

Television: How Much is Too Much for Children?

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Television, when properly used, can stimulate a child's educational and creative activity. It can suggest new ways of seeing and understanding life, and may help improve vocabularies.

But how much is too much? The average U.S. household has at least one television set turned on for about 7 hours each day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting a child's viewing to one or two supervised hours a day.

"Because very young children do not think in the same way adults do and lack the maturity and experience of adults, they shouldn't have unlimited access to the television," says Maria Pippidis, Extension home economics agent.

Pippidis, who researched and wrote a fact sheet on helping children learn from television, says children cannot make objective evaluations, cannot form logical conclusions and cannot sort out relevant data about the things they see on television.

If you are concerned about your family's viewing habits, Pippidis suggests keeping a log of how many hours children spend in front of the TV each day.

"Decide how much programming you are willing to let a child watch," she says. "Then read through the television section on Sunday evening and make your selections for the coming week.

"Watch with your children so you can discuss the programs and relate them to your own lives," she adds. "Discussions led by an adult can dramatically improve the value of almost any program."

Pippidis also suggests encouraging other activities. Encourage your children to explore other avenues of information. Take them with you to the library, look up answers in reference books and start enjoying the newspaper. Use television as a springboard for other activities,

Find places on a map, explore nature or write down your child's dictated story.

"Recent research found that the primary motivation for a child or adult to learn something new is the involvement of another family member," Pippidis says. "The magic ingredient is time spent together exploring and mastering the information and experience."
