



Children & Television

The Facts

Researchers have conducted thousands of studies measuring the impact of violence portrayed on television and its effect on children and teenagers. American households have their television sets turned on an average of 7 hours per day. As a result, children are watching from 3 to 5 hours of television each day. By the time they turn age 13, they've witnessed 100,000 acts of televised violence, including 8,000 depictions of murder. Prolonged exposure to television violence has been found to influence children in the following ways:

- Children who watch violent television shows, even just "funny" violent cartoons, were more likely to hit playmates, argue, and disobey.
- Children often identify with certain characters, victims and victimizers on television and imitate the violence they see.
- Watching televised violence has been found to be the single greatest factor contributing to aggressive behavior in children.
- Researchers have found that watching televised violence may desensitize children to real world violence and teach them that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems.

In addition, children that are heavy viewers put less effort into school work, have poorer reading skills, play less with friends, have fewer hobbies, and are more likely to be overweight.

Taking Control

Parents can greatly curb the influences of television by instituting a few guidelines:

Set limits

Limit the amount of time spent watching TV and encourage children to spend time with friends, on sports and hobbies.

View programs they choose

Watch at least one episode of each program that your children watch. This allows you to know what they're watching and discuss it with them. Ban programs that you find too offensive and restrict viewing to programs that are educational or encourage cooperation, helping, and caring.



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Pre plan program schedule

Use a TV Guide or newspaper to determine in advance which shows are appropriate for family viewing.

Interpret what you watch

Use the TV to express how you feel about difficult topics such as violence, divorce, sex, honesty, and love. Teach children to question what they watch, which will also help reinforce your values.

Violence on television

Disapprove of violent episodes in front of your children. Refuse to let children see shows known to be violent and change the channel or turn off the set when something offensive comes on. Explain what you found offensive about the scene.

Point out that although these actors are not really hurt or killed on screen, in real-life this type of violence results in pain or death. Discuss what causes TV characters to behave in violent ways and that adults rarely solve problems in this same manner. Discuss non-violent alternatives to solving problems.

Resist advertising pressure

Children, age 8 and younger, do not understand that the purpose of advertising is to sell products. Also young children have trouble distinguishing between ads and programs; yet, the average child may see more than 20,000 TV commercials each year. Teach your children how to identify sales hype and become smarter consumers.

Structure viewing time

Keep the television and video players out of children's bedrooms, and turn off the TV during meal times.

Keep a time chart

Make an effort to balance your child's viewing habits with other activities. Before watching TV, let your child choose from a list of alternatives. For *example*: bike riding, reading, homework, chores and playtime with friends.

Remember: a balanced "diet" of entertaining and informative television programs are like a balanced diet of food. Both help contribute towards the healthy development of your child.

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