

ACTIONS PARENTS CAN TAKE

- 1 Reduce the amount of time your children watch TV.** Dr. Thomas Robinson, of the Stanford University School of Medicine, showed that simply reducing TV viewing time reduced children's aggressive/combatative behavior. (see footnote 2) That is, his study did not seek to reduce the viewing of TV with violent content, but simply to limit TV viewing by children to seven hours per week or less.
- 2 Provide/recommend alternative activities for children.** For young children, see our list at alternative activities. For children of high school age, alternatives abound, including listening to music, visiting with friends, studying, recreational reading, school clubs, and sports. A parent might also suggest that they read one of the books by Neal Postman (e.g., *Amusing Ourselves to Death*) and then discuss its content with you, or use it as a book report in school. In this way, you invite the student to debate your decision to limit TV viewing and engage him in a critical examination of TV's effects on society.
- 3 Help your child select age-appropriate programs.** Do not assume that children of high school age or less truly view a TV show with the same understanding that a parent does. Talk about the program with the child, discussing its content, the decisions made by the characters, the alternatives they had, and the way the characters were portrayed.
- 4 Avoid putting a TV in a child's room.** Let TV viewing be something a parent can monitor.
- 5 Turn off the TV when the program you are watching has concluded.** That is, watch a "program" not "TV." Demonstrate to your child selectivity in TV viewing. Do not leave the TV on when no one is watching it.
- 6 Have dinners together with the TV off.** Use dinner time to listen to your child's activities and concerns, and let your child hear about how you spent your day, including its good aspects and frustrating ones. Children want to know their parents, what they value, what they do, what they think. Trying to influence your child's behavior in the adolescent years can be a frustrating experience if you have not forged a close relationship much earlier.
- 7 Do not purchase, or permit in the house, violent video games.** Let your child know that you disapprove of those games, and explain why: (a) That you do not believe a game whose objective is to kill or injure another is a suitable form of entertainment; (b) That whether we believe it or not, we are influenced by what we do. Finding violence entertaining can have damaging consequences on our emotional development. It can also desensitize us to the pain real violence actually causes.



Your child may seek other opportunities to play these games, but at least he knows, and is influenced by, your beliefs about such games.

Source: *Limitv.org*

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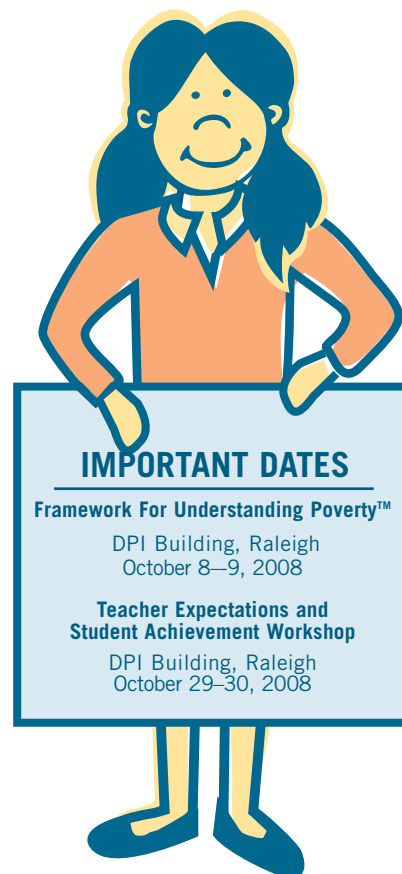
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BACK-TO-SCHOOL SPECIAL EDITION

FOR PARENTS AND
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STAKEHOLDERS



CHANGING THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS IN THE VILLAGE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE
RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS SECTION

SCREEN TIME IS HITTING AN ALL-TIME HIGH

For many adults and children, watching television is a favorite, inexpensive and enormously entertaining pastime. On average, people watch television almost four hours every day. For children in particular, viewing time is even higher. According to a recently completed longitudinal study on TV-viewing by 1300 teens, Dr. Tracie Barnett (2008) found that **teens are spending nearly 40-plus hours a week in front of a television and/or computer screen.** And, when added to that the amount of time they spend playing electronic games that comes out to be a lot of media-watching by children. It is no wonder that more and more of us have begun questioning the effects so much screen-viewing has on the academic and social lives of people, children in particular. Specifically, we want to know the severity of these effects to a child's life overtime, whether the damages are far-reaching, and what can be done to control excessive screen time among our youth under 18.

