

# Making the Most of Television



## Tips for PARENTS of Young Viewers

### Taming the TV

Experts disagree about the number of hours children spend watching television. However, all adults can agree that the influence of television is becoming more and more powerful. Sometimes trying to control—or even be aware of—what your child is watching can seem overwhelming. Nevertheless, there are many things you as a parent or caregiver can do to make television a partner in helping your child grow and learn.

With your help, TV can expand your child's world and be a springboard to reading. Studies have shown that children who watch *some* TV read more than they would otherwise. What they see on television can ignite their interests and encourage them to read to find out more. If you help them find related books or articles, you'll encourage them to become eager readers.



**Make a TV plan.** Don't be afraid to limit TV time—most experts agree that children shouldn't watch more than 2 hours a day. You can use the following guidelines when establishing limits:

- Set some family rules and guidelines *with* your children. If you involve them, the rules are more likely to stick.
- Explain that watching too much TV takes time away from other important activities, such as reading and socializing with family and friends.
- Let children know they must fulfill such responsibilities as finishing homework, doing chores, or practicing their musical instruments before they watch TV.

Help your children plan what they'll watch in advance. Look at TV listings together and discuss the reasons for your choice of programs. Besides helping your children make decisions about what shows to watch and why, this provides a good opportunity for reading.

### **Get involved while they watch.**

Watch TV with your children as much as possible so you can discuss the programs and share insights. Talk about the programs before, during, and after you watch them.

Try these approaches:

- Predict what you expect to see and ask your child for his or her predictions.
- Discuss the show during commercials.
- Summarize and analyze the show after it is over.
- Encourage related reading. For example, if your child is interested in a program about the U.S. Civil War, plan a trip to the library to find books about it.

If your older child is at home alone after school, keep the lines of communication open and know what he or she is doing. If there's one special show your child watches during this time, be sure to discuss it with him later. You also can provide alternatives to TV by suggesting that your child read a book that you will discuss later. If children don't just automatically turn on the TV whenever they're looking for something to do, they're less likely to watch while you are at work or when they're at a friend's house.

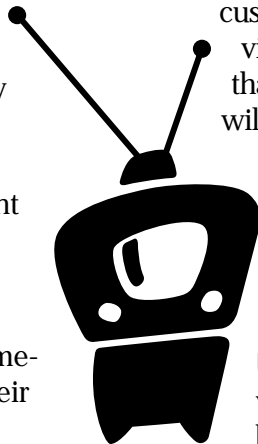
**Use the VCR and videos.** If you videotape a show in advance, you'll be able to watch it at any time that fits into the family schedule and to

stop the tape for discussion. You can borrow from the library, rent from the video store, or buy special videos. Video possibilities include

- adaptations of outstanding children's literature that make rereading the books even more enjoyable,
- classic movies the whole family can enjoy together, and
- documentaries and how-to videos that inspire further exploration of interests and hobbies.

You can consult your children's librarian or bookseller or reviews in parenting publications to find the best of what's available.

**Turn TV time into thinking time.** Reading to your children, even older children, every day is the single best thing you can do to help them become good readers. Try not to let television take the place of reading aloud, and encourage your chil-



dren to be critical viewers of the TV they do watch. Relate their viewing to reading and other activities.

*Discussion starters and activities:*

- Talk with younger children about the difference between pretend stories on TV and in books and real life.
- Explain that TV sometimes promotes stereotypes—of women, older people, ethnic groups, and other cultures. Point out examples on TV, ask children to watch for examples, and talk about how this can lead to prejudice.
- Talk about commercials and how they use special effects, music, and celebrities to influence people to buy products. Explain that the money manufacturers pay to air the commercials pays for the shows.
- Children can keep a weekly log of the shows they watch, writing down comments about these programs to discuss with you later. Have them record and look up words they don't understand.
- Look for TV programs based on books. Encourage your child to read the book before watching the show and then to compare the show and the book. Find other books by the same author at the library.
- Keep an atlas and reference books near the TV so that children can look up places they hear mentioned during the news. Encourage them to explore these topics through further reading.

## Tune into learning

All this planning may sound very time consuming, but once you get started you'll be surprised at how quickly your children pick up positive viewing habits. Once they have these habits, TV will become an asset rather than a detraction. They'll be able to watch more thoughtfully and critically and to compare what they see on television with the generally more in-depth presentation of books, newspapers, and magazines. Not only will you have tamed the TV, you'll find that you're communicating more with your children.

Other brochures in this series include:

\*Get Ready to Read! Tips for Parents of Young Children

\*Explore the Playground of Books: Tips for Parents of Beginning Readers

\*Summer Reading Adventure! Tips for Parents of Young Readers

\*Also available in Spanish.

This brochure may be purchased from the International Reading Association in quantities of 100, prepaid only. (Please contact the Association for pricing information.) Single copies are free upon request by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Requests from outside the U.S. should include an envelope, but postage is not required.

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