

[IMAGE]

No Substitute for Good Parenting

Are your children glued to the boob tube? Even if we assume for a moment that there is value to the learning experiences provided by some educational programs, countless other not-so-beneficial programs fill our children's brains with thoughts of violence, crude language and inappropriate social interactions. And what about those "good" shows that teach children how to count, spell and discern right from wrong; since when did a TV program become a suitable substitute for good parenting? Yes, it's the magic and wonder of television, that little box (or flat screen) the average American is content to spend *nine years* of their life watching.

Recent research tells a discouraging tale about children and television habits. According to a 2007 study published in the peer-reviewed journal *Pediatrics*, sustained television viewing (two or more hours per day from ages 30-33 months to 5.5 years) was associated with poor behavioral and social skills compared to children who watched less daily TV. The study also found having a TV in the child's bedroom contributed to sleep problems and emotional issues at 5.5 years of age. (A whopping 41 percent of children had a TV in their room at age 5 1/2.)

It's no wonder the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that parents limit children's TV exposure to no more than one to two hours of *quality* programming daily and not keep a TV in their child's bedroom. If there's any good news, it's that the study found heavy exposure in early childhood did not have enduring consequences if viewing habits were adjusted; children with early exposure only (less exposure at 5 1/2 years) did not have behavioral and social difficulties compared to children with heavy exposure at both ages.

Kid watching TV - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Another study in *Pediatrics*, published three years earlier, suggests early television viewing (at ages 1 and 3) can contribute to problems with attention at age 7. The number of hours viewed per day was associated with an increasing risk of developing problems with attention span.

So-called "educational" programming may help children learn if parents don't have the time to teach them, but it doesn't seem to make them any smarter, according to a 2008 study, again in *Pediatrics*. Researchers concluded, "Contrary to parents' perceptions that TV viewing is beneficial to their children's brain

development, we found no evidence of cognitive benefit from watching TV during the first two years of life."

Other studies suggest a clear link between television viewing in childhood / adolescence and lack of exercise and poor eating habits. After all, sitting on a couch all day doesn't leave kids with much time to exercise or eat right, especially when they're being bombarded with ads for chips, soft drinks and fast-food items.

If that's not enough, here's a final statistic to consider: On any given week, the average U.S. child spends an estimated 1,700 minutes (four hours a day) watching TV and under *four minutes* engaged in "meaningful" conversation with their parents. Isn't it time to reverse those numbers?

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