

# TELEVISION: IS IT "GOOD" OR "BAD"?

*"Other than a child's family, there is no force today which influences behavior as powerfully as does television. The average child spends more time in front of a TV set than she does studying in school or attending to parental instruction. In other words, children learn more about the world and values from television experience than from family or community. This places enormous responsibility on the media and on concerned parents."*

~ T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.  
Touchpoints



Photo by Howard G. Buffett

Television was introduced into our lives around 1950. Viewing was not initially a daily activity for most people. It brought to our family and homes a new level of entertainment. During the next five decades, technology and the television revolution has exploded. Most families now have several TVs that are placed in various rooms of their homes.

Dr. Brazelton's quote gives insight to the influence television has on our society today. The social structure of the home and family now tends to be regulated by television viewing. Today's family members may wake up to one TV show, have breakfast with another and go to school after yet another. Their days are regulated by their television viewing.

Television was introduced into our culture to enhance our lives. There are many positive benefits of this technology.

Television can enrich family's lives.

Television was designed to educate.

**Cost efficient education** - TV can educate many people at the same time.

**Exposes us to experiences out of our reach** - We can go to the moon or the bottom of the ocean without leaving our home.

**Can enhance reading** - TV viewing may stimulate interest in new subjects to read about. Some shows introduce children to new books that may later be checked out at the library.

**Can encourage career planning in some fields.**

**Can promote useful activities** - TV characters introduce us to and encourage us to relate to someone who is making a worthwhile contribution to our world. We meet some positive role models.

**Instructs us about skills, ideas and issues.**

**Informs us about nature, politics, etc.**

**Brings appreciation for history and cultures of others into our homes.**

Television has been a positive influence in our society, but it also has some negative effects on both individuals and families.

Television is the direct opposite of reading.

Reading requires and encourages a longer attention span. TV fosters a short attention span because of the programming. Programs are broken into eight-minute commercial segments. To hold the viewer's attention to the next commercial, there is constant action.

In order for you to read, your eyes need to move across and down the page. Television viewing trains your eyes NOT to move.

Television deprives children of their most important learning tool - questioning.

On average, children ages 2 to 5 years old watch 32 hours a week in front of a television. During this time, the child isn't asking a question or receiving an answer.

Kids with a TV in their bedroom spend an average of almost 1.5 hours more per day watching TV than kids without a TV in the bedroom.

Television interrupts important language lessons - family conversation.

Although children may be introduced to new words on TV, they learn words best by saying them aloud and using them in conversation.

Approximately 66% of households "usually" view television during meals – a time when the family has opportunity to discuss and share about their day.

Television stifles imagination

Children don't have to make the pictures or sounds in their mind.

Television is addictive.

Habitual and cumulative TV viewing produces physical stress. This stress can be seen in a condition called sensory overload. It can be measured by changes in the electrical activity of the brain, in the heart rate, in blood pressure and in the secretion of hormones.

The internal physical effects show up externally in two ways.

1. The overloaded body displays a passive, drugged look with eyes glazed and fixed-like.
2. The overloaded body may display unfocused hyperactivity and irritability that is either released immediately or stored to be released after viewing. The rapid movements and choppiness of TV images results in an overtaxed nervous system.

In her book, The Plug-In Drug, Marie Winn discusses this addiction to TV.

*"When we think about addiction to drugs or alcohol, we frequently focus on negative aspects, ignoring the pleasures that accompany them and yet the essence of any serious addiction is a pursuit of pleasure, a search for a 'high' that normal life does not supply."*

*"Not unlike drugs or alcohol, the TV experience allows the participant to blot out the real world and enter into a pleasurable and passive mental state. The worries and anxieties of reality are as effectively deferred by becoming absorbed in TV programs as by going on a 'trip' induced by drugs or alcohol."*

~ Marie Winn,  
The Plug-In Drug

Television can encourage deceptive thinking.

Commercials say there is no problem that can't be solved by simple, artificial means – a pill or a spray. Between ages 1 - 17, the average child is exposed to 350,000 commercials (400 per week) promoting the idea that solutions to life's problems can be purchased.

Television can create anti-school and anti-reading feelings among children.

86% of 3rd grade students chose the video version of a book over the book.

Television overpowers and desensitizes a child's sense of suffering and sympathy

According to The American Psychological Association, by the end of grade school, children will have viewed 8,000 TV murders and 100,000 incidents of violence. Television depicts violence as a key to power. Children can become insensitive to violence and its victims with repeated viewing. Studies have shown the greater the exposure to TV violence, the more children used violence to solve problems. Violence-filled TV gives children an exaggerated sense of danger and mistrust. Children may have difficulty distinguishing reality and fantasy.

Television is passive and discourages creative play and replaces activities such as playing with friends, being physically active, getting fresh air, reading, playing imaginatively, doing homework and doing chores.

The more television is watched, the more children see the world as a gloomy, mean place to live.

Many children and adults are disrespectful and verbally brutal to one another. Kid's programming and prime-time sitcoms thrive on this type of communication.

TV can rob children of a childhood. They see incest, murder, abortion and sex explicitly displayed on TV.

## SOOO, WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO?

**Parents must take control of the TV.  
It doesn't turn itself on.  
It also has an "off" button.**

### LIMIT TELEVISION

According to Dr. Brazelton, toddlers should watch no more than one-half hour at a time. This can be done twice a day.

For older children, decide on an amount of time together and pick the very best programs. Another way to limit viewing with an older child is to use TV programs as rewards.

If you limit television, you, as a parent, must provide alternatives. Establish structure to your day. It is easy to use TV to fill up your days. Plan for other activities.

Crayons/markers and paper

Books

Helping you with household tasks

Playing with everyday items – clothing, boxes, kitchen items, pillows and blankets and their toys. (Make some toys seem like new by rotating toys to be played with.)

Encourage exercise

### READ TOGETHER!

Use technology to make us more literate, not illiterate. Make use of book tapes, audio cassettes and the radio.

Watch TV with your children In this way, you are able to interact and answer your child's questions. It also gives you the opportunity to pass along your values and ideals.