PBS KIDS Ready To Learn®

Why Not Just Turn It Off?

Answering the Critics

Q. Why not just prohibit kids from watching TV?

A. Because 99% of homes in the U.S. have televisions. With that many television sets around, children are going to watch TV no matter what. The only question is whether or not they will have the skills to choose well and view actively.

Because kids who don't watch at all miss out on some great stuff. There are a lot of places that only video can take us—to other planets, inside the human body, inside a volcano, to see a demonstration or performance that took place 20 years ago.

Q. Kids watch too much TV already. Should they watch more in school or child care?

A. Some kids do watch too much TV, and heavy viewing isn't good for them. But the same children who are viewing too much at home are also the least likely to be learning critical viewing skills at home. Using TV actively in the classroom or child care setting can model a different—and more productive—way of viewing. Thus, viewing in a controlled or structured educational setting can actually support and expand learning.

Q. Does TV keep children from reading books?

A. The studies are mixed on this. Some researchers have found that television viewing can replace other "quiet time" activities, including reading. This is especially true for heavy viewers. Other studies have found no effect, especially in light or moderate viewers. However, we do know that television can be used to reinforce reading.

Age-appropriate television viewed actively can also help children develop pre-reading skills, including vocabulary development, sequencing, letter and word recognition, and an understanding of character, setting, and passage of time.

Q. Will TV turn children into zombies?

A. Many journalists have claimed TV is no more than "a plug-in drug." But they are journalists, not researchers and the research does not back up their claims. Video can present a lot of information at one time, and some children will stare intently at the set to take it all in. But they are concentrating, not shutting down their brains. In fact, we know that well-designed, educational programming—like PBS programs—viewed in moderation, can stimulate children's brains and help them learn.

Q. Where do children learn to watch TV?

A. Children pick up viewing habits from watching the adults around them. If their only viewing model is an adult who uses television to help fall asleep or to kill time, they will likely become passive viewers. But if they see adults use the TV as a resource, they will, too. That is why PBS *Ready To Learn* emphasizes active viewing and critical thinking skills. You know your children. Ask yourself, "How do my children learn and play? How will they get the most from our watching TV together?" Some children will want to be actively involved with the TV—they watch by singing, dancing and talking to the TV. Some children will want to sit and absorb what they see and hear—then talk about it later.

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