Given the content of most prime time programs on television, increasingly more adults are understandably concerned about the influence media (electronic games and computer use notwithstanding) have on children. To give you an idea of the power of television, we collected some startling facts published by A.C. Nielsen Company about the "boob tube" which, we hope, will provoke every reader to take appropriate, aggressive action to reduce screen-viewing by children.

FAMILY LIFE:

- **98%** of U.S. households have at least one television
- **66%** of Americans watch television while eating
- **49%** confess they watch too much TV
- **7 hours and 12 minutes** is the average number of hours the TV set is on each day

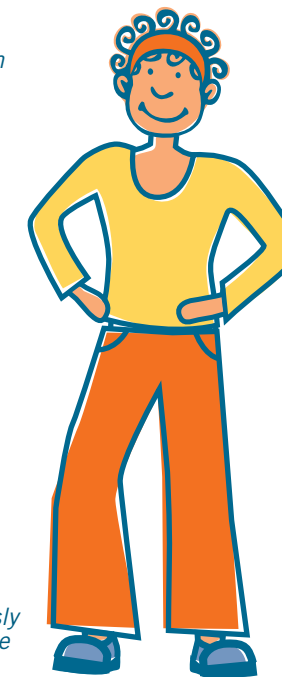
CHILDREN AND EDUCATION:

- Number of minutes per week most children spend watching TV is **1,197**
- Number of minutes per week most parents talk to their children is **38**
- Number of hours 81% of all fourth graders watch television is **14 or more**
- Average number of hours/year children watch television is **1,500**
- Average number of hours/year children spend in school is **900**

VIOLENCE AND HEALTH:

- Number of violent acts a child in the U.S. sees on TV by the age of 18 is **200,000**
- Number of murders children witness on television by 18 is **16,000**
- Percent of children who reported feeling upset or scared by television violence is **91**
- Percentage of children ages 6-11 who were seriously overweight in 1963 was **4.5**; it's now **14%**, given the link between television viewing and obesity

Additionally Nielsen found that children behave differently after viewing violent acts. That is, they become less sensitive to the suffering of others, behave more aggressively, and become more fearful of their environment.



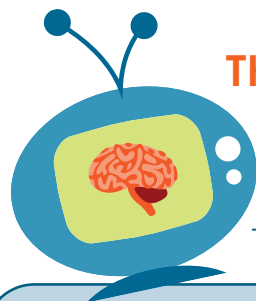
BUT WHAT'S A FAMILY TO DO?

If children are putting in this much screen-viewing every week, every year until the age of 18, what is the outlook of their academic career and overall health? Presumably not very good. TV-viewing—which is frequently preferred to reading and physical exercise—may contribute to poor school performance and delay literacy. Additionally it has the potential to impede a healthy lifestyle which is "crucial to physical development" (Drugs.com). In short, **"grades drop when children watch more than 10 hours of television a week,"** LimiTV's president Stephen Jurovics contends. (LimiTV is a non-profit organization that writes about the harmful effects of intense screen time and what parents can do to curtail it.)

We can go on and on about the damages screen time may bring to young lives, but the reality is that families from coast-to-coast have heavily relied upon television and electronic games as convenient, cost-effective in-home babysitters. That's not likely to change overnight. However, there are some things adults can do to control the effects of excessive screen time. For your convenience, we have reprinted articles from LimiTV that speak to the damaging effects of screen time as well as actions parents can take to restrain TV-viewing.



