

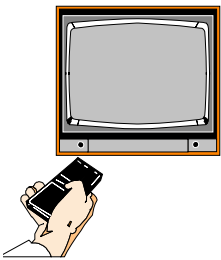
FINDING ALTERNATIVES TO WATCHING TELEVISION: NOT EASY AT FIRST, BUT WORTH IT IN THE LONG RUN

"Our cable went out three days ago. I can't wait until it comes back on...my kids are driving me crazy!"
Quote from a parent after a temporary glitch in the family's cable service left them without television.

"You took away the TV as punishment? Don't you realize that's a punishment for ME, too?" *One parent to the other, reacting to a "you are grounded from TV for a week" punishment doled out to their child for misbehaving.*

"I NEED TO GET SOME WORK DONE. GO TURN ON THE TV..."

After a long day at work, parents still have many responsibilities to fulfill at home: preparing dinner, getting clothes and lunches ready for school the next day, laundry, house/yard work, returning phone calls, paying bills, and a myriad of other obligations. Oftentimes, it is parents who want the TV on so that they can have some peace and get things accomplished while their children are watching; however, this "medicine for quiet" is not without negative side effects.



The more children watch TV, the less they read for fun. Research from the National Center for Education Statistics states that children who read for fun daily score higher on proficiency tests than those children who never read for fun. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has warned that when children have a TV in their bedroom, they often stay awake too late watching it, causing them to be tired at school the next day. When children are tired, they have a harder time concentrating and learning! The American Heart Association is concerned that the sedentary lives children are leading while plopped in front of the TV and computer are not "heart healthy."

This is not to say that we should *never* watch TV. There are educational programs that are worth watching. Parents and children can benefit from watching and discussing the content of quality programs together. But how can parents limit their children's TV viewing, yet teach them how to occupy themselves in healthier and more productive ways? Here are a few suggestions:

- ❖ Ask children to think of activities they enjoy other than watching television. Then, write (or have them write) this sentence: "Instead of watching TV, I could..." Elicit ideas from them to finish the sentence. Refer back to their list during the next "no TV time." Eventually, children will learn how to play independently and find creative ways to pass the time. Also, making this list will reinforce their reading and writing skills. Encourage children to add to the list as they think of new ideas. Include children's responsibilities, such as chores or homework, on the list.
- ❖ Provide alternatives to TV watching ahead of time. Fill the home with books from the library, board games, art supplies, paper and pencils, puzzle books, etc.
- ❖ Set an example. Do you always reach for the remote when you have some down time? Let your children see you reading or exercising instead of zoning in front of the tube!
- ❖ Set clear rules about TV viewing, such as "no TV past 8 o'clock" or "no TV until homework has been completed." However, the AAP recommends against using TV as a reward or punishment, as this conveys the message that TV is more important than it actually is.
- ❖ At first, your children may beg, "Pleeeeaassse let me watch my show!" and you may be tempted to give in so you can have some peace. It is important to **stand firm**. Over time, children will learn to engage themselves in healthier, more productive ways and not solely rely on you --or the TV -- for entertainment.

Sarah's List *Instead of watching TV,* *I could:*

- * Play in the backyard
- * Ride my bike around the block
- * Go for a walk with Mom or Dad
- * Play leapfrog
- * Run around outside
- * Water the flowers
- * Read a book
- * Listen to a book on tape
- * Draw a picture
- * Cut out shapes from a magazine and glue them to paper
- * Make a card for someone I love
- * Finish my homework
- * Write a letter to grandma
- * Play with the dog
- * Play a board game with my sister
- * Finish my chores
- * Listen to music

Sources: "Instead of Watching TV, I Could...Quick Activity" by the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org; "What Parents Can Do About TV" by the American Academy of Pediatrics, at www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/tv-2.htm; "Why Parents Say They Don't Limit TV" by Christine Della Maggiora, consultant to LimiTV at www.limitv.org/why.htm; "Less TV Opens Doors to Literacy" by the TV Turnoff Network at www.tvturnoff.org.