

Good Television Habits For Kids

Television can have a positive effect on your child's social, emotional and mental development. Here are some ideas that may help him or her benefit from the right way of viewing television. The following suggestions may also help protect your child from the negative influences of television.

- ✧ Make sure your child watches programs you are familiar with. Pay extra attention to ensure that your child does not watch programs that show violence, sex, and offensive language.
- ✧ As frequently as possible, try to watch television with your child. Do not use the television as a babysitter. Do not allow your child to have a television in his or her bedroom.
- ✧ Discuss the teaching value of a program with your child, such as the importance of sharing, giving, loving or doing the alphabet together. Programs like Mister Rogers' Neighborhood and Sesame Street are very useful in helping your child's development. Use follow-up activities that further develop material presented on the programs.
- ✧ Be careful with the example that you set as a parent. Children learn many of their values and ideas from their parents. Also, be sure to explain the rules of television watching in your home to caregivers such as nannies, babysitters or grandparents.
- ✧ Limit daily television watching to one hour or less for preschoolers and two hours or less for early school-aged children. Use the other time available to teach skills such as reading and writing, or to visit museums, zoos and aquariums. Teaching takes time, but in the end it is worth it.
- ✧ Older children should be given the opportunity to plan their weekly viewing schedule in advance, but parent should still supervise their choices. Praise your child for making good choices, and encourage him or her to criticize and analyze what he or she sees on television.
- ✧ Help your child understand the differences between fantasy, make-believe and reality. Discuss and explain the reasons why he or she cannot watch certain programs. Use this as an opportunity to raise a child who is aware of the values you feel are important.

- ✧ Set a bedtime for your child that does not change according to the television schedule. If your child is interested in a program that airs past his or her bedtime, consider using a VCR to record it.
- ✧ Television is a powerful tool for selling or promoting toys and products. Discuss commercials with your child. Help him or her identify high-pressure selling techniques and exaggerated claims.
- ✧ Turn off the television during meals. Turn off the television when visitors arrive and during study time. Do not use the television as a background sound.
- ✧ Make a rule that homework and chores must be finished before your child can watch television.
- ✧ Express support for good television. Subscribe to newsletters that provide information about good programs to enjoy and poor programs to avoid. For example, contact the Association for Media Literacy and the Media Awareness Network.
- ✧ Support media literacy education in schools.
- ✧ Become an advocate for responsible television programs. Contact the Radio-television Authority or the House of Commons Standing Committee for Communications and Culture. This is an opportunity to promote program ratings to protect children from 'bad' television.
- ✧ Consider using the V-chip. This is a technological advance that allows undesirable programming to be filtered out automatically.

In the end, it is not up to television ratings or the V-chip to establish good viewing habits. Your example and personal involvement make the biggest difference.

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