bedtime should be inviting to a tired child. Include a ritual such as a warm bath, a bedtime story, and a time to cuddle before the lights go out. Keep bedtime consistent. Children need sleep and routines they can count on—and parents need their own quiet time, something that is hard to come by before children are happily tucked in.

Lifestyle Choices

Get rid of stuff. Some research shows that all the stuff we have is actually complicating our lives instead of simplifying them or making them more manageable. Do you really need all that baby paraphernalia that clutters up the closet and runs up the credit card bill? Another issue for families is having too many toys. Choose them carefully, paying attention to safety, durability, and creative play possibilities. This will eliminate a lot of toys that create

clutter and never get played with. Get in the habit of sorting through things on a regular basis. That includes your own stuff that you think you might need someday, even though you've been saying that for five years. If you discard regularly, you will have less to organize, less to lose, and less to repair—and your life will be much easier to manage.

Keep a Family Calendar

The family calendar should be kept in a central location. Everyone's appointments must be listed—it's the only way to see what's really going on. If three other activities land on the same day as the dentist appointment, it will be a difficult, if not near impossible, day. Make entries on the calendar as soon as notices for the soccer game, the dog's checkup, the school pictures, or the parent program come into the house. This is not as difficult as it sounds if you keep a pen mounted or tied by the calendar so it can't disappear. If your family calendar is full, only you can make the change to a simpler lifestyle by



canceling, postponing, eliminating, delegating, or reorganizing. Check the calendar every day, or even the night before, to keep everyone on track. The most organized calendar in the world won't help if no one pays attention to it.