



**Dads Help Tame the "Tube"**

According to the National Institute on Media and the Family, children spend more time watching television than any other activity except sleeping. This means television can become a powerful tool in a child's life. And dads play an important role in determining whether that tool results in positive or negative behaviors in the child.

Tim, a potato grower and father of three girls ages 18 months to 6 years, has seen that. "They're learning from television. They're learning good stuff, but they're also learning bad stuff. Sometimes after I hear them say something they've heard on television I have to tell them, 'Those words are not appropriate.'"

Scott, a father of two young boys agrees. He says parental

monitoring is crucial. "Right now we have 100 percent control of what they watch." He and his wife decided to keep the television elevated, so the kids couldn't reach the power switch. They review the TV guide descriptions of shows. And sometimes when the content turns sour in the middle of a show, he simply announces, "Let's go make some popcorn!" to keep the children from seeing content that concerns him.

Several dads mentioned that they use videos as a substitute for television. One urged parents to check out the free children's videos available at the public library as an alternative to commercial broadcasts.

As children grow, rules naturally change. Steve, the father of three teenagers, does not have rules for television viewing these days. He and his wife have declare one or two late night shows "off limits," but have few

other controls in place. But they used to. During the elementary school years, he recalls they allowed the television only to be watched on weekends during the school year. This encouraged his children to all become avid readers.

Researchers know that when television displaces other more enriching activities, children's development suffers. This is especially true when the shows they are viewing are cartoon or entertainment-type shows rather than carefully constructed, age-appropriate educational shows. That's why Tim said, "Sometimes we just have to chase them out of the house and say, 'Go play outside,' if the television has been on too much that day."

Children between the ages of three and five are at a critical stage for language and literacy development. In 1985 Drs.

Searls and Ward documented that children who watched more than three hours of television a day had the poorest reading skills among their peers. So limiting the time spent in front of the television is important to later school and job performance.

What other issues related to television concerned these dads? The father of the teens was extremely concerned about how blatant the sexual messages were on shows—not just a few shows but seemingly everything his children wanted to watch. Scott felt strongly that more government regulations were not the solution, "It's got to be the parent's responsibility to turn off the television. I don't want the government doing what I should be doing as a parent."

The industry is only making what sells, and if parents started turning the violent stuff off, the industry would start to change."

Although there are many concerns, there are also some shared fun times. Scott likes to watch Nova and Krat's Creatures with his son. Steve enjoys sharing Seinfeld reruns with his kids. And Tim recalls a cute moment, while working on his tractor, his girls found his tape measure and started reenacting a scene from Mary Poppins declaring to one another, 'Really stubborn and suspicious.' "They even measured me!"

The dads did admit that if they weren't careful, television could become a babysitter or the trick to getting kids to fall asleep at nap time. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children watch no more than two hours of television a day. The National Institute on Media and the Family adds that televisions should be kept out of kids' bedrooms and should be turned off during meal times.

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