

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

THE MEDIA: Is It Good for Your Children?

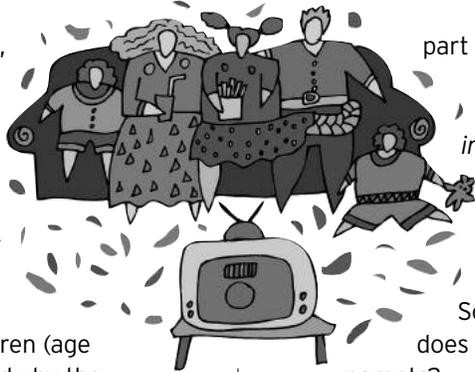
When you think of newspapers, television, radio, or hear the word "media," what kinds of things do you think of? Do you also think of "children" and how much they hear and see in the media? You may not automatically think—*children*—but there are good reasons why you should. Here are some statistics on media and children (age birth through six) from a 2003 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Children Birth Through Age Six:

- 99% live in a home with a TV,
- 50% live in a home with three or more TVs,
- 75% live in a home with a computer,
- 63% live in a home with internet access, and
- 34% have a newspaper subscription in their home.

Media is Everywhere

We live in a world of instant information and entertainment at your fingertips. There's a variety of media – whether it's movies, radio, music, newspapers or magazines – and it is everywhere and a



part of everything. As the numbers show, TV, radio, books, computers, and a variety of other media *instantly* become a part of a newborn's world. Many babies listen to music from wind-up stuffed toys, CDs or recorded songs.

So why talk about media? What does it mean to children and to you as parents?

Is it Good for Your Children?

Whether TV, computer games, or popular music is "good" or "bad" for children is an ongoing concern for many parents. Children of all ages can be exposed to violence, sexual images, and curse words through TV, video games, songs, or the internet.

This is a fact that parents, child care providers and other adults are aware of and have to address. It may be hard for parents to keep up with what's "new" or what exactly is being shown or said in the many types of media their children can access. Whether media is good or bad for your child can sometimes be answered by asking yourself these questions:

- "Is it appropriate for my child's age and maturity level?"
- "Knowing my child as I do, is there a chance it may do harm or have a negative effect on her?"
- "Do I want my child to see or hear or read it?"

Protecting Children

There are many things adults would prefer not to see and hear. However, most adults are capable of mak-

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ing and carrying out these choices. Children, especially young children, do not have the same ability as adults to make such decisions. Nor are they, at such young ages, capable of knowing what is real or fantasy, or knowing how to handle feelings that they may have because of what they are seeing or hearing.

Laws are also in effect that govern what type of commercials and how many ads can be shown during children's programs on TV. There are a handful of other laws that were established to protect children from media, and all of these laws and standards came into being because of parents' concerns.

There has been a lot of interest on the impact of television on children. The effect of TV and movie violence on children and the link between TV viewing and obesity in children has been studied. Bottom-line findings in these studies are that children who view aggressive or violent acts on TV tend to act more aggressively. Children who watch more TV tend to be overweight (you will find references to these studies at end of this issue).



What Parents Can Do to Monitor Media

One way parents can help protect their children from undesirable media is to know what kinds of television, music, and images you do not want your children to see or hear. You may not always be aware of what your child may hear or see, but it's always best to be prepared. Focus on knowing what is available to your children. Watch TV or

movies with them – find out what they're about before viewing. Make choices as to what your children will have access to and limit what you don't want them accessing.

Infants and Toddlers

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under age two do not watch television. It is important that young children in this age range be engaged in brain developing activities rather than a passive activity such as watching TV.

Media Protections for Children	What It's About
Children's Television Act	Federal law says: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs on TV must exist specifically for the educational and information needs of children ages 16 and under. They must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a regularly weekly schedule • have at least 3 hours per week of core educational programming • inform the public of what programs there are in advance (public inspection files are available) • limit of commercial time during certain children's TV – 10.5 minutes per hour (12 on the weekends)
V-Chip	Requires all TV sets 13 inches or larger to have features so that parents can block channels based on TV ratings.
Cable Lockbox	Cable subscribers can request a lockbox to prevent channels from appearing.
Children's Internet Protection Act	Schools and libraries must limit children's access to certain content on the internet and in other available information.
Blocking 900 numbers or pay per call numbers	Your local phone service can block numbers that you don't want your children to dial.

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- **Talk to your child care provider** to make sure you both are in agreement that your child will not watch TV.
- **Be aware of the music and lyrics playing in your car or at home** that your infant and toddler may hear (and may later repeat).
- **Limit the time TV is on and watched.** Many homes have their TVs on nonstop whether someone is watching or not.



child's access to media, try these additional suggestions.

- **Decide on rules and expectations.** Know what you do and do not want your child to be exposed to. Let your child know what your expectations and rules are on video games, TV programs, music and movies.
- **Use lockboxes or V-Chips or computer software.** To prevent your child from

Preschool Children

Between ages 3 and 5, many children become familiar with popular TV and movie characters geared toward young children.

- **Know the content of a TV program** or movie *before* your child sees it. For movies, check the ratings or reviews on them.
- **Choose books for your child's age.** Read a book before reading to your child to see what it is about so you can explain things, ask questions, or answer questions about it.
- **Talk to your child care provider** about what types and how much TV or movies you want your child to see daily.
- **Be aware of music played** while in the car and at home. You may be surprised at the lyrics of popular music or songs.
- **Be aware of newspaper or magazine photos** your child could see that may have violent or graphic images.

School-age Children

As your child gets older, it gets harder to know of or control everything he is exposed to through media. Your school-age child's circle of friends and influences continues to grow through school and outside activities.

In addition to doing the same things you would for a toddler and preschooler, to monitor your school-age

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

- **97% of children birth to six have clothes, toys, and other products based on characters from TV shows or movies**
- **97% of children birth to six have listened to music**
- **91% have watched videos or DVDs**
- **48% have "used" a computer**
- **30% have played video games**

seeing certain programs or websites, use the available technology to block unwanted images on your TV or computer.

- **Talk to your child regularly.** Of course you already do this, but you may have to ask direct questions to find out exactly what your child sees, hears, or plays on a daily basis when he is not at home.

So, is media good for your children? The answer is it depends – on what the specific programming, movies, materials, lyrics, photographs are

showing (or saying) and the age of the child. Some media is clearly not appropriate for children of any age. In the end you are the ultimate judge and gatekeeper to help determine what your children will end up viewing and hearing.

Knowing what your child is seeing, hearing, reading, and playing is the basic and best way to have control over what your child is exposed to through the media. Parents are in the best position to protect children from media that is inappropriate and potentially harmful.

References:

- **The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation:**
 - *ZERO TO SIX: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers.* Victoria J. Rideout, Elizabeth A. Vandewater and Ellen A. Wartella. Spring, 2003.
 - *Key Facts: TV Violence,* www.kff.org, (publication #3355)
 - *The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity, Issue*

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For More Information

- **FCC Parents Place**, www.fcc.gov/parents, is a page on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) website for parents to help them understand and monitor all kinds of media and communication their children can access.
- **Common Sense Media**, www.commonsensemedia.org, is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that provides information on all the kinds of media your kids use – movies, TV, games, websites, books, music, and magazines – giving detailed reviews with specific content evaluation and recommended age ranges for appropriateness based on child developmental criteria.
- **Parents' Action for Children**, www.parentsaction.org, is a national non-profit dedicated to



advancing the interests of families and children. They provide parent education materials, connect parents with one another, and fight for issues such as early education, health care, and high quality and affordable child care. Resources, including children's access to media, are available by online search on site by age and topic.

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