

## TELEVISION AND VIDEO GAMES

### *Monitoring your child's screen time*

Between the television and computer, both children and adults spend a lot of time in front of the screen. TV and video games can and often do provide education, entertainment, and a wonderful way to relax and unwind. While these activities are not bad, they should be done in moderation and with some limits, just like everything else.



### *What parents can do*

**Set rules and limits.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of two years have no screen time and children older than two years of age watch no more than one or two hours a day. Try to stick to this as much as possible – of course, it is ok to make an exception every once in a while. Do not keep a television set in your child's room, and keep the TV off during meal and homework time.

**Preview the shows or games.** Watch TV with your child if possible, or if not, at least try to watch the first several minutes so you are aware of what your child is watching and can determine if it is appropriate. If your child wants to watch something that all her friends are watching but you are uncomfortable or unsure if it is appropriate, talk to other parents, pediatricians, or your child's teachers about their thoughts on the show or channel.

**Use the ratings.** Both TV shows and video games have ratings for violence, maturity, sexual content, and language. However, even with a ratings system in place, it is still important to preview the game or show to make sure it is appropriate for your family, as the ratings may not match what you want your child to be viewing.

**Discuss what they see.** Help your child gain perspective on the show or game by talking about it. Even things you don't necessarily agree with present a learning experience as they give you the opportunity to discuss things like values, differences, and stereotypes with your child. For example, you can talk about real-life roles of men, women, the elderly, or people of different races. These are healthy and educational discussions to have. Monitor your child when he has finished watching a show or playing a game. If it seems to have affected him in a negative way, you may need to help him understand the difference between what he saw and real life.

**Offer other entertainment options.** TV and video games should be treated as privileges and not activities that your child is entitled to. If a favorite show is

missed one day, it is not the end of the world. These activities can easily become addictive habits. When it is time to turn off the TV, be able to suggest other things your child can do for fun, such as reading, going outside, or playing with friends. Your child should be engaged in a variety of activities throughout the day to help her develop a healthy mind and body.

**Set an example.** When it comes to screen time, the same rules apply to adults. Limit your own TV watching time to one or two hours per day, and find some other ways to fill your free time. For example, set aside some time each day for the entire family to read. Or, go for a walk around the block every day with your child before settling down to watch your favorite show together. There are many shows that the whole family can get into together. This can be both an educational and bonding experience.

*This information was compiled by [Sunindia Bhalla](#), One Tough Job Manager, and reviewed by the [Program Staff](#) of the Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund.*