



**Taking Time**  
by  
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Now that we've turned our clocks back, you may find yourself and your children in front of the TV more than you would like. Although my personal preference is to greatly limit TV viewing by all family members, I know that may not happen especially during the dark, dreary winter months. You do have some options for really making that TV viewing

time work for you as a family. First, deliberately review a printed schedule, and as a family, select programs to watch. Try to avoid having each person watch his own show in a room by himself. This opportunity practices decision-making skills and allows all of us to practice evaluating choices. Allow each person an opportunity to vote, choose, and

express preference. (It's amazing how kids can learn negotiation skills through this.) I know some families where each person is allowed to select one TV show during the week that will be their "pick." Don't channel surf to make up your mind about what to watch. Limit the amount of time/number of shows each person can select. My husband and I just reviewed the latest PBS program guide. I was really excited about some of the options it listed like Austin City Limits and Wynton Marsalis on Music. I also would love to take time for some New Orleans Cooking Lessons.

While watching TV as a family, hold younger children on your lap. Sit close together. This is especially important for parents who are separated from their children for the majority of the day. This enhances a child's sense of security.

Now that you've selected a show to watch and have settled in to comfortable positions, try playing "TV Talk." Make an envelope

with questions for each type of TV program that you might view. During a commercial, hit the mute on your remote control and ask one person to select a questions in the appropriate category and answer it with his opinion or view.

If time allows, other family members can respond or ask additional questions of the person. Each person's opinion needs to be listened to respectfully. During the next commercial break, another person takes a turn. Here are some questions to get you started. Before beginning a show, you might want to jot down some additional ones.

For sports programs: Since the last commercial break, list an many examples as you can remember that illustrate good sportsmanship. If you were coaching the losing team, what would you tell them right now? If you could spend time with any one of the players, who would you choose and what would you want to do together?

For sit-coms: Do you know the people in real life who act the way the characters in this show behave? How do you feel about the way people treat each other in this program?

For suspense programs: Think about what the story is about. Tell why or why not something like that could actually happen in the town where you live. Which character would you NOT want to be? Tell why.

For soap operas: What do you think people like about watching programs like this? What do you think about the way the characters in this program handle problems?

For news/documentaries: Have you learned something that you didn't know before by watching

this program? If yes, what have you learned? Do you think some people might disagree with what's being said on this program? Why or why not?

For drama programs: Who is your favorite character and what do you like about him/her? Pretend you are being magically transported into the world portrayed in this program. What would you do once you got there?

For commercials: Do the people in this commercial act like people in real life? Does this commercial try to sell something you think is not healthy? If so, why do you think that is so?

Another way to tune in to a TV show and build some discussion is to keep count of the number of violent acts made in the show (with or without weapons) against people/property. Talk about other ways the problem could have been solved. Discuss whether viewing violence affects the way you view the world. Discuss what purpose violence serves in entertainment.

It's obvious that the suggestions I've offered change TV time radically. If you're hoping that TV time gives you an opportunity to escape, stop thinking, and ignore your responsibilities for awhile, these ideas aren't for you. But if you're frustrated with how the TV robs you of family time, these may improve the situation. Instead of checking out and becoming a passive, couch potato, use your television set as a center for family time and family conversation. It takes a little effort on your part, but this is one way to redeem a popular pastime that otherwise might shut us off from one another.

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