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA
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THE SCHOOL YEARS: YOUR CHILD'S BRAIN WASN'T BUILT FOR ALL THAT TV

TV trains the brain. It impacts neurological development. It seems so harmless, and sometimes even marvelous, but it is not a neutral force in your child's life. This page discusses how TV can hamper a child's ability to learn.



1 TV INTERFERES WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLIGENCE, THINKING SKILLS AND IMAGINATION.

A crucial element of thinking is extrapolating from what you know and figuring out how it applies in a new situation. School requires this, TV does not. In *The Development of Children*, Michael and Sheila Cole report on the work of G. Solomon who found that children socialized to learn from TV had lower than normal expectations about the amount of mental effort required to learn from written texts, and tended to read less and perform relatively poorly in school. (LimiTV Summary: It takes very little mental effort to follow a TV show. *Kids raised on TV believe it takes less effort to learn from books because they are used to being spoon-fed information by television.*)

Opportunities for a child's imagination to develop are also denied by habitual TV viewing. Children need some unstructured time to allow imagination skills to form by thinking about a book read or a story heard, a conversation in the home, or an event in school, or just the scene outdoors.

2 TV CONDITIONS A CHILD TO DUAL STIMULI: SOUND AND IMAGES.

The persistence of TV sound and rapidly-changing images can condition a child to expect that level of stimulation in other circumstances, notably school. But there, a child will be called upon to speak, to listen to a teacher, work some problems, or read, none of which contain the attention-grabbing effect of TV's dual stimuli.

Anecdotal information from the college level suggests that one of the main reasons professors introduce multimedia (sound and image) segments into lectures is to retain the attention of the TV-raised student. A chalk-on-the-blackboard lecture leaves many students unable to remain attentive.

3 WATCHING TV IMPEDES THE GROWTH OF LONGER ATTENTION SPANS.

As with conditioning a child to the sound and images of television, the approximately *seven minute length of program before a commercial interruption can condition a child to a seven minute attention span.* The Wall Street Journal, February 10, 1994 relates the experience of professional story teller Odds Bodkin, who performs before some 10,000 people a year, most of them children. After about seven minutes, he says, restlessness sets in as their inner clocks anticipate a commercial break.

Schools expect kindergarten through second graders to have short attention spans, but also expect attention capability to increase with grade level. When that doesn't happen, children are disadvantaged. A student who, month after month, is inattentive in class may well find it difficult to learn the material being presented.



4 WATCHING TV INTERFERES WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING SKILLS.

A child must learn to move the eyes back and forth across the page in order to read. But with television, the eyes fix on the screen. *One hour a day in school learning to move the eyes back and forth cannot compete with four or more hours with the eyes fixed on a TV screen.* It's little wonder that many children find difficulty learning to read.

5 WATCHING TV DECREASES THE TIME FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS.

Children may hear new words on a TV show, but this is not the same as speaking. If they are watching TV, they aren't spending time talking. Children generally start to talk by speaking single words, then progress to short sentences, then to groups of sentences. Reading to a child, and speaking to a child directly, aid the development of speaking skills. A child rarely develops proficiency with speech simply by getting older. *A child spending four or more hours a day watching TV loses the time needed for conversation, and may well find difficulty becoming articulate and fluent, and be less able to speak and write in complete sentences* than the child who, it seems, "just never stops talking."

6 CERTAIN TYPES OF TV CULTIVATE AGGRESSIVE OR VIOLENT BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN.

This topic has been the subject of much research over decades and the abundance of evidence supporting TV's cultivation of aggressive behavior in children has been one of the leading factors driving the installation of a TV rating system.

The child prone to aggressive or violent behavior can find difficulty dealing appropriately with parents and siblings, with teacher authority, and with irritation by other students.

