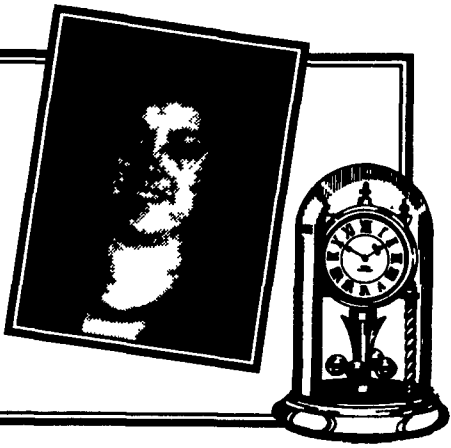


Taking Time by Rebecca Escott



watching television than any other activity except sleeping. This is particularly harmful for young children, under 5 years of age, who are at critical stages for language and cognitive skill development. For them, television viewing displaces time that could be spent on other activities which would help their learning. One very noticeable area is where television viewing replaces reading with children.

When you turn the television off, find a book to read with your children. Or designate one night a week as a television-free night where everyone reads instead of watching television. You can be the difference. Help turn off the television and turn kids on to reading.

Reading is just one option when the television is turned off. Since the television is off, start bath time early. But make it a special occasion - double or triple the amount of bubble bath you normally use. Kids will have a great time making bubble sculptures, piling and blowing

away mountains of suds. You may find yourself in hysterics, too.

If you want to get some fresh air, try a family game of HackySack™. I imagine it's been awhile since many of you played that game in the high school parking lot or on the college green. Your kids will get a chuckle at your efforts, and you may be humbled by your lack of flexibility. It's like playing with a hula hoop. Every time I try, I find myself saying, "I used to be able to do this! Why can't I now?"

For those families who can't find a HackySack™, you can play your own version of the game. Roll up two unmatched socks. Place them inside a third sock and tie it shut with a rubber band. Now start the game. The goal is to toss the sock in the air and keep it from touching the ground by ricocheting it off your feet, knees, head, etc. The

use of hands is not allowed. This is great practice for the budding soccer player! How many kicks or how many seconds can your family keep the sock moving?

The National Institute on Media and Family also encourages families to make the following choices in an effort to "tame the tube."

Don't place a television in a child's room.

Set up rules about when the television can be watched (for example, not before school, not until homework is done, only on weekends, etc.)

Turn the television off during meal times.

If the television is on, watch it as a family and discuss the storyline/content.

Like many other good decisions in life, these actions take your time, but the payoff is worth it for your children and your family

Turn Off the Television
Studies document that watching more than one to two hours of television per day (even "good," educational television) was associated with lower school performance and lower IQ scores. One particular study found that having the TV on as "background noise," when no one was obviously watching it, limited language development in young children.

To me, the obvious response to these studies is: 1) use televi-

sion very selectively, and 2) when possible turn it off. Family life is wild enough. Television just adds one more thing to juggle, one more distraction to keep us from going outside, one more excuse to keep us from reading a good book or having an important conversation.

The National Institute on Media and Family reports that the average child and adolescent spends between 21 and 28 hours per week watching television. Children spend more time

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