



# The Media and our Children

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## Media as part of our modern family life

### Special points of interest:

- We watch 27,000 hours of TV by the time we graduate from high school (we spend only 18,000 hours in the classroom).
- By age 6 many children have spent the equivalent of 3 years of their time with television.
- We watch 600,000 commercials by age 20.
- You burn more calories sleeping than you do watching television.
- By the time a child turns 11 they would have witnessed: 8000 murders, 100,000 acts of violence.
- There are 20-25 acts of violence in kid's programming per hour compared with only 5-6 acts of violence during prime time.

*"Every day, millions of Americans leave their children in the care of total strangers. Many do so reluctantly. Child care is hard to come by and they take what they can get. Fortunately, many of the strangers are good company. They know something about the needs of children, and are caring, even loving, in trying to meet them. But because the financial rewards for child care are few, these people rarely stay. Those who do pay attention, they hustle the children for money, bribing them with toys and candy. They bring guns to the house, and drugs, and they invite their friends over; sometimes they use the house for sexual liaisons. Often things get out of hand. Fights break out, and frequently someone gets hurt or killed"*  
(Minnow and LaMay, 1995, p. 17-18).

This colourful description of the home MEDIA environment seems to reflect the 50 years of research confirming that media have impacted families in a major way.

Television, for instance, has integrated itself into the family, becoming an appliance so common that it not only dominates families' entertainment choices, but also alters their eating schedules, changes their leisure activities and even transforms their living rooms; living room furniture, which was

once organized around the fire place, is now focused around *the television*.

As new media such as computers and video games enter homes, research reveals that we are increasing our media-use time and in doing so, displacing time with family and friends as well as other leisure activities.

*What is the impact of all of this media use?*

### The debate on media effects continues....

Early media research confirmed the fears of parents and educators regarding the impact that the media was having on children's violent and anti-social behaviours; it seemed as though causal relations indeed existed.

However, as the public began to acknowledge that not **all** children who viewed violent programs

became violent, the theories didn't seem to be as believable and many disregarded any of the findings.

Researchers therefore began to look at the mediated environment of children in a new way; rather than looking for direct links between cause (media content and time) and effects (antisocial behaviours, obesity and poor grades) they turned to the theory of RISK communication.

This new theory proposed that media exposure be viewed as **a risk factor** and the **more** that a viewer or media user uses the technology, the **more** they are at risk of it impacting their lives in a negative way.

This theory not only made more sense to families but also created hope for the creation of strategies to help reduce the risks.



## How can we reduce the risks?

**F**or the past four years I have been talking with parents about the need for media education in schools and the number one question has been: "What can we do at home?"

This is a difficult question because media has become an integrated part of our everyday lives.

There are, however, some helpful hints that experts such as the American Pediatric Association and educators from The Media Awareness network have sug-

gested:

- 1) look at how the media is used in the family; examine HOW, WHY, WHEN and with WHOM do we use the media.
- 2) Examine what is missed when time is spent with the media; help reawaken interests and hobbies
- 3) Become active in what your children watch and play; the more we know about what they are doing the more we are able to see if they are creating healthy media use habits.
- 4) Get the media out of kids' bedrooms!!
- 5) Know where to turn for support; it is a tough job and the more support we have the more strength we'll find.

'We are our children's role models so it is essential we question our own media use as much as we question theirs'

### 1) Look at the household media use patterns

**L**ook closely at the media habits in the home. Remember, children model your behaviour so have a look at everyone's media use patterns in the home; not just the kids.



We are our children's role models so it becomes important that we look at our own use as well.

Begin by asking questions like:

*How is the TV, video game or computer used?*

- Is it for entertainment?
- To keep children occupied, or as a reward?
- Is it used out of boredom or has a habit formed?

\* if TV, videogames or the computers are used out of boredom, begin to actively brainstorm with your family members about some activities, projects or plans that would be interesting

and fun to do. Try to break any habits of watching out of boredom!

\* If the TV is being turned on, but not actively watched and is just used as a comforting sound in the home, try a 'tune out day!' to challenge the family to reduce energy waste and again break the habit.



### 2) When media is used, what is being displaced?

**I**f we ask our children, or even ourselves, to choose between a walk or a TV show— well, we can pretty much guess what the answer would be. Rather, ask yourself and your children what you really like to do in your free time and see how often you actually

get to do that. Often our research has indicated that children turn to media because 'they don't know what else to do'. Finding the time to reawaken hobbies and interests is essential and a very worthwhile activity for everyone in the home.

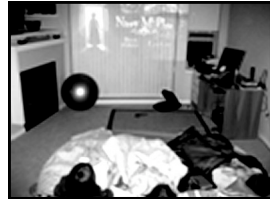


### 3) Try to watch or play what your children do

**C**o-viewing has been seen by many researchers as not only an important part of family life but also essential to helping children watch critically, and for parents to learn more about the role of media in their children's lives.

I know some of the shows your children watch can make your stomach turn, but co-viewing really is important. When you groan and roll your eyes, this

may open up a dialogue between you and your child—  
 “Oh please, remember when we used that dish soap? – Our dishes never shone like that!”



It also gives you an inside look into what your child likes. Take note of what they find amusing. If it tends to be a certain type of humour, jokes or riddles, this may help with your next book purchase for your child or a topic of conversation on those long car rides. If it's slapstick, physical comedy- hmmm maybe gymnastics lessons?!



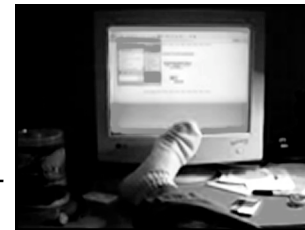
### 4) Get the TV out of their room

**T**V, DVDs and video games have slowly made their way into the bedrooms of our children. Though this may have reduce the fighting over what shows to watch and when, it also created an isolated viewing and playing space for children.

Advice from pediatricians and educators has always been to “get that TV, video game and computer OUT of your child's bedroom!”



I know it may have been a well deserved treat, but it reduces your ability to monitor and really decreases the chances of discovering preferences, interests and activities for the family.



It's a long hard road—find others who can support you in this change of lifestyle

### 5) Find support among friends

**I**t is very difficult to make lifestyle changes. And those who do, often need the support of others. Find other parents who can be there to lend an ear or help to figure out strategies for families.

If you decide that playdates will be media-free, then make sure other

parents help you with this challenge. When children go to visit grandparents or other relatives or are being babysat, try to set up another activity for the children to play or challenge them to think of something else to do. The less reliant they are on the media, the easier it will be to make changes.

Remember, for many children media has become part of a heavily-embedded routine and making changes will take a great deal of energy on your part.

Finding support from others will really come in handy.



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**In 2001 Kym spent one year in South Korea conducting research for her MA thesis, *Informatization of a nation; A case study of South Korea's computer gaming and PC-Bang culture*.**

**For the past four years she has coordinated and developed media education programs focusing on helping elementary school teachers, students and parents learn about the risks of heavy media use through creative media education initiatives.**

**These media education consultation experiences have provided the basis for her current dissertation research which focuses on the development of transformative, media-education experiences for teachers, students and parents.**

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## Resources

### Media awareness network

This website provides a list of activities, topics of discussion and recent literature on Internet safety, TV and video game use for parents.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/index.cfm>

### Simon Fraser University Media Risk Reduction project webpage (research review page)

This website provides a list of literature on topics such as aggression, bullying, media education and health.

<http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/risk/research.html>



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