



Turn It Off!

Quick Guide

Real Tips from Real Parents

We all want our children to be healthy, active, and engaged in learning and the world around them. Yet research shows that one of our most common activities—watching television—can be one of our worst enemies in helping our kids to grow up the way we want. In fact, studies show that kids who watch too much television are more likely to be overweight or obese, to struggle in school, and to spend less time talking and playing with friends and family. And new research suggests that

early exposure to television may “re-wire” a child’s brain, contributing to attention deficit problems.

Still, today’s hectic schedules make it tempting for us to use TV to occupy our children while we get other things done. What to do? In research on TV in families with young children, TV-Turnoff Network found that TV-savvy families outline four easy steps to watching less TV:

I. Make the Commitment

You need to know *why* you want to watch less TV in order to stay committed to reducing your family’s viewing time. Using the list on the back of this page, mark the reason or reasons you would like your family to watch less TV. Post the list where it is easy to see—maybe on your TV set—to remind you.

II. Change Your Physical Environment

- Take the TV out of kids’ rooms. Screens in children’s rooms pull the kids away from the family, isolate them, and promote more screen time.
- Move the TV set out of the living room AND out of the family room. When a house is set up to make watching television the easiest and most comfortable activity, that’s what we do.

III. Change the Family Mindset

TV-savvy parents tell us is that over time, their children’s attitudes about television changed—TV stopped being what they asked for, because they no longer thought of home as a place where people primarily watch TV. You can promote this change in attitude:

- **Be a good role model**—limit your own screen time and let your children see your interest in other activities.
- **Establish periodic screen-free nights**—especially on all school nights,
- **Promote interest in screen-free activities**—get your family to do things together—take a walk, read a book, tell a story, play a game.
- **If you do choose to watch TV, watch selectively**—avoid channel surfing; turn the TV off at the end of a program.

IV. Plan Ahead

When is it hardest for your family to avoid TV? Thinking ahead to when those times might be, and planning for them, can help. TV-savvy families gave us helpful ideas for a number of different times of day that can be difficult:

- **Early mornings with sleepy parents**—Leave some sturdy books that your toddler can reach from the bed or crib to look at by themselves when they first wake up. Put a tape or cd player in your child’s room, and let them listen to a story on tape or cd. A good project later in the day is to sit with you while you read a story for them into a tape recorder—now they’ll have a tape in your own voice.
- **End-of-the-work-day-with-toddlers-underfoot**—Ideas from other parents for getting through this often challenging time of day include:
 - Children age three or older may be able to help in some ways—setting the table, tearing up lettuce for salad, decorating “place cards” for family members.
 - Younger children may be able to sit in a high chair and watch you cook, especially if you give them a spoon and small bowl to bang on or stir so they can imitate you. Or, you can have a few toys near the kitchen that will make them feel included.
 - Try hiring an older sibling, or even a neighbor’s child, to amuse a younger one (without tv!) until dinner is ready.
 - Make some easy-to-heat-up meals ahead of time to use when you start to change your family TV habits.

- **Before bedtime for kids**—Many children (and adults) get in the habit of watching TV to settle down before bed. But research shows that TV viewing actually hinders children’s sleep. Instead of TV, give your child the company of a parent for a few minutes before bedtime. Sing a song, read a story, or tell each other about the most fun thing that happened to you today. *Kids would actually much rather have their parents’ attention than have TV-time!*
- **On the Weekends**—What would you like to do that you don’t have time for now? Make a list of the things that you or your spouse would love to do that you never have time for:
 - Introduce your kids to your favorite childhood hobby, or see if one of them wants to be your exercise partner once or twice a week!
 - Invite your family or some friends over for the evening.
 - Choose a community service project to work on together.





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4 STEPS

1. Make the commitment—make a family decision to cut back on TV time!
2. Change your environment:
 - Remove TV from bedrooms
 - Focus your household on conversation and fun—not on TV
3. Change your family's mindset
 - Be a good role model
 - Have periodic screen-free nights
 - Promote screen-free activities
 - Speak up—let others know you're breaking free of TV
 - If you do watch, be selective—don't surf!
4. Plan ahead.
 - Identify trouble spots or difficult times of day—and plan to overcome them
 - What are things you'd like your family to do if you had more time? Now you have the time!

How much TV is OK?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and TV-Turnoff Network recommend no TV at all for children age 2 and under. For older children, a maximum of 10 hours per week is recommended. And of course, there's nothing wrong with watching no TV at all! Many families find this to be the easiest solution.

Five ideas for keeping toddlers happy without using TV:

1. Instead of watching television, have early rising toddlers listen to a story on tape—even better if the tape is of you reading to them!
2. Involve children in chores, like making dinner. They can shred lettuce, make place cards, set out napkins—or just bang a spoon on a small bowl to be like you. It may take a little longer—but it's worth it!
3. Prepare meals in advance so you can heat them up quickly.
4. Read a bedtime story to your child or sing a song with them, instead of plunking them in front of the TV. Research shows that kids who watch TV have a harder time getting to sleep than those who don't.
5. Take a short walk, play an easy board game or play dominoes after dinner, rather than watching TV.

REMEMBER—there's no limit to what you can do with your free time!

A project of TV-Turnoff Network and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

What's Your Motivation?

- To be more physically fit
- To help manage weight
- To reduce my children's exposure to violence
- To have more time with my family
- To stimulate my children's imagination
- To sleep better
- To have more time for hobbies
- To reduce my kids' exposure to commercials
- To reduce my kids' exposure to adult situations
- To have more time to read
- To improve my children's reading ability
- To improve my kids' image of adults
- To reduce my kids' materialism
- To improve my family's food choices
- To reclaim our leisure time!



American Academy of Pediatrics

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