

## *Television: What Children See and Learn*

Television can be a great tool. There are many marvelous programs on television for children. But, too much television comes at the expense of other important activities. Many families have a household rule: no more than two hours of TV or computer per day. If there was a three hour program that children want to see, they have to "bank" an hour earlier in the week.

It is not enough to just limit the total time watching. Monitoring what children watch is also important. Below are some suggestions from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help parents in dealing with children and television.

### **Violence**

If your child watches three to four hours of non educational television per day, he or she will have seen about 8,000 murders on television before finishing grade school. Children who see violence on television may not understand that real violence hurts and kills people. They become numb to violence. If the "good guys" use violence, children may learn that it is okay to use force to solve problems. Studies show that even children's cartoons contain a significant amount of violence.

Research also shows a very strong link between exposure to violent TV and violent and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. Watching a lot of violence on television can lead to hostility, fear, anxiety, depression, nightmares, sleep disturbances and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is best not to let your child watch violent programs and cartoons.

### **Sex**

Television exposes children to adult behaviors, like sex. But it usually does not show the risks and results of sexual activity. On television, sexual activity is shown as normal, fun, exciting and without consequences. In commercials, sex is often used to sell products and services. Your child may copy what is seen on TV to feel more grown up.

### **Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs**

Young people today are surrounded by messages that say drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes or cigars are normal activities. These messages do not say that alcohol and tobacco harm people and may lead to death. Beer and liquor are some of the most advertised products on television. TV programs and commercials often show people who drink and smoke as healthy, energetic, sexy and successful. It is up to you to teach your child the truth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

*Television: What Children See and Learn (continued)*

### **Commercials**

The average child sees more than 40,000 commercials each year. Commercials are quick, fast-paced and entertaining. After seeing the same commercials over and over, your child can easily remember a song, slogan or catchy phrase. Commercials try to convince your child that having a certain toy or eating a certain food will make him or her happy or popular. Older children can begin to understand how ads use pictures, music and sound to entertain. Kids need to know that ads try to convince people to buy things they may not need.

One final suggestion; remember good habits are something we can all model. Try not to get in the habit of using your television for “background noise”. While cleaning, cooking, or doing other household chores, turn the television off and turn on some music!