

Taking Charge: Strategies for Parenting in a TV Age

While it is unrealistic for most families to get rid of their television sets and other media screens, guiding and limiting “e-time” use may be easier than you think. Research is clear that setting reasonable limits for children's screen use can have significant long term pay-offs, such as improved school performance, decrease in aggressive behaviors and even better eating habits! Here are six simple ideas to help you get started.

1. Set Limits.

The first thing to do to take charge of your children's TV watching is to set limits on how much TV they will be allowed to watch. For example, a maximum of 2 hours a day, or no more than 10 hours a week. Other ideas:

- Encourage a variety of daily TV alternatives for the whole family - sports, games, hobbies, reading, chores.
- Decide ahead of time what your criteria are for their selection of popular shows that may contain violence or content you find problematic. For example, "You can watch "Sponge Bob Square Pants" or "The Suite Life" if you spend 15 minutes discussing it with me afterwards."
- Use a locking device to prohibit access to certain channels or prevent watching at certain times.
- Don't use TV as a reward; on the other hand, reducing the limits you've set or prohibiting TV watching for a time can be an effective discipline.

Be willing to set limits on your own viewing as a model for your child.

2. Watch by the Show, not by the Clock.

Keep a copy of TV Guide or your local TV weekly around so that you and your children can use it to choose which shows to watch rather than turning on the TV and flipping channels until something catches your attention.

- This works best if you don't wait until you're ready to watch before checking the listings. Help your children decide what to watch well before they are ready to turn on the TV (like every Sunday afternoon, or before school each day).
- When the chosen show is over, turn the TV off. If you enforce your limits, your children will learn to prioritize and watch what they really like.

3. Plan Special Viewing Times to Watch with Your Child.

Take advantage of children's specials or the many options that cable TV and videos/DVDs offer. Look for shows and videos that offer alternative perspectives or images that your children do not usually see on TV: non-violence winning out over violence, or individuals who refuse money or power.

- Start a family video/DVD collection with approved movies and tapes your child can enjoy when there's nothing else to watch. Compare notes with other parents about sources or suggested titles.
- Look ahead for programs that help in your child's education. Watch together, then find related books at your local library to enhance their knowledge.

4. Talk Back to the TV.

What better way to let your children know of your opinions about what's on TV than by talking to it? Sometimes talking to the TV may drive them crazy, but they'll learn your perspective!

- Use storylines or characters on TV to dialogue later with your kids about topics that are sometimes hard to discuss emotional feelings, family relationships, appropriate sexual behavior, divorce or death, and religious beliefs. Rather than question directly, it may be more effective to muse aloud; musing lets your children hear your values and prompts conversation in a non threatening way.

5. Try Some Structured Activities While You Watch.

- Structured activities are more demanding ways both for you and your children to encourage positive interaction with TV.
- Help your children with geography by keeping an atlas or globe next to the TV. Encourage them to find the different places that are mentioned on the news.
- Watch a show with the sound turned off, adding your own sound effects and dialogue.
- Try to predict the kinds of commercials that will appear in a selected show. This helps kids connect program content with commercial intent.
- Even a show with "terrible" values can be a positive learning experience when used creatively.

For more ideas to help you "Tame the TV" including a bibliography of resources and related workshops, call Cornell Cooperative Extension at 845-344-1234.

Resource: 1991 CENTER FOR MEDIA AND VALUES #1 Strategies For Parenting

Submitted by Denyse A. Variano, Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County

TV Turn-Off Week is April 19-25, 2010

Turn off your TV (and other screen activities like the computer and video games) and tune into your family and non-screen time activities. Take advantage of TV Turn Off Week to spend time walking with your family after dinner (it's light later now!), reading books, playing board games, volunteering, doing yard work, riding your bikes, making a collage with found objects, drawing or painting pictures,

have kids send handmade cards to relatives who live far away or just take time and TALK to each other...enjoy the freedom of being disconnected.

Another great alternative to TV/screen use is reading!

National Library Week is celebrated April 11 - 17, 2010

This year's theme is "Communities thrive @ your Library". Stop by your local library to borrow books, music CDs, VCR tapes, DVDs, magazines, use the computers to search the web or for homework help or use the resources to look for a job.

Parenting tip: Head to the library with your child and look at the cookbooks in the children's section. Let your child take out a cookbook and then together, select a recipe you can prepare together. Have your child draw a picture and write a short story (if they are old enough) about what was their favorite part of making the recipe. Make trying new recipes with your child a regular practice in your home.