

Too Young to Watch Television

Recently I wrote about the importance of having television black-out time in the home. In this article, I will share about the dangers of television, especially for the young, and a few guidelines for television viewing.

First, I want to ease the mind of television or movie lovers. I am not condemning television or video viewing itself. Nor am I stating that there is nothing good we can gain from the watching of television or videos on any device whether it is a smart phone, Kindle, iPad, iPod or Tablet. In fact, I know individuals whose lives have been changed just because of what they watched on television. I know of relationships improved and wounded people healed. I love the television. But I must hasten to say that the dangers of indiscriminate television viewing are well documented. Indiscriminate television watching is doing more harm than good to families today. The latest research indicates that in the case of children, just the fact of watching videos or television is dangerous to their minds and bodies.

The April 2010 issue of the magazine Pediatrics states: "Children who watch television experience shortened attention spans. Television viewing considerably enhances the chances, based on number of hours of television watched, of developing ADDs (attention deficit disorders) later on in life."

THE WORSE AGE TO WATCH TELEVISION

The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that children under the age of two not watch television. Dr. Lorraine Day in her article of Attention Deficit Disorder states: "It is reported that children watch an average of 43 hours of TV per week, that's longer than the average adult work week. While watching, they rapidly become almost hypnotized. It has been shown scientifically that within minutes of beginning to watch TV, the brain changes from the alert brain waves (beta waves) to the hypnotic waves (alpha waves) where the judgment center of the brain is bypassed. So the violence and decadence that the child sees, bypasses the judgment center in the brain and is implanted in the child's brain without any ability on the child's part to decide whether what they are seeing is right or wrong. The violence and decadence are accepted by the brain without any moral judgment being applied to it. It then becomes part of the child's permanent subconscious. What goes into a child's mind is just as important as what goes into his or her mouth!"

The British Medical Journal published: "Children under three should be kept away from television altogether, according to the review of a study which looks at the amount of "screen time" toddlers endure each day." Dr Aric Sigman, an associate fellow of the British Psychological Society, has written about the dangers of too much television. He stated in a 2007 article in the journal Biology that there are at least 15 ways TV viewing was damaging the health of children. These ranged from obesity to early puberty, autism, Type 2 diabetes and even early onset Alzheimer's. He warned: "Watching television, irrespective of the content, is increasingly associated with unfavorable biological and cognitive changes."

Let me share with you some guidelines I shared more than ten years ago with a few new additions.

GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN TELEVISION VIEWING

- (1) Do not let your children watch television during the school week (Monday to Thursday). Let them focus on the school work and play. Neither should the parents sit and watch

television in the presence of the children and expect the children to be disinterested. Remember that children learn best by example during these early years. My preliminary finding on the effects of television on the development of children indicates that the less television watched by children, the better their social and academic performance (Council for Family Research, 1998). Generally, children who do not watch television between Monday and Thursday are less aggressive, more sociable and cooperative in school.

- (2) Preselect television programs that are uplifting for the children. Soap operas, violent pictures, pictures containing vulgar language or scenes, rude comedies, etc., should not be seen by our children.
- (3) At no time should a parent allow a child to sit and watch television for indefinite periods. One hour of television viewing for children less than ten years of age provides a heavy dosage of information to process. Secondly, the danger of your child developing an unreal view of the world and his or her surrounding is seriously increased. During holiday times our children spend too much time watching television. Even teenagers and adults should not develop the habit of watching more than 2 to 3 hours of television without taking a significant break. Parents should decide that the television will be on only for specific hours at a time and only at certain times of the day. Again, it is better for your child to learn how to entertain him or herself than to be entertained.
- (4) Do not have a television in your child's room. It is ideal that a home should have no more than 1 or 2 televisions. Make television viewing family time. Too many televisions in the home rob the family of valuable togetherness. It also creates a problem for managing time and programming of the television.
- (5) Do not train your child to fall asleep with the television on. This helps to create undisciplined behavior in the child. While sleeping, unwanted subliminal messages may still enter the subconscious, leaving the child vulnerable to literally anything.
- (6) Here is a suggestion from another psychologist. "Limit television to 10 hours per week. A nice way to do this is to allot a "TV allowance," just as a child might receive a monetary allowance each week. Try making paper slips with the phrase "1/2 hour TV time" written on them. A child might receive 20 such slips every Sunday night, and "pay" 1 slip for each show or half hour of video games they play. This way the total TV exposure is limited, and you do not have to haggle over each show. He recommends children under three should not watch any TV, between three and five they should watch no more than half an hour of "good quality programming" a day, going up to an hour for five to 12-year-olds and an hour and a half for teenagers."
- (7) Do not eat while the TV is on. Eating in front of the TV is a prescription for obesity. That's where the phrase "couch potato" comes from!

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