



Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

TV and a child's development

The American Academy of Pediatrics takes a "better-safe-than-sorry" stance on TV for young children. It may be tempting to put your infant or toddler in front of the television, especially to watch shows created just for children under age two. But the American Academy of Pediatrics says: *Don't do it!*

These early years are crucial in a child's development. The Academy is concerned about the impact of television programming intended for children younger than age two and how it could affect your child's development. Pediatricians strongly oppose targeted programming, especially when it's used to market toys, games, dolls, unhealthy food and other products to toddlers.

Any positive effect of television on infants and toddlers is still open to question, but the benefits of parent-child interactions are proven. The mechanical language of TV is no substitute for a parent talking directly to a child about what he is doing or what she is interested in at that very moment. Under age two, cuddling, talking, singing, reading, listening to music or playing are far more important to a child's development than any TV show.

In addition, TV can discourage and replace reading. Reading requires much more thinking than television, and we know that reading fosters children's healthy brain development. Kids from families that have the TV on a lot spend less time reading and being read to, and are less likely to be able to read.

Tips for family viewing

The following are ways you can help your children develop positive viewing habits:

1. **Set limits.** Children under age 2 should not see any TV. For children over age 2, limit the combined use of TV, movies, and video and computer games to no more than 1 or 2 hours per day.
2. **Limit access.** Do not put a TV in your child's bedroom or watch TV during meals.
3. **Plan what to watch.** Instead of flipping through channels, use a program guide and the TV ratings to help you and your children choose which shows to watch. Turn the TV on to watch the program and turn it off when it is over.
4. **Watch TV with your children.** Watch TV with your children and talk about what they see. Young children may not be able to tell the difference between a show, a commercial, a cartoon, or real life. Be especially careful about news or "reality-based" programs. These shows are not appropriate for young children.
5. **Find the right message.** Some TV programs show people as stereotypes or portray wrong or illegal behaviors. If you see this, talk with your children about the real-life roles of women, the elderly, and people of other races. Also talk about what is right and what is wrong about the behaviors portrayed.
6. **Help your children resist commercials.** When your children ask for things they see on TV, explain that the purpose of commercials is to make people want things they may not need.

7. **Look for quality children's videos and DVDs.** There are many quality videos and DVDs available for children. Check reviews before buying or renting programs or movies.
8. **Give other options.** Watching TV can become a habit for children. Help them find other things to do like playing, reading, doing puzzles or art, kicking a ball, listening to music or a story, or spending time with family, friends, or neighbors.
9. **Set a good example.** As a role model, limiting your own TV viewing and choosing programs carefully will help your children do the same.
10. **Ask for help.** Talk with family members and other parents and agree to enforce similar rules about TV viewing.



Children who watch TV are more likely to be overweight

University of Michigan researchers found the following indicators of increased risk for being overweight among children who watch TV:

- Just being awake and in the room with the TV on more than two hours a day was a risk factor for being overweight at ages three and four-and-a-half.
- Weekend TV viewing in early childhood affects body mass index (BMI), or being overweight in adulthood.
- TV was a bigger factor than diet in predicting body mass index (BMI) among 3- to 7-year-old children.

Need to get chores done?

Since toddlers like to be where the action is, let them play alongside you while you work. Think creatively

about how your child can help you with the task. Have your little one "help" with your chores around the house (like matching clean socks on laundry day), or wear your child in a front carrier, sling or backpack so they can ride along and see what you are up to. For safety's sake, a backpack is the best choice when you are cooking.

- As you go about your chores, talk to your child about what you are doing.
- These chores are routine for you, but for your baby they are an incredible learning opportunity.

What toddlers can do besides watch TV

Interaction, reading, and play activities are always better than watching TV. These activities are important in the healthy development of social, emotional, and intellectual skills. Here are some ideas for activities to do with your toddler instead of watching TV:

Explore: Baby-proof an entire room and put an assortment of toys and safe household objects in the room to play with.

Watch: Hang a bird feeder outside a window where the child can see the birds and squirrels.

Listen: Play music at a moderate volume and encourage your child to sing and dance.

Touch: Toddlers like to dig, scoop, and mold, exercising their fine motor skills. Provide some play dough or a bowl half filled with beans and cups for scooping

Splash: Let your child play in the bathtub. However, never leave your child alone even for a minute when he or she is in the tub.

Look at Books: Read a book or just look at the pictures with your child.

Bag It: Let your child unpack and repack a suitcase or tote bag with toys or safe household items.

Sleep: Help your child develop a good sense of healthy naptime and bedtime habits.

Find a Friend: Trade babysitting time with other parents of toddlers so your child can experience being with other children. This interaction will contribute to healthy development.

Source: University of Michigan Health System

About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit www.first5sonomacounty.org