

# TIP SHEET FOR PARENTS:

## Television



Many parents, at some point in time, worry about the impact of TV on their child. Parents frequently ask: *How much TV should children be watching? What types of shows should they watch? What effects will TV viewing have on them? Will TV cause ADHD, attention problems or obesity? Will TV programs make my child aggressive?* Parents need to know about how TV viewing can impact on children's development, as research shows that it can have both a positive and negative impact. It really depends what and when your child watches TV and not necessarily how much they watch.

### SO HOW MUCH SHOULD THEY WATCH?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and various Australian Children's hospitals recommend **NO SCREEN-TIME** for children **under 2 years of age**. These guidelines are based on 'fear of harm'. For children under 2 years of age, research has shown that **TV viewing** does not promote learning, contrary to the marketing claims of popular DVD programs marketed towards babies and toddlers. There are also concerns associated with the impact of (excessive) TV viewing on children's attention, language delays, sleeping difficulties, compromised playtime and obesity rates. Very young children should spend time on other more worthwhile activities such as playing with physical materials and moving (both critical for brain development), rather than with passive media like TV.

For children aged 2 years and over the recommendations vary, but generally no more than **1-2 hours of quality screen time** is recommended each day. Screen time is NOT just TV viewing- it includes computers, gaming consoles, DVDs. TV viewing has a '**displacement effect**'- i.e. children spend time watching TV and are inactive, instead of participating in other worthwhile activities, such as imaginative play and interactions with peers and adults.

### THE REALITY...

Screen time limits are often ineffective and place parents under unnecessary stress. Interestingly, the APA recommendations for screen time are based on research with passive media (like TV) and we now have a wealth of other technologies which are now more *interactive* like iPads and gaming consoles. Technological advancements have also allowed children's TV to soon become more interactive (see Kinect and Sesame Street project).

Rather than focussing on **HOW MUCH** TV children watch, parents should focus on **WHAT** children watch, **WHEN** children are watching it, **WHY** children are watching it and **HOW** they are watching it (are they alone or co-viewing with Mum or Dad)? This is much more helpful than simply imposing a number of hours of TV viewing.



### TV is LIKE FOOD...

The right sorts, at the right time, make for a healthy 'media diet'. Too much and the wrong types of TV (violent content & fast-paced cartoons) make for an unhealthy 'media diet' It is more than just how much children consume.

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### What Parents Need to Know:

A child's **early experiences matter**. Connections between brain cells are based on children's earliest experiences, so parents are literally shaping their child's brain. TV can have both *positive* and *negative* effects on this wiring process. Like anything, a balanced approach is best.

When you are not using the TV **TURN IT OFF!** **Background TV** has been shown to be detrimental in terms of children's language development. Today's children aged 8 months to 8 years are exposed to nearly four hours of background TV a day, according to a recent US study.

Children actually learn from parent-led conversations during or following TV viewing (**co-viewing**). Ask questions such as, "How do you think the character was feeling when..?", "What do you think would happen if..." "When have you ever felt..." Use TV viewing as an opportunity to 'capture the teachable moment'. Have rich conversations about what your child has watched on TV.

**CONTENT IS KING**- what a child watches is critical. For example, *rapid, fast-paced cartoons* have been shown to pre-condition the mind to expect high levels of stimulation. This is why we recommend no cartoons before school- as children's brains expect that rapid-fire pace to continue at school. *Violent TV* content has also been shown to cause aggressive behaviour in children.

**Watching TV** can have **educational benefits**. Research shows that *educational programming*, such as Sesame Street and Playschool, have a positive effect on children's language and school readiness skills.

### CONTACT US

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### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR MANAGING SCREEN TIME

Set and enforce **limits** for TV viewing each day (start this as soon as your child starts watching TV). For older children, it may be better to negotiate limits as opposed to imposing limits.

There are several **apps** that allow you to record children's screen-time (this way there is no arguing with the app when time is up!). Apps include 'Screen Time-Media Time Manager' and 'Game Time Limit for Parents'.

Provide **TV vouchers**- children can earn these *after* they have spent time playing outdoors or completing other activities.



### ABOUT EVERY CHANCE TO LEARN

Dr Kristy Goodwin is the Director of Every Chance to Learn & Lecturer at Macquarie University. She delivers parent & teacher workshops & seminars related to early learning & development in a digital age. Kristy has worked as a teacher in a range of settings & as a consultant for children's media companies & the NSW Department of Education & Communities. She delivers parent seminars & teacher professional learning on a range of topics related to how we can harness the potential offered by new technologies such as iPads, digital games, and their impact on children's learning & development.