

Television **The Third Parent : Good or Bad for Children?**

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For SOME children under SOME conditions SOME television is harmful.

For OTHER children under OTHER conditions it may be beneficial.

For MOST children under MOST conditions MOST TV is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial.

Schramm Lyle and Parker (1961)

In every home a heated argument is on. Papa says: "Switch off that idiot box". Son says: "I cannot miss my weekly movie". Mamma Says: "TV is bad for health, you will get specs". Daughter says: "Just 15 minutes more".

Although written 33 years ago, the above quote on television (TV) viewing and children is as relevant today as it was then. Extensive research is on all over the world regarding influence of TV on children.

Television has become an integral part of furniture and practically every affluent home has atleast one set. The children are born into a world where TV is present from the start. Increasingly with age, young television viewers come to attend more consistently and strategically to programmes and understand more effectively what they view.

Television is a potent force. For better or worse, television is a teacher. In some homes it is a baby sitter, engaging a child when parents are not around. Television, hence, can be called "a third parent".

Television is preferred even to food and shelter and clothes. In all homes where there is a television set children are dedicated consumers spending 20-25 hours per week in front of the television.

Studies of television watching by young children recognise that it has some beneficial effects such as increase

in knowledge and broadening of interest. On the other hand, there are evidences of harmful effects such as too much stimulation, nervous tension, sleeplessness, nightmares, aggressiveness in play with other children and acceptance of the pattern of unsociable behaviour as a norm. This is specially true when parents exercise little or no control over programmes their children watch.

Many Ills

Experts say television viewing greatly reduces the time available for reading, constructive play, hobbies, and outdoor pursuits. A sundry result is the associated habit of snack eating, with resulting risk of obesity. Many sociologists and psychologists are afraid that television is going to deteriorate interpersonal relationship and the warmth in human relationship would be lost because of the encroachment of television on the lives of human beings. Three decades of research in USA suggests a casual link between exposure of children to violent images on television and subsequent violent behaviour. Television watching inhibits the child's healthy motor development because of less physical activities. It keeps the children away from constructive activities.

So, the parents must know the "third parent" well enough. They should know the liabilities and assets which a television has in the interest of children. They should be aware of the harmful effects of this medium on the physical and mental health of their children. At the same time they must also know the potential which television has as parent, teacher and reformer.

Scientists engaged in research on television viewing have so many different opinions. They are : 1. No known direct ill effects reported. 2. TV

viewing children are not zoobies. 3. TV is bad for children and it endangers a lust for violence. 4. TV is good for children as violence acted out dramatically helps children to get rid of hostile urges. 5. TV has little effect on children's personality. So, as parents, we should first know the strategies to mediate the impact of TV programmes on children. These would include the following :

1. TV is spice of life and not the whole meal; so, the parents should spend time with their children.

2. Parents should watch their own TV addiction.

3. TV is not a baby sitter.

4. *Do not dispose off your TV* : If you sell off your TV set, children would go elsewhere to watch it. It is also wise to watch TV with the children so that parents can discuss with them the ideas, feelings and values generated by the programme. This would help the children to learn to view in a proper perspective and help social and moral learning. Parents should remember that TV has a positive value in a child's learning.

5. Beware of overstimulation. Hence restricting number of hours in front of TV is a must.

6. Help children to learn from TV.

7. Foster a democratic atmosphere in the family and promote warm relationships with children. Do not allow the TV to upset the normal routine in the family.

8. Introduce children to hobbies and alternate channels of recreation.

9. School can play a positive role in utilizing the creative and useful outcome of TV.

10. Television viewing can be used as a reward.

11. Parents should make it a point during bed time rituals that they include reading and talking and less TV.

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Nursing Strategies

The following strategies help in creating a balance between TV watching and other activities for children and adults:

(a). Educate parents about normal child development with emphasis given to the effect that visual media, specially TV, can have on early child development.

(b). Encourage parents to spend time with their children.

(c). Support parents in exercising control over the use of TV in the homes.

(d). Encourage parents to be role models for their children by participating in activities other than TV viewing and by changing their own TV viewing habits.

(e). Encourage children to engage in physical activities and exercise.

(f). Introduce children to games such as monopoly, cards and other board games.

(g). Encourage reading as an alternate form of entertainment.

(h). Counsel parents in the

provision of structured bedtime rituals that include reading and talking and less TV.

(i). Discourage the acquisition of a second TV set or cable TV in households with unsupervised young children.

(j). Advise parents against the use of TV as a babysitter or as a reward or punishment.

Finally, we must remember, in the words of Dorothy Singer (1989): "Professionals and parents must be aware of all sources of input for their children, not only peers, textbooks, teachers and relatives but also from the subtle 'stranger' in the living room who talks to children daily with complex messages of sharing, friendship and concern for others.

Recommendation

A Separate Doordarshan Channel for Children: The last but not the least, all the individuals in the society who are interested in the welfare of children,

should come together and convince the Government for offering useful and quality programmes on television for children.

Finally, parents must learn to have peaceful coexistence with television and accommodate this 'third parent' in their homes and put it to use for the development of their children and shaping of their personality.

References

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2. Deitz, W.H., and V.C. Strasburger (1991) : Children, Adolescents and Television', *Current Problems in Paediatrics*, 21, 8-31.

3. Chaudhary, Mamta and Veena Mann. (1993) : 'TV : Good or Bad?' *Social Welfare*, May-June, 43-44.

4. Suraj Gupta (1990), Recent Advances in Paediatrics-7, Jaypee Brothers Medical Publishers (Pvt.) Ltd., New Delhi, 218-232.

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