



# Australian Council on Children and the Media

**fact  
sheet**

## Top ten tips for parents

### 1. Lead by example

Children will model their viewing patterns on what they see you doing.

Try to avoid turning the TV on as soon as you arrive home and then leaving it on as background. Practise some guidelines for yourself such as turning the TV off as soon as visitors arrive or after your favourite TV show is finished.

Watch and support programs that you believe are good. Let TV and radio stations, network executives, and advertisers know what you like and what you don't like.

### 2. Choose which programs to watch on TV

If we accept that we all use the TV as a babysitter from time to time, consider how carefully you would normally choose a baby-sitter for your child. Remember your children will be picking up values and attitudes from the TV they watch every day. Try to make sure these values and attitudes are what you believe in too.

Apply this thinking to the 'adult' shows, including the daily news which your child watches along with you. The younger the child, the more impressionable he or she is, and the less experienced in evaluating content against the values of family and community. Some images in the TV news are extremely disturbing for very young children and could lead to sleep disturbance.

#### Keep TV out of kids' bedrooms

It is difficult to monitor what your children are watching when they are watching TV in their own room. They may be tempted to watch TV when it would be more appropriate for them to be studying, reading, or sleeping.

Having a TV in a child's room discourages participation in family activities. It also means that you are not able to explain disturbing or misleading

information, or explain how your family values may contradict the values being depicted.

#### Decide as a family what you will watch in advance

Go through the TV guide in the paper on Sunday and make family decisions on shows to watch for the week. Discuss reasons for the decisions with your children. If in doubt, get more information, using independent evaluations like KidScore, TV and movie guides, articles in magazines, etc. Discuss issues and ideas with other adults, friends, and parents of your children's playmates.

#### Teach children how to plan their own TV viewing

For very young children, write a list or draw pictures of their favourite shows that are coming up in the next week. Give them a counter for each one and have them give it to you as they watch it. Many very young children respond to star charts based around this idea. Or give them a certain number of counters for a week, reflecting the amount of TV you are happy for them to watch. If they have counters left over, reward them with a special activity that they enjoy.

You can help older children to circle what they want to watch in the TV Program. Help them to learn to turn the TV off when they have watched what they planned to.

#### Use the classifications system and consumer advice lines

Choose P and C programs for your children. They must meet certain requirements laid down by the Children's Television Standards. You can check these out on the Australian Broadcasting Authority's (ABA) website ([www.aba.gov.au](http://www.aba.gov.au)). G programs should be suitable for children to watch without adult supervision.

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### **3. Tape programs the family wants to see**

If there is a program or movie on TV that everyone wants to watch, tape it and schedule a special family viewing - complete with popcorn. If a show is on at an inconvenient time such as meal time, homework time, or family time, tape it to watch later.

Tape good children's programs for later viewing. Young children love to watch their favourites over and over again. The small discrete episodes which are often shown on the ABC are good fillers while you get the evening meal. When tea is ready, it will be easier for young children to turn the TV off at the end of one of these than in the middle of a longer show or video.

### **4. Choose some times when the TV is off.**

Plan TV free times during a day.

#### **Set clear guidelines about when the TV can be on**

Depending on the age of your children, you can work out these guidelines with your input. The sort of guidelines you might want to think about are: no TV before school, that the TV only goes on once homework is completed, only one hour of TV per day etc. The clearer the guidelines are the better.

Sticking to these guidelines is important and children of all ages need and will respond guidelines if they think they are fair and they are consistently applied.

### **5. Choose a family area which is a TV free space.**

If possible set up an area where people can sit and read or play games. Make it comfortable and use it

#### **Don't make TV the focal point of the room**

If it isn't possible to create a separate area, try to rearrange the room so that the TV is no longer the focal point. Research shows that people watch less TV if it is not in the most prominent location in the room. Put the TV in a cabinet or cupboard or drape a rug over it.

#### **Have meals in a different room**

Turn off the TV at meal times and sit around a table. Catch up with one another and share stories and activities from each family member's day.

### **6. Talk about programs seen on TV.**

Discuss what you are watching and ask specific questions. Ask what your children see—it may be very different from what you see, so ask them to tell you what they think is happening.

Express your views. You can be a powerful media educator by pointing out devices that are used or values that are being promoted that contradict your family values.

### **7. Encourage children to describe how TV affects them**

Ask them why they watch specific shows, what characters they like and don't like. Talk about how family members feel about certain programs - happy, scared, excited, worried, angry.

### **8. Play 'Spot the Gimmicks and Trickery' in TV commercials.**

Discuss the commercials and their perception of toys, cereals, etc. and the people who sell them. Point out the tricks that advertising companies use and play a game around children noticing these for themselves.

Point out the real thing in the shops and compare what has been promised with what the toy actually does.

### **9. Make a list of other things for the family to do.**

Sit down with your children and write down other activities that they enjoy. They might think of craft activities, games, toys, visiting friends. Audio tapes are often a good alternative for younger children. Toy libraries can help with keeping the supply of toys fresh and interesting.

### **10. Find the 'OFF' button on the TV set.**

And practise using it.