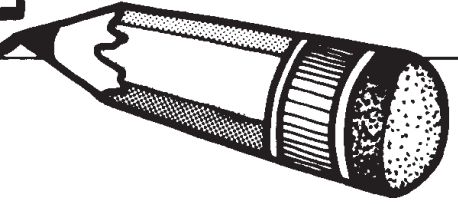


# Parenting Pipeline



*A newsletter for parents of fourth-grade children  
from the North Dakota State University Extension Service*

## Children and the Media

### The Influence of Commercials

Do commercials really influence children? Yes. Your children remember and recite fairly complicated slogans, jingles and songs from advertising. Children are very aware of brand names and do try to influence their parents to purchase advertised goods. One way to reduce the influence of commercials is to discuss with your children your reasons for purchasing a particular product. Teach your children what you look for. You can also talk back to the television when your child is around. Point out flaws in reasoning or photographic techniques that make a product appear better than it really is.

Children may learn misleading information about nutrition from commercials. Cream-filled snack cakes are vitamin-enriched. Chocolate and caramel candy bars are “packed with the protein power of peanuts.” More than half the food ads on children’s TV are for heavily sugared foods such as presweetened cereals and snack foods. Less than 4 percent of the food ads directed to children are for meat, bread, fruits, vegetables or dairy products.

This nutritional “education” is important because food habits are established in childhood. Children are in what some commercials refer to as “the cavity-prone years.” A diet high in sugary foods can increase the incidence of cavities. A diet high in sugary or fatty foods can also increase the chances for weight problems and unhealthy food choices.

## Help Your Child Become a Good Consumer of Television

The impact of TV on children and families continues to be hotly debated. Even a quick glance at the importance of TV in daily life explains why.

- Almost all homes today (98 percent) have at least one TV set.
- The average TV set is in operation more than seven hours a day.
- Children as young as 9 months of age already are watching TV as much as 90 minutes a day.
- By age 4, children average four hours a day watching TV.
- By the time young people graduate from high school, they will have spent more time watching TV than on any other activity except sleeping.

The time your child spends watching TV can, if structured appropriately, be a positive experience. The following suggestions can help.

1. Make TV time family time. Identify TV programs that the family can watch together. Spend time talking about what happened on a show. What feelings do family members have about a character or the way a show/movie ended? How would your child change the show/movie? These types of questions can lead to an evening of sharing that can strengthen your relationship with your child and pass on your values.
2. Turn the TV off when a program is over. Model this selective viewing for your children.
3. Discuss family values. Ask your child to identify the ways in which a family on a TV program is different from your own family. Discuss why your family has its own values, beliefs and home rules.
4. Check your child’s level of understanding of a program. Is your child able to tell the difference between the stunts used on TV programs and reality? Be sure to explain that the stunts shown on TV may be dangerous and should not be attempted at home.

5. Plan follow-up activities to watching TV. Trips to the library, zoo, museum, lake or even the backyard can expand the meaning of the many TV programs that deal with animal and plant life, math, music and most any subject area.
6. Challenge your child to be a good consumer. Spend time listing products shown in TV commercials and decide with your child which of these products to sample. Compare the products with the TV commercials. This activity works best and is least expensive for TV food commercials.
7. Identify TV snack foods. Many parents worry about the junk food their children choose to eat while watching TV. Work with your children to identify a list of approved TV snacks. Post this list on the refrigerator door. While you may not always be able to enforce the list, its presence will at least remind your children of the family agreement regarding TV snacks.
8. Plan alternative activities to watching TV. As a family, plan two or more nights a week to do something other than watch TV.

## Alternatives to TV

- Walks and talks
- Creative play and games
- Exploring – nature, your community, the attic
- Visiting – social interaction, conversation
- Letter writing – pen pals, relatives
- Reading aloud or silently
- View photo albums – family histories
- Radio
- Storytelling
- Board games
- Family meetings
- Gardening
- Exercising
- Singing and musical activities
- Crafts, hobbies, experiments

## Consider About TV Programs

- The level of violence.
- The potential impact of stereotypes.
- The potential impact on school performance.
- The potential impact on physical health.
- The potential impact on language development.
- The potential impact on behavior and imagination.
- The balance in your child's life.

Children who watch TV in moderation (less than 2 hours each day) do better in school, are less likely to be obese and have better social skills.

## Media Violence

Media violence is another critical concern for many parents. Facts are highly debated on both sides of the issue.

Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of media violence. They are less able than adults to distinguish between fantasy and reality, less able to understand real-world consequences of violence and more prone to imitate what they see on television. Parents should limit the exposure of children to media violence. Instead, they should work together to select good quality programs and make television viewing a constructive activity.

Good quality educational resources on media violence and children can be accessed through such organizations as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), or the American Psychological Association, or your local office of the NDSU Extension Service.

## Reading Books Together

Reading together can be a highlight for both children and parents. Often adults read regularly to younger children but quit once they can read on their own. School-age kids enjoy snuggling up to a good story with you. Try to take time to read together a chapter from their current library book, share a favorite poem or read newspaper/magazine articles that are of interest to your children. Happy memories surround a variety of books, magazines and poems. Keep reading together!

This newsletter is published for North Dakota families with fourth-graders by the NDSU Extension Service and distributed through your county extension office. See your extension agent for more parenting information and other nutrition, youth and family programs.