

How to Limit Your Child's Screen Time

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"Television is the menace that everyone loves to hate but can't seem to live without." – Paddy Chayevsky

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation:

- Kids under age 6 watch an average of about 2 hours of screen media a day, primarily TV and videos or DVDs.
- Kids and teens 8 to 18 years spend nearly 4 hours a day in front of a TV screen and almost 2 additional hours on the computer (outside of schoolwork) and playing video games.
- Counting all media outlets, 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media across a typical day

And the effects of television on children are not good. Children who watch too much television...

- Carry a much higher risk of childhood obesity.
- Are more likely to display aggressive behavior. Children naturally copy what they see. (For a simple, chilling experiment, allow your son to watch professional wrestling and see how long it takes before he tackles his sister).
- Are more likely to engage in "risky behaviors" when they get older.
- Have less energy.
- Have a harder time in school.
- Are more-exposed to commercials, advertisements, and propaganda.

There is no wonder why "Ten Reasons to Watch Less Television" is one of the most popular posts on this site. Most people would agree that our culture watches too much. Yet, few people are able to curb their habit and reclaim their life. And even fewer know how to help their children navigate this media-drenched world that we live in.

To help inspire parents, here are 12 Tips to Help Limit Your Child's Screen Time. Each of these are tried-and-true methods used in our home and others.

1. **Set the Example.** Sorry to start with the toughest one, but there is nowhere else to start. Children will always gravitate toward the modeled behaviors of their parents. If they see you reading a book, they are more likely to read. And if they see you watching television, so will they.
2. **Be the Parent.** It is your job to encourage healthy behaviors and limit unhealthy ones – sometimes this means making unpopular decisions. Make these tough decisions for your children. And always go the next step of explaining why you have made the decision – this will help them follow through and someday choose it for themselves.
3. **Set Limited Viewing Times.** If you are not going to turn off the television completely, choose the appropriate television viewing windows for your kids. It is much easier to limit their viewing habit if they understand that they can only watch one show in the morning and one show after school (as just an example).

4. Encourage Other Activities. And provide the necessary resources (books to read, board games, art supplies, and/or sporting equipment).
5. Play with Your Kids. Get down on the floor with your kids and pick up a doll, truck, or ball. It takes intentionality and selfless love when they are 6. But when they turn 13, you'll be glad you did.
6. Be Involved in Their Lives. For many parents, it is just easier to turn on the television than to actually be involved in the lives of their children. But those intimate life details are required for successful parenting. So observe, listen, ask, and parent.
7. Cut your Cable / Remove Your Television Completely. If you want a sure-fire way to limit your child's television viewing habits, cut your cable/satellite television feed (or remove your television completely). It will change your family's life overnight (it changed ours). Oh, by the way, it will positively impact your checkbook too.
8. Observe Your Child's Behavioral Changes. Television has an immediate impact on your child's behavior. After too much television/video games, my children get irritable, aggressive, selfish, and impatient. I can tell almost the moment I walk in the door. Be on the look-out for these behavioral changes. When you start to notice them yourself, you'll be less inclined to put your kids in front of the screen.
9. Don't Worry if They Miss Out on Parts of the Conversation. Your child's friend will talk about television. They will compare notes about cartoons, Nickelodeon, or prime-time programming. You will think that you are depriving your child of friendships because they can not join in on those parts of the conversation (I'm speaking from experience). But don't worry. You will have successfully prepared to your child to enter into far deeper, richer conversations than the most recent Hannah Montana episode.
10. Value Family Meals and Car Rides. About two-thirds (64%) of young people say the TV is usually on during meals. That's too bad because your family's richest conversations will always take place during meals and in the car. Value those times with you kids. Don't let the TV steal them from you.
11. No TV's in Bedrooms. Not your kids' rooms. And not yours either.
12. Find your mantra. A mantra is a sound, word, or group of words that are considered capable of creating transformation. While the words may not be magic in themselves, the consistent use of them can be. Every parent should have them and use them effectively. My "too-much television" mantra goes like this, "There's been too much screen time in this family." And every time my kids hear me say it, they know what it means... they know we are about to spend some quality time together.

Limiting your child's screen time may seem like an impossible chore or it may seem like a battle that is too difficult to fight. But it is worth fighting.

Implementing just a few steps right away will help you implement the others. Television viewing is a momentum-gathering behavior. The more you do it, the more compelled you are to do it (advertisements have that effect on viewers). But the opposite is also true. The more you turn it off, the easier it becomes to turn off. You've just got to start somewhere.