As early as the 1950s, '60s, and 70s, the correlation between TV violence and aggressive and violent behavior in children was documented. In 1972, a U.S. Surgeon's General's committee released a six-volume report, Scientific Advisory Report on Television and Social Behavior, which concluded that *viewing TV violence has serious consequences for children, making a child more willing to respond with aggression in a conflict situation, more willing to harm others, and more aggressive in his or her play.*

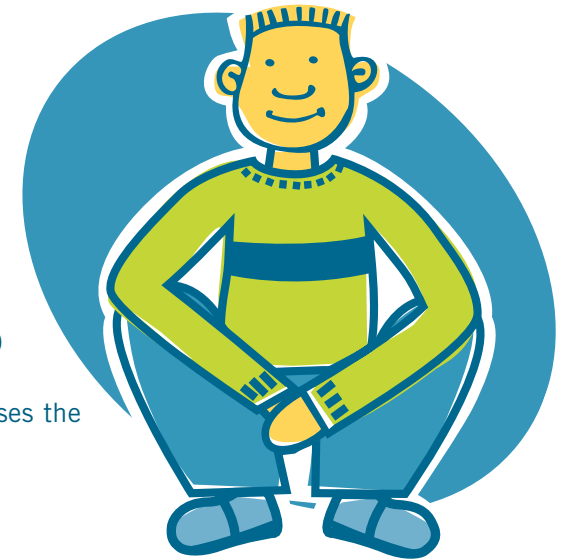
Appendix III of the report, "Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence", concludes the following: The relation of third-grade television habits to later behavior now appears even more impressive. Not only is the violence of programs preferred in third grade related to peer-rated aggression in the third grade and ten years later, but it is also related positively to self-discipline and anti-social behavior ten years later on."

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MEDIA VIOLENCE AND BEHAVIOR: TELEVISION, VIDEO GAMES AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

The effects of media violence on children have been studied for over thirty years, with researchers repeatedly finding correlations between aggressive/violent behavior and the viewing of media violence. These education and psychology researchers began asserting years ago that a cause-and-effect relationship existed, i.e., viewing media violence was one of the causative factors in aggressive behavior in children.

On July 26, 2000, four major health organizations released a two-page statement that contained the following text: "At this time, well over 1,000 studies . . . point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some students." This statement endorses the position held by numerous researchers that media violence can cause aggressive/violent behavior in some children.



CHILDREN ARE IMPRESSIONABLE

We often use the phrase that "children are impressionable." We mean that children do not see the world through the same filter of experience that adults do. Children see things more literally. They do not yet possess the sophisticated sensibilities to distinguish fiction from reality. It matters a great deal, therefore, how much TV children watch and what they view.

HOW THE MEDIA CAN AFFECT BEHAVIOR

How does viewing media violence actually foster aggressive behavior? At least two mechanisms are at work:

- 1 **Young children often mimic what they see.** Parents and caretakers observe this regularly. If children see people punching and kicking, they may act out that same behavior.
- 2 **Older children develop, through years of watching, sub-conscious mental plans of how they will react in conflict situations.** For years they have seen conflicts resolved by violence, and they sub-consciously develop the same reaction plan. When confronted with a conflict, the tendency is to react the way they have seen countless others react—in a combative, aggressive or violent manner. Researchers call this developing a "cognitive script."



THE MEDIA AND CONDITIONING

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman's compelling book, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, identifies three conditioning factors to which our children are subjected: classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and social learning.

- 1 Through television, video games, and movies, children and teens view countless acts of violence, brutality, and terror as part of entertainment. They become conditioned to associating violence with entertainment. This is the classical conditioning.
- 2 First-person shooter video games develop our children's skills in operating weapons. The games reward marksmanship, and further reinforce the association of killing with entertainment.
- 3 In the past, the heroes of movie and television shows were usually people who strictly followed the law. Now, heroes are often people who take the law into their own hands, who see an injustice or evil and seek to rectify it personally, sometimes brutally, regardless of the consequences. Such portrayals signal to a child society's approval of that behavior. Lacking the judgment that comes with age, a child who feels he has been dealt with unfairly may copy that behavior, with disastrous consequences.

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"Children see things more literally. They do not yet possess the sophisticated sensibilities to distinguish fiction from reality."