

Turn Off the Television – Spring 2007

National TV Turnoff Week - April 23 - 29, 2007

Did you know that the average American child spends more time each year watching television (1,023 hours) than going to school (900 hours)? The American Academy of Pediatrics states that the average American child or adolescent spends more than 21 hours per week watching television. This is in addition to time spent watching movies/music videos, playing video/computer games and surfing the Internet! Even family dinnertime is no longer sacred, with forty percent of Americans watching television during dinner. Since it began in 1995, millions of people all over the world have participated in TV Turnoff Week. Advanced Pediatrics recommends your family give it a try this year and see how much extra time your children will have for exercise, reading, school work and family activities !

Why is too much television/media viewing bad for children?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes that a reasonable exposure to mass media (television, movies, video/computer games, music videos and the Internet) can be a benefit to children and adolescents when providing healthy, age-appropriate entertainment and educational programming. However, the AAP and US pediatricians are becoming increasingly aware of the negative media influence on children and adolescents. Specifically, the AAP finds the following negative effects of current television/media habits among American children:

- Too much time spent watching television/movies/music videos, playing video/computer games and surfing the Internet takes away time from more healthy creative, active, educational or social activities.
- Television and media content is becoming increasingly violent, and studies show that significant exposure to media violence increases the risk of aggressive behavior in children.
- The average young viewer is exposed to over 14,000 sexual references each year, with very few promoting responsible sexual behavior.
- Increased television/media use is documented to be a significant factor leading to obesity in children.

Recommendations for healthy television/media habits for children and adolescents:

Set limits - Limit your child's use of TV/movies/videos, video/computer games, Internet surfing and online chatting to no more than two hours per day. **Do not put a television or computer in your child's bedroom!**

Plan your child's viewing - Rather than allowing your child to surf channels, use a program guide and the TV ratings to help you and your child choose age appropriate shows. This same principal can be applied to Internet use by encouraging children to use the Internet for specific purposes, but not wander aimlessly and for long periods of time.

Participate with your child's media use - Whenever possible, watch TV/movies/music videos with your child and discuss what you are watching. Take opportunities to learn about the video/computer games your child is playing by occasionally playing with them. Sit down with your child when surfing the Internet and give them guidelines on safe and appropriate usage.

Take advantage of parental controls - Newer televisions and computer software allow parents to set limits to television viewing and Internet usage, preventing children from stumbling upon inappropriate media content.

Help your child resist commercials - Explain that the purpose of commercials is to make people want things they may not need. Limit the number of commercials your child sees by watching PBS programs.

Look for quality children's videos, DVDs and games - Reviews are abundantly available in print media and the Internet to help determine if content is appropriate. Pay attention to movie ratings, but be aware that there is a wide range of content within each rating (PG-13 is especially broad with more violence and sexual references than some parents may expect).

Encourage other options - TV and other media can become a habit. Encourage your child to play, read and participate in extra-curricular activities.

Set a good example - Be a positive role model by limiting your own media usage and content.