

TV Watching: FACTS AND TIPS

Researchers have found young children and their caregivers use fewer words and have less conversation when they're listening to the TV. Studies suggest that more TV watching equals: more language delay, more behavioral problems, less creative play, less sleep, more weight gain and increased exposure to negative effects of watching commercials, e.g., promoting junk food. Given this information, parents concerned about their child's communication skills and overall development are asked to consider these suggestions:

For babies

- Avoid TV for babies under age two. Choose activities to do with your child that promote language development and brain growth such as talking, playing, reading, singing and enjoying music.

For children over age two:

- If you allow TV time, choose age-appropriate programs, e.g., if your child is under 8, avoid programs in which the main characters are 9 or older.
- Involve older children in setting guidelines for what to watch, e.g., discuss and agree upon what programs are okay with the parents and also enjoyable for the children. Older children in the family may be asked to watch certain shows approved for them only by the parent at times when younger siblings are not present.
- Use guides and ratings to help, but watch out for unproven claims that programs or DVDs are educational. Even children's cartoons can be violent or overstimulating.
- Limit TV time to no more than two hours per day. **LESS IS BETTER.**
- Keep TV off during meals.
- Set "media-free" days and plan other fun things to do.
- Avoid using TV as a reward.
- Turn off TV when a chosen program is over and/or when no one is watching it. Don't leave TV on as background filler or while doing other things.
- When no one is actively watching, turn TV off.
- Watch TV with your child. Talk about what you see and engage with your child about the content.
- Keep TVs out of bedrooms.

Sources: Journal of Pediatric Research (2013), Pediatrics (2011, 2009, 2005), Seattle Children's Hospital, CBC News, June 1st, 2009, Science Daily (2006-2009), Med Page Today (2006), American Psychological Association (2004).