



## CARE PROGRAMS

### **Cautions and guidelines**

*by Brigitte Vittrup*

**W**ith the media landscape constantly evolving and expanding, various types of electronic media have made their way into early child care settings, including television sets, VCRs, DVD players, computers, and gaming systems. Most research on children's media use has surveyed use in the home.

A recent national survey by Christakis and Garrison (2009), however, provided information about the use of television in home-based and center-based child care programs. Results revealed that television is now commonly used in early care. Home-based programs made more frequent use of television, as the following findings reveal:

- Nearly three-fourths, 70 percent, of home providers reported using TV.
- Only 36 percent of center directors reported that television is used in their programs.
- On average, home-based providers used television 3.4 hours a day.
- Center-based programs that reported using television used it 1.2 hours a day.

Use of TV in caring for infants and toddlers was even more troubling.

- 12 percent of the home-based providers used television for infants.
- None of the centers surveyed allowed television in their infant rooms.
- Heavy television use started with children as early as age 2: A third of toddlers in home-based care and 2 percent in centers watched more than two hours a day.
- The percentage of preschoolers using TV two hours a day or more jumped to 43 percent in home-based care and 4 percent in centers.
- Indeed, 25 percent of preschoolers in home-based care and 3 percent in centers were exposed for up to 5-10 hours of television a day.

### **Limits on media use**

**S**everal state licensing bodies outline limits and requirements for the use of television and other media in licensed child care centers and homes. For example, the state of Oklahoma requires that television and videos be age appropriate and used with discretion (Section 25.1(a)(6); Section 25.2(c)(3); and Section 91(b)).

The state of Kansas requires that television use be limited to age appropriate children's programs (K.A.R. 28-4-438). In child care homes with multiple age groups, no R-rated or X-rated videos may be shown (K.A.R. 28-4-116).

The state of Texas has recently proposed changes to minimum standard rules for licensed child care facilities. As part of the proposed changes,





## HOME-BASED PROGRAMS MADE MORE FREQUENT USE OF TELEVISION.

Subchapter F (Developmental Activities and Activity Plan) has been updated to allow screen time activities, such as television, computers, or video games. Screen time is permitted only for children ages 2 and older, and it should be age appropriate, related to planned activities, and may not exceed two hours a day (Section 746.2207). For home-based providers, the age requirement is not included; however, the other stipulations apply (Section 747.2105).

Similarly, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) requires that all NAEYC-accredited centers limit the use of “passive media,” such as television and videos, to developmentally appropriate programming, and that such media be used to expand and enrich the overall goals and curriculum (Standard 2, Topic 2.H).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly recommends no screen time for children younger than age 2. The Academy further recommends that children ages 2 and older watch no more than one or two hours of quality TV a day (American Academy of Pediatrics 2001).

In reality, children spend much more time in front of screens. Children ages 2-7 watch an average of two to three hours of TV and videos a day (Roberts and Foehr 2004). Even babies spend time in front of a television set. Specifically, more than half of children younger than age 2 watch TV on a daily basis—on average one hour a day (Rideout and Hamel 2006). In addition, about 35 percent of children live in homes where the TV is on always or most of the time (Vandewater, et al. 2005).

### What’s wrong with TV?

**P**art of the reason for the AAP recommendations to limit screen time is the importance of human interactions for healthy brain development. In other words, children need face-to-face, real-life social interactions with other people, such as their immediate caregivers, in order to learn and grow.

In addition, research has shown that young children learn less from two-dimensional formats compared to live three-dimensional interactions—something referred to as the “video deficit” (Anderson and Pempek 2005). Time that children spend with media often displaces their involvement in creative activities, active play, and social interactions—all of which are necessary for cognitive, physical, and social growth and development.

Apart from developmental concerns, heavy television exposure is associated with higher risks of childhood obesity, not only because TV watching is a sedentary activity, but also because of the heavy exposure to enticing advertisements for unhealthy foods and snacks. TV commercials cross promote food products and popular TV characters, influencing children to make unhealthy food choices and consume more high-calorie foods (Kaiser Family Foundation 2004).

TV watching can have a negative impact on school readiness. Children who grow up in households where the TV is on all or most of the time also spend less time reading or being read to. Consequently, they are less likely to be able to read, regardless of their parents’ educational level (Vandewater, et al. 2005).

Research has also indicated that TV watching is correlated with sleep problems, risky behavior (smoking and drinking), poor self-image, and other negative effects (Boyse 2010).

Because children are already exceeding the recommended limit on screen time at home, any additional screen time at school or child care puts them even further beyond the limit. What does this mean for caregivers and teachers?

### **Caution: Avoid the regular use of TV, computers, and video games in the classroom.**

For all the reasons described above—stunted brain development, the video deficit in learning, lost time for creative and social activity, risk of obesity, delayed reading readiness, and more—caregivers and teachers should not use media as a regular practice.



Parents generally choose child care because they believe it will provide opportunities for learning, social growth, and physical activity. If they knew how much time their children are parked in front of a TV, they might look for another care provider.

It is true, however, that screen technologies can be used occasionally in ways that are both educational and interactive. Caregivers and teachers can carefully incorporate television time so that it is developmentally appropriate, interactive, related to planned activities, and short in duration.

