



Practica Program

February 2010 / written by Lizette van Huyssteen

www.practicaprogram.co.za



Making the most of Television

1. Focus on the television

Watching television with a child should be an intentional activity. Choose a program, enjoy it together and then switch off the TV.

According to a study done by Dr Christakis, of the Seattle Children's Research Institute in America, one of the worst things a parent can do is have a television on in the background, while trying to prepare dinner or attend to one's family at the same time.

In a study of 329 children, aged 2 months to 4 years, he found that parents and children virtually stop talking to each other when the TV is on, even if they're in the same room.

Adults usually speak about **941** words an hour, but with a television on in the background, parents were found to speak only an average of **171** words an hour. The children also talked much less.

Read more: http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-06-01-TVandkids_N.htm

"Parents may not realize how little they interact with children when a TV is on. A mother may think she's engaging with her baby because they're both on the floor playing blocks. But if a TV is on in the background, the two of them talk much less," says Dr Christakis, who fitted word-counting devices to his test subjects as part of the research.

Interestingly, mothers spoke about half as much as they usually do when the television was on, while it had a much greater influence on fathers, who were practically silenced by it!

2. Limit viewing time

Young children learn language and thinking skills from having one-on-one conversations.

However, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average American spends roughly 4 hours watching television per day, while parents spend about 38.5 minutes engaged in meaningful conversation with their children each day.

In England, where children enter formal education at the age of 5, the Daily Mail reported that half of the kids in that age group are unable to speak properly. They struggle to construct sentences and are unable to follow simple instructions. Experts blame this crisis on the fact that modern day parents no longer have long conversations with their children, many children attend institutionalised childcare, televisions are used as "babysitters" and having family dinners is no longer a priority.

Read more: (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-541012/Half-year-olds-speak-properly-start-primary-school.html>)

3. Only for older kids

The American Academy of Paediatrics recommends no TV before the age of 2 and that children over 2 be limited to one to two hours of screen time a day.

4. Repetition=Recognition

Young children naturally don't know enough about the world, people or the meaning of words to look at a program once and learn anything worthwhile from it. So buy DVD's or record a number of carefully selected shows and treat these recordings as you would treat books. Watch them over and over again – as if visiting a well loved friend.

5. As if reading a book ...

Watching television with a child in a way that facilitates learning is not effortless.

For a young child to benefit from watching television, the experience has to closely resemble sitting on a parents lap while reading a book together.

Because of the way in which young children process information, you'll need to talk to your child and deliberately help him focus his attention, or else he'll spend large portions of the time staring mindlessly at the screen. You can, for example, pause the show at certain fixed intervals and point out particular details, including actions, sound effects, and visual images that you would like him to notice.

Keep an eye on your child's reactions and encourage him to talk about what is happening on the screen. You can also copy what characters did in the show and encourage him to do the same, e.g. "Can you show me how scared Piggy was!" or "Let me hear how Wolf huffed and puffed?"

In the same manner as reading a book together, the goal is to enjoy language and discover new ideas as you enter into an imaginary world. You also want to deepen your relationship him and develop his brain to make sense out of what he hears and sees.

6. Give background info

One of the best ways to nurture memory and language skills is when a parent and child talk about, or quotes from favourite books. Do the same by talking about a TV show before and after viewing it. As you talk about main events and characters, you are guiding your child to view the experience from a whole new perspective – as if he is on the outside looking in.

This is the beginning of a very important skill, called "meta-cognition", which refers to the ability that all successful students

have to "think about how they think".

7. Move to learn

Hit the pause button and ask your child to get up and walk to the screen to physically point to something, like a bird, apple, etc. Also clap hands, sing and dance together to the rhythm of the songs on your shows.

8. Bring it home

Little ones learn by using their bodies. Your child will therefore learn more about the meaning of "big" and "small" by playing with big and small balls, than by seeing pictures of big and small balls on TV. Demonstrate new concepts in real life. For example, after watching a show that introduces the concept of a "triangle," you can show him how he can use his fingers to make a triangle and build little triangles with match sticks on the coffee table.

8. Find out more

When your child shows an interest in something that he sees on television, such as a certain kind of animal, food or activity, invite him to join you as you Google the subject on the internet. Read some of the newly discovered interesting facts out loud and print a few pictures to display in his room or in a scrapbook. This is a great way to instil a love for learning in your child and teach him that learning is even more fun when one actively pursues it.

9. Eat elsewhere

Not only is eating in front of the television a real conversation killer, but studies show that people are more likely to overeat when they are watching television. The person is simply so involved in the program, they fail to notice how much they eat! And because their brains are only partly alert, they opt for more 'sensational' tastes – like junk food and high calorie treats – to feel satisfied.

Parents often report that babies and toddlers willingly gulp down foods that they otherwise refuse, while staring at the TV. However, nutritionists warn that this not at all a good way to get food into picky eaters.

The reason why the child is so "compliant" while watching television is plainly because he is not giving attention to the food, its flavour, colour and texture. Ideally, a child should be given time to familiarize himself with new tastes and textures at his own pace, and in many cases a new food may have to be presented to a baby or toddler 5 times or more before he accepts it!

Sneaking spoons full of new foods into a baby while he is only partly aware of the experience is probably not helping him to develop a healthy relationship with food!