



Good Beginnings

Early Child Development · Parenting Education · Learning and School Readiness Tips

the Buzz...

For most families, television viewing is an everyday part of life. Who among us doesn't have a favorite TV show remembered from childhood? Because most of us have grown up watching TV, we think of it as a normal part of daily life. However, we tend to forget what a powerful influence it can have on children.

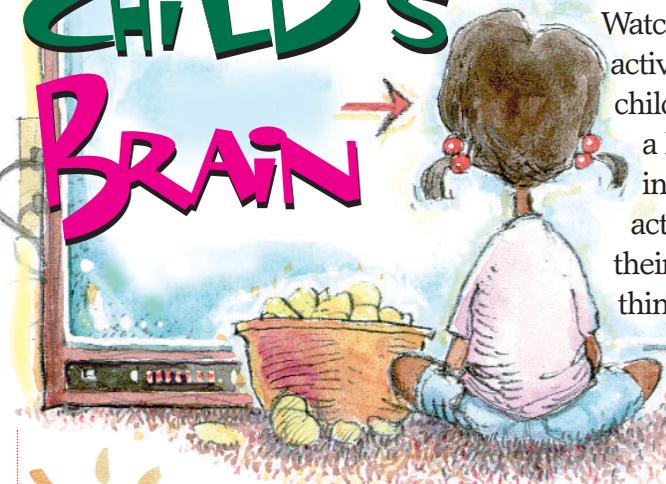
Television can be an influence for good. It can offer educational and entertaining programs that families can enjoy and talk about together. TV can also have a negative influence. It can show images and offer messages that can be confusing and harmful, especially to young children who do not have the ability to separate reality from fantasy.

A great deal of research over the years tells us how television can affect children's learning and behavior—both for the good and for the bad. TV viewing habits begin at an early age. As your child's first teacher, one important part of your job is to make good decisions about your child's TV viewing habits. This issue of *Good Beginnings* offers information to think about as you make those important decisions.

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TV AND YOUR CHILD'S BRAIN

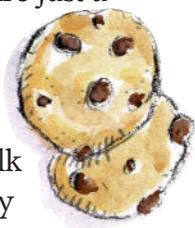


Children between the ages of 3 and 5 are at a critical stage in brain development. This is the time when the parts of the brain affecting language and thinking are growing. The best way to help these parts of the brain grow is for children to take part in active play. Watching TV is not an active play activity. When children watch television a lot, they aren't spending time doing other activities that encourage their language and thinking development.

ACTIVE PLAY ACTIVITIES

When the TV is off, parents can help children get involved in any number of active play activities. Use your imagination and enjoy yourselves! Here are just a few suggestions:

- Draw a picture
- Read a book
- Go for a walk
- Play with a toy
- Write a letter to a friend
- Call grandma to say hi
- Blow bubbles
- Visit the library
- Finger-paint
- Play with friends
- Act out a story
- Help bake cookies
- Learn a nursery rhyme
- Put together a puzzle



TV and Learning

There are two types of programs made for children: educational programs and entertainment programs. Studies tell us that children who watch educational programs made especially for their age level, such as *Sesame Street*, develop better prereading skills than children who do not watch such programs. These studies also show that children who watch cartoons or other entertainment-oriented children's shows, such as *Power Rangers*, have poorer prereading skills. Parents who limit their preschool child's daily TV viewing to less than 2 hours of well-constructed, educational programs help their children develop good TV viewing habits that will

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TV and Success in School

The average American child, age 2 to 11, watches 27 hours of television each week. This amount of time is more than children spend doing any other activity besides sleeping. How does heavy TV watching in early childhood affect the development of some of the skills children need to be ready for school?

Both spoken and written language are **keys to school success**. TV programs are picture-based. If children are watching TV, they aren't having conversations. They aren't reading or being read to. **Language-based** interactions are critical to language development.

Large and small muscle coordination are important **physical** skills related to academic success. They develop from regular physical activity. TV watching rarely encourages the physical exercise that children need to develop good motor skills.

The desire to learn is related to having a sense of curiosity and imagination as well as an interest in new activities and experiences. Too much exposure to TV can **restrict** a child's imagination and curiosity. That's because most TV programming doesn't require the child's participation. It offers very little to be curious about. Too much TV watching takes away time for developing new interests.

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not interfere with learning. Child-oriented educational programs for children available on public television include the following:



- Reading Rainbow
- Mister Rogers Neighborhood
- Arthur
- Barney
- Charlie Horse
- Kraft's Creatures
- Teletubbies
- Theodore Tugboat
- Sesame Street
- Wimzies' House
- Wishbone

TV and Self-Control

Self-control skills are important for children's success in school and in their relationships with others. Examples of these skills include the following:

- Being able to **express** their strong feelings in good ways
- Understanding the connection between behavior and its **consequences**
- Dealing with anger and frustration in **nonviolent** ways

When children regularly see violence on television, their self-control skills may suffer. When children watch television characters react violently, they do not learn to

express their strong feelings in **good** ways. In fact, exposure to violence can cause young children to become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.

Young children are attracted to television scenes where there is fast movement, color, and vivid scenes. Many of the most violent scenes on television are shown this way.

This makes it difficult for young children to understand that **certain behaviors will have consequences**.

When you are making **decisions** about your child's TV viewing habits, consider this: on an average week-day during prime time, there are about 5 to 6 violent acts shown each hour; on Saturday morning children's television, there is an average of 20 to 25 acts of violence shown. Could TV be making your job of teaching your children self-control skills harder?



Self-Control
(not remote control)

He or She? We take turns referring to children as he or she. When we use he or she, we mean to include all children.

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References: National Institute of Media and the Family, www.mediaandthefamily.org.

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