**Caution: Never use television, video games, or computers to replace educational activities.**

As mentioned, children already get plenty of media exposure outside the classroom, and much of this is non-educational in nature. Therefore, television and other media in child care should never be used purely for entertainment or for the purpose of giving adult caregivers a break.

It can, however, be included as part of the educational activities that are already scheduled, and it can be implemented in a cohesive manner by following the guidelines below.

**Guideline: Choose programs or videos that are educational in nature.**

Plenty of educational videos and televised programs are available, and children usually find them enjoyable. Choose programs that children can learn from rather than programs that are merely entertaining.

Educational programs marked as “E/I” (educational and informational) are often created and produced with input from child development experts. As a result, they target specific developmental milestones, including language and cognitive development, social and emotional development, and sometimes physical development. The programs are aimed at specific age groups, indicating they are at a level your children can understand, follow, and enjoy.

Programs that challenge children’s thinking and imagination are especially useful for combination learning. This kind of learning combines the methods with which you teach children about a particular topic, as indicated below.

**Guideline: Choose videos that extend learning themes.**

What is the week’s topic or theme—colors, animals, alphabet, shapes, seasons, sharing, helping, holidays? A video can enhance and extend what children are already experiencing in learning centers. You can find several such videos, particularly on the alphabet and counting, at [www.sesamestreet.org](http://www.sesamestreet.org).

Before showing the video, remind children of what they have learned already about the topic and what they should pay particular attention to on the video. After viewing, review the topic, focusing on specific examples in the video and how they related to previous classroom activities. Ask children about the content and let them explain and summarize the information. This helps them remember the lessons, and it teaches them to apply the information they have learned to other contexts.

**Guideline: Choose programs that include music and physical activity.**

Young children are naturally active, and they do not like to sit still for extended periods. Promote healthy activity levels by encouraging them to move, dance, jump, roll, and spin by showing them videos that include music and characters engaged in physical activity. This can also teach them to listen and follow prompts by making them wait for commands and do the activities together as a group.

You can even include mini lessons such as counting (count how many times they jump, spin, or clap), colors (imitate a character in a particular color shirt), and taking turns (have each child dance or imitate a character, one at a time).

**Guideline: Choose programs that promote morals, values, and prosocial behavior.**

As caregivers, it is our duty to help children develop into responsible, well-intentioned individuals who contribute to society. With that comes the promotion of morals and values, as well as prosocial behaviors such as sharing, helping, and cooperating. By choosing videos that focus on these concepts, you can help remind children of the importance of manners and proper behavior.

Video examples can help children develop empathy and caring for others. For example, if a child on the video is hurt, teased, excluded, or bullied, you can engage children in discussions about how the child is feeling, why the child is sad or upset, and what others can do to help the child feel better.

In addition, videos can help children learn how to solve a conflict, such as fighting with another child over a toy, pushing, or arguing. Videos can teach children the importance of sharing, cooperating, and being mindful and respectful of others.



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**Guideline: Incorporate memory and imagination games.**

After showing a video, have the children recall objects, settings, characters, actions, or scenarios. Ask them about the content and see what they remember. Have them create alternate endings. Invite them to imagine they are friends with people in the video and are planning a play date. They can talk about their future play, draw a play date scenario, or act it out in pretend play. This helps children practice their memory and imagination, both of which prepare them for later academic learning and problem solving.

**Guideline: Promote age-appropriate media literacy.**

*Media literacy* refers to reflective and analytical understanding of mass media (Brown 2001). Media literacy education teaches children critical viewing skills, and it helps them understand and interpret the media content, as well as be skeptical about the reality and meaning of such content.

Given the amount of daily exposure to television, video games and computers, children need to learn these skills from an early age. The best tool for teaching these skills is to explain the reality behind media content. In the classroom, you can remind children that what they see on television is not always real, giving them examples of what is real and what is made up. You can also point out that not everything the characters do on television is appropriate.

Lack of media literacy skills can leave children vulnerable to negative content, such as violence,



aggression, sexualized behaviors, and negative stereotypes, all of which are common staples of entertainment television.

**Guideline: Be involved in children’s screen time.**

To be fully educational for young children, television and videos need to be accompanied by adult guidance and explanations. You can get actively involved with children’s screen time in three ways (Nathanson 2001; Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, and Engelbertson 1999):

**Categorize.** Define whether and how the media content reflects reality.

**Validate.** Endorse appropriate content and character portrayals and condemn the inappropriate ones.

**Supplement.** Point out useful information and provide additional information to enhance learning.

This type of involvement enables caregivers to influence children’s interpretation of the media content. It is associated with more critical viewing skills in children, an increase in learning from educational programs, and a reduction in negative stereotype perceptions (Corder-Bolz 1980; Nathanson 2001; Fisch, Truglio, and Cole 2000). In addition, adult discussion and elaboration strengthens prosocial effects (Mares and Woodard 2001).

**Limit and be deliberate about TV use**

TV, videos, laptops, and video games have become a daily part of children’s lives. These media are not, however, a substitute for hands-on activity and face-to-face interaction with real people. As caregivers and teachers, we provide learning that benefits children, not harms them. We limit screen time activity to occasional use that promotes educational objectives.

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## INCORPORATE TELEVISION TIME SO IT IS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE.

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