

# Managing the Television at Home

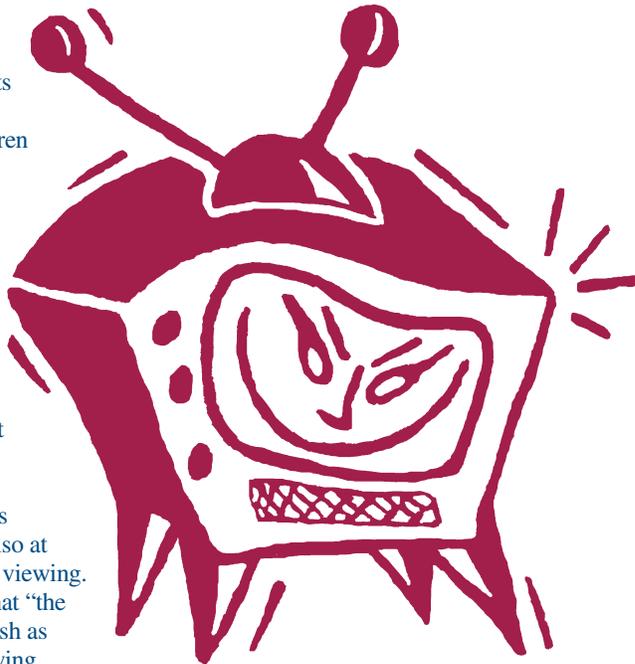
Does your preschooler balk at bedtime because he insists on watching “just one more show?” Do you have to serve dinner between your daughter’s favourite programs? Are you noticing a steady decline in your children’s abilities to solve problems peacefully and to play creatively? If so, it could be that television watching is getting out of hand in your home.

Programming has long been a concern and the focus is still very much on the negative effects of TV violence on young minds. Television violence makes children less sensitive to the pain of others, more fearful of the world around them and increasingly aggressive toward other people. More recent research shows that children who spend a lot of time watching television, *regardless of programming*, are more likely to have social problems, and exhibit delinquent or aggressive behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence suggests that children’s mental and physical health are also at risk through extended television viewing. Health Canada research found that “the viewing patterns children establish as toddlers will influence their viewing habits throughout their lives.”<sup>2</sup> Research demonstrates that watching television is a major contributor to sleeplessness, depression and hyperactivity in young children.

In addition, children who are avid TV watchers are less physically fit because they aren’t running, jumping and doing other large-muscle exercise while they sit glued to the “plug-in drug.” The rate of childhood obesity is growing and ever-younger children are clinically obese. “Research has equated being physically inactive to smoking the equivalent of a pack of cigarettes a day.”<sup>3</sup>

Another adverse effect of television is on children’s nutrition. It has been estimated that a quarter of all advertising targeted to children is for food, but nutritious foods are rarely displayed. Most ads are for sugary, high-fat, salty foods such as pre-sweetened cereals, packaged snacks and fast foods in ever-larger portions, all of which link to childhood obesity trends.



## Guidelines for Managing the TV

- Watch TV with your child. Don’t use it as a babysitter.
- Control what your children watch.
- Establish a daily or weekly TV allowance and stick to it.
- Plan alternate recreational family activities (picnics, library visits, park play, swimming).
- Avoid newscasts containing explicit violence. Protect children from programs that frighten them. The effects on children can last for years.<sup>4</sup>

- Pre-record programs and movies for special viewing.
- Discuss manipulative advertising techniques with children. Make a game of identifying these techniques.
- Use TV topics to encourage conversations within the family.
- Plan TV for purposeful viewing, not background noise. Avoid eating in front of the TV.
- Help children understand what is real and unreal on TV.

Parents can make a difference on the issue of children and television. As well as controlling the use of your home TV, parents can influence television programming through the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, the Canadian Radio-Television Telecommunications Commission, Citizens Against Violence on the Screen and the Alliance for Children and Television.

Encourage your children to make critical choices about the television they watch and praise them for wise selections. High quality non-commercial Canadian programming for children has been shown to improve thoughtful behaviour in children and adults who view them.

Your example is one of the most powerful ways to teach children about television. Let your children see you reading for pleasure. Show them you are selective in your viewing and are eager to interact with them in imaginative play with games, crafts and stories. Serve nutritious meals away from the television. Taking charge of TV viewing can unleash its creative and entertainment potential.

1. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 156:910-914, September 2002.  
 2. Health Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/html/nfnseffevage\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/html/nfnseffevage_e.html)  
 3. Tremblay, M. & Willms, D. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, Nov.28, 2000; 163 (11).  
 4. Cantor, J. & Harrison, K. *Tales from the screen: Enduring fright reactions to scary media. Media Psychology*, Spring 1999.