

Television is a bad influence

Key Terms

V-Chip
Passive
Impressionable
Programming

Sources

American Psychological Association
<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/violence.html>
Pop Cultures
<http://www.popcultures.com/articles/tv.htm>
Study: TV On, Reading Ability Off
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/10/28/health/main580490.shtml>

Fact Set

- The average American watches television for more than four hours a day.
- A recent study found that children 6 months to 6 years old spend on average 2 hours a day watching television, using a computer or playing a video game. That is three times as long as they spend reading or being read to.

Arguments in favor of television being a bad influence

- Television makes children violent and aggressive. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, there is a consensus developing among members of the research community that violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs.
- Television discourages face-to-face interaction among children or families.
- Sitting passively in front of the television leads to weight gain, increasing the chances of diabetes in children and heart disease in adults.
- Television programs model undesirable behavior such as drug and alcohol use or unhealthy relationships.
- Research indicates that students may be less able to engage in formal descriptions of events or objects than their peers in the past. Dr. Rosemary Sage of the University of Leicester's School of Education attributes this drop in verbal communication skills to an increase in television watching among youth at the expense of communication with their parents or other adults.

Arguments against television being a bad influence

- Television is an easy and inexpensive way to get information. Television is the most popular way for Americans to get informed. A Pew Research Center survey found that 53% of Americans get their news from television. 90 percent of adults said they watch television news either daily (63%) or at least a few times a week (27%).
- Television allows us to create a national culture, because it gives people something in common to talk about.
- Television provides some good role models for children.
- Television allows viewers to experience something as close as possible to firsthand. This might allow them to question or criticize policies, as in the Vietnam War in which televised shots of deceased soldiers made people more likely to criticize U.S. foreign policy.
- Educational television can help supplant some children's missing educational opportunities and put children on a more equal playing field.
- V-Chips can be used by parents to block out objectionable programming.

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Discussion Questions

- What makes something a bad influence? Do bad influences sometimes also contribute good things?
- What is the best response to something that is a bad influence?
- What are some examples of good programming on television? What is it about those programs that make them good?
- Does watching violence on television affect the viewer? Why or why not?
- What is the difference between an active activity and a passive activity?