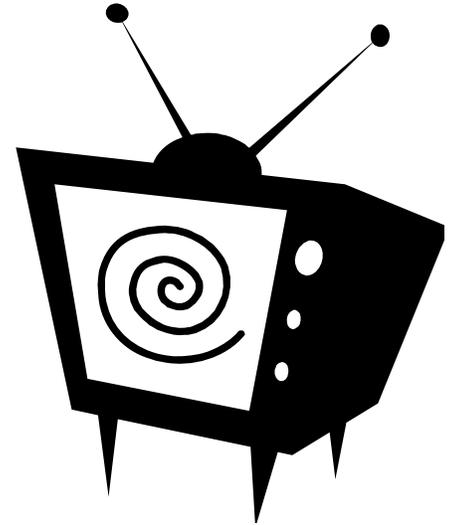


Taming the Tube

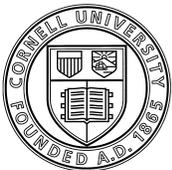
Many parents and caregivers are justifiably concerned about their children's television viewing habits. They worry about the amount of time children spend "glued to the tube" and the content of television programming. Many are disturbed by the excessive or graphic violence, sexually oriented images and language, sexist or racist stereotypes and manipulative advertising found on both commercial and cable television. Others are alarmed about the number of hours children watch TV and how television viewing interferes with other activities like homework, play and family communication.

What you can do to tame the tube:

- ***Set limits on the amount of time children watch television.*** Experts suggest that preschool children watch no more than one hour daily and school-age children watch no more than two hours.
- ***Set limits on the content of television programming.*** If you find certain programs objectionable, do not let your children see them.
- ***Watch television with your children and discuss the programs with them.*** Watching with your children will help you judge what they are learning from television and its effects on their thinking and behavior. You can reinforce learning that is positive and challenge or counteract messages you think are untrue or inappropriate.
- ***Plan family television viewing.*** Use a television guide to select programs in advance. Avoid aimless channel hopping. Encourage the entire family to have a program in mind before turning the television on and to turn it off when the show is over.
- ***Locate the television in a room where you can control its use.*** In general, the more television sets a family has, the more television is watched and the less control parents have. Don't put a television in your child's room.
- ***Don't mix television with other activities.*** Turn it off when no one is watching it and don't turn it on during meal times, family conversations, homework time or when children are playing.
- ***Don't use television as a babysitter.*** Remember: television is a powerful teacher, but it may be teaching your children the wrong lessons.
- ***Avoid using television as reward or punishment.*** Doing so places too much importance on it. Do you really want your children to be motivated by the chance to watch television?
- ***Help your child resist commercials.*** Teach your child consumer skills and help her evaluate television advertising.
- ***Use the VCR.*** Most libraries carry an excellent selection of quality movies, educational programs and children's videos. These can replace unacceptable television programs. Furthermore, by taping approved television programs, you can control when and how much television your child watches.
- ***Teach critical viewing skills.*** Tell your child what is real and what is not. Explain how television uses stunts, special effects and camera tricks to create a make-believe world. Ask them how their real-life experiences compare to television.
- ***Encourage alternative activities.*** Make a list of activities your child enjoys. Have suggestions and materials on hand when he complains that there's nothing to do. Help him use his leisure time for exercise, sports, reading, art, hobbies and creative play.



Source: Tim Jahn, Human Development Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.



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Printed 8/2008

HD 38