



Watching the TV News

What it is

When we talk about ‘the News’, what we are usually talking about is a collection of the worst, and often the most violent, things that have happened in the world on that day.

Impact of watching the news

Adults

- realise that what is on the News does not represent what is likely to happen to them in their daily lives
- know that the News principally reports on the most violent events from all over the world, often in a sensationalised manner
- choose to watch the News for a variety of reasons, including that they may wish to be informed about world events, and in the knowledge that many of these events are far removed from their own immediate experience
- can nonetheless be made to feel depressed and anxious by watching the News.

Children

- lack grown-ups’ experience of the world and so are unable to distinguish between what they see and the likelihood of these events occurring in their own lives
- may think that when they see the same event over and over again (such as the often repeated images of the planes hitting the World Trade Centre in New York) that the event is *actually* happening over and over again
- can be made anxious because they think that the events that they see are likely to happen to them. At a young age, they are unable to understand the concept of probability so are not necessarily reassured if you tell them ‘it isn’t likely to happen to us’
- may become quite fearful if violence is shown in settings with which they are familiar, such as homes and families, or children and animals.

What are the greatest risks

- the risk is greater to primary age children, than to very young children, as older children know that ‘the news’ is supposed to be the real world and are more likely to identify with the persons and situations in the news. For example they may fear being kidnapped, or that their family might suffer a fate seen in the news
- particularly catastrophic events such as 11 September 2001 in New York pose acute problems for children, as viewing adults’ fears will be communicated to the watching children.

What parents can do

It’s best to turn off the TV news when your children are in the room.

While children should not be shielded from the realities of the world, ‘the news’ as a collection of the most horrific events of the world is not representative of everything that happens in the world in one day. Younger children find it very difficult to understand that the events they are seeing are unlikely to happen to them.

The ABC program *BTN (Behind the News)* is an excellent program produced to assist children in understanding the events of the world from a perspective appropriate to their age and development. Find out if your child watches this program at school, or tape it yourself to watch with your child.

Fact Sheets about Children and the Media

The Australian Council of Children and the Media has over 60 printed Fact Sheets about the impact of the media on children, e.g. *Children and Disaster in the Media - Questions and Answers for Parents*

childrenandmedia.org.au/resources/fact-sheets

