

## Bright Futures: Family Matters

**Smart “Screen Time” – TVs, Computers, & Videos** are now part of daily life. Helping children learn to use them well and balance viewing with physical and social activity is an important new role for parents. And it’s not easy.



Statistics show that the average child will have watched **5,000 hrs of TV before entering grade 1<sup>1</sup>** and by graduation most will have spent **more time watching TV than in a classroom<sup>2</sup>** Also, watching TV uses fewer calories than any other activity besides sleeping - this puts children who watch large amounts of TV at risk of overweight.

### Families can help children make good screen time choices.

Wise choices and amounts of screen time can help children develop all sorts of knowledge, skills, and interests and can even be helpful to schoolwork - on a limited basis.

Some children need to be indoors for extended amounts of time, whether desirable or not - very cold/ hot weather, unsafe neighborhoods, recovering from surgery or other special needs. TV, videos, and computers can offer education and entertainment. They can be tools to help children connect to the outside world – email, games played with friends via Internet. Some programs even encourage children to be physically active. But - this all depends on the programs selected – that’s your job!



### TIPS FOR SMART SCREEN TIME:

- 1. Find out how much and what kind of screen time your children use now** - keep track for a week or two to see what’s on your kids’ menus.
- 2. With your children, plan viewing in advance** Use the TV guide to select programs instead of flipping through channels. Look for programs that mesh with school topics or your family or child’s special interests. See what videos your library offers. Turn off the TV when the program is over

**3. Offer – or require - other options** – active play, reading, board games, chores, walks, social time with other kids. Alternate screen time with something more active.

**4. Determine the amount of screen time you feel is appropriate** – the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under 2 watch no TV; older children no more than 1-2 hrs/day. Choose programs as carefully as you would a sitter. With older children you’ll be negotiating, especially if programs or computer time relate to school work.

**5. If you can, record programs ahead of time** – then you can fast forward or cut out commercials, reducing the total amount of time and advertising.

**6. Turn the TV off** – during mealtimes & other activities. Have a TV free day each week.

**7. Keep TVs and computers out of your children’s bedrooms** – it’s isolating and more difficult for you to monitor.

**8. Watch shows with your children** - and talk about what they are seeing. Help them interpret what they see.

**9. Be a role model** – spend your free time doing the kinds of activities you want your child to do!

### FOR MORE TIPS, SEE THE LINKS BELOW:

This page adapted from:

- [www.loveandlearning.com/telvs.shtm](http://www.loveandlearning.com/telvs.shtm)
- [www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/tv\\_habits.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/tv_habits.html)
- [www.vh.org/pediatric/patient/pediatrics/tvchildren](http://www.vh.org/pediatric/patient/pediatrics/tvchildren)
- [www.aap.org/family/tv1.htm](http://www.aap.org/family/tv1.htm)
- [www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/parenting/10/28/tv.kids/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/parenting/10/28/tv.kids/index.html)

Family Voices is a national grassroots network of families and friends speaking on behalf of children with special health needs. Our children are also part of the wider world of children. With a Partners in Information and Communication (PIC) Cooperative Agreement from the MCH Bureau - DHHS, Family Voices works to encourage partnerships between families and professionals for children's good health. *Bright Futures: Family Matters* is a digest of articles and news clips to share with families, family organizations, and our professional partners. Check out our Family Voices web sites at: [www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org](http://www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org) and [www.familyvoices.org](http://www.familyvoices.org)

## Partners... The National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA) works

to educate, empower, and speak up for families caring for a chronically ill, disabled or aged loved one. They offer tips, guides, resources, their Take Care newsletter, and much more for caregivers. They also offer a story project that allows caregivers to share their stories and connect with each other. The NFCA has bilingual personnel as well as literature in **SPANISH**.

[www.thefamilycaregiver.org](http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org)

10400 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 500  
Kensington, MD 20895-3944

Toll Free: 1-800-896-3650

Fax: 301-942-2302

[info@thefamilycaregiver.org](mailto:info@thefamilycaregiver.org)



## Family Resource Corner

☀ The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Canadian Pediatric Society, and the Indian Health Service will have the first ever International Meeting on Inuit and Native American Child Health April 29-May 1, 2005. Go to [www.aap.org/nach](http://www.aap.org/nach) for more info.

☀ Free web pages to share up-to-date information during hospitalizations and long term care with family and friends: [www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org)  
[www.carepages.com](http://www.carepages.com) **SPANISH**

☀ There is a new computerized tool that helps identify common diseases that may run in your family. It can be downloaded free and is available in **SPANISH**. [www.hhs.gov/familyhistory](http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory)

☀ Kids First! offers video and program suggestions for you and /or your children to watch - topics include father and baby interaction, children's videos, and skill building activities. [www.kidsfirst.org/kidsfirst/home.shtml](http://www.kidsfirst.org/kidsfirst/home.shtml)

☀ The American Academy of Family Physicians' website can help you find a doctor and offers health information on topics from A to Z like diabetes, toilet training, mental health, quitting smoking and much more. This site is also accessible in **SPANISH**. [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)

## What's new in research?



Allowing young children to watch television is a controversial topic. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends no TV for children under age two. Recently, researchers examined information from a national longitudinal survey and determined that there is an association between television viewing by young children, ages 1 and 3, and attention problems in children at age 7. They also found that the more television watched, the greater a child's chances of developing these problems later. While more research needs to be done, these findings are important and support the recommendations of the AAP.

Christaks, D. A., Zimmerman, F. J., DiGiuseppe, D. L., & McCarthy, C. A. (2004). Early television exposure and subsequent attentional problems in children. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 113(4), 708-713.



## Tidbits for the Month

December is National Safe  
Toys & Gifts Month!

Check out these websites for tips on buying safe toys for children this holiday season:

[www.preventblindness.org/safety/chldsafe.html](http://www.preventblindness.org/safety/chldsafe.html)

[www.kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid\\_safe/home/safe\\_toys.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/safe_toys.html)

[www.familycrafts.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.nncc.org/Health/toy\\_safety.html](http://www.familycrafts.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.nncc.org/Health/toy_safety.html)



Highlights for the next  
*Bright Futures: Family Matters*

**GRANDPARENTS RAISING  
GRANDCHILDREN**

## Share your news with others!

We're always looking for news and activities about family organization and programs to post. Share exciting events and activities about your organization that will be interesting to others. Email Betsy Anderson at [betsyand@fcsn.org](mailto:betsyand@fcsn.org) or fax at (617) 572-2094 with your tidbits. To subscribe to the newsletter, email or call Betsy at (617) 236-7210 •

This issue prepared by: Betsy Anderson and Barbara Popper.