

**Joanne Austin**  
**Area Family Living Agent**  
**WSU Cooperative Extension**  
**360-428-4270**

## **WHAT ARE YOUR KIDS WATCHING ON TV?**

How much time do your children spend watching television? Do you worry about what they see and learn? If so, it may be time to evaluate your family's viewing habits.

Consider these statistics from the National Network for Child Care. In the United States most 2 – 5 year olds watch more than 4 hours of television a day. The average family has the TV on 6.2 hours each day. The average child sees 45 acts of violence on TV each day. Ninety percent of the shows children are watching are designed for adults rather than children.

Research indicates that TV violence can have a serious effect on children and adolescents. They may develop emotional fears and become less sensitive to the horror of violence. Some children may go so far as to act out the violence they have observed on television.

What can parents do?

- Keep the television in a family viewing area so you can monitor what children are watching. However, if the television is in the kitchen or dining room it drastically interrupts family communication, especially at mealtime.
- Determine what is the role of the television. Select what is being watched, rather than having it on all the time. One family resolved the “couch potato” habit by unplugging the TV and hooking it to a generator on a stationery bike. To watch TV someone had to pedal.
- Watch TV with your children and evaluate what they are watching. Observe the responses of your children. Do they express fear, excitement, or anger? Consider what is appropriate for each child's age. **Infants and toddlers** are interested in bright, colorful objects and music. Most shows don't hold their interest for very long. **Preschoolers** have a longer attention span but generally they can't tie everything together in a story. Adult shows are too confusing and may frighten them. **School-age children** understand more but still may misinterpret what they see. They take things literally and may believe a certain type of car will really make their life more exciting. Violence has a significant impact on the school-age child. They may develop fear of being killed or kidnapped. The evening news can be very frightening.
- Turn off violent television shows. Discuss why you disapprove of the violence.
- Talk about options other than violence to resolve problems. Clarify the difference between real life and make-believe.
- Evaluate commercials and challenge your children to figure out what gimmicks and techniques are being used to sell products.
- Contact TV stations and advertisers to express your opinion. What shows and ads meet your approval or disapproval?

By implementing a family plan for TV viewing you can drastically affect the impact of television on your children.