

NEWSLETTER

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NEW NEWS ABOUT TV

Parents seem to know that pediatricians recommend zero hours of TV for children under two. Parents understand the rationale behind the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics and agree with them.

But parents are in the front lines and many have a "What else can I do?" attitude or have been convinced by those who profit from, for example, BabyFirst TV that their tots NEED TV to develop their brains.

A new study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that many parents, despite knowing about the potential harmful effects of TV on children, believe that the benefits of a little TV outweighs the risks. So 61% of children under two watch some TV, 41% of children age 2 to 3 and 43% of children age 4 to 6 watch TV 2 or more hours a day.

It's readily apparent that there are two main reasons parents allow their children to watch TV despite advice to the contrary. The first reason is that TV is a safe, cheap, and readily available babysitter. We all need to plunk a child somewhere safe sometimes while we do our tasks. And this somewhere safe place has to engage the child so he or she won't come toddling over to disturb or distract us or get into trouble.

I used a baby carrier and took my babies to the kitchen while I prepared a meal. When they got too big for the carrier, I set a playpen in the kitchen. Playpens have fallen out of favor but I strongly recommend them for limited use when either Baby or Mother needs some self time.

The second reason many parents ignore the dictum against TV especially in young children is that parents are swayed by expert marketing. They are told that TV promotes the baby's attention, they are thrilled when a young child utters a word from a TV program or identifies a product.

But I tend to agree with the experts on this one. You need an electronic babysitter once in a while? Use it without guilt. But you think watching TV programs designed for babies is going to get your kid into Harvard? Not a shred of evidence, so save your money. Buy books. Books both for Baby and yourself. Kids are more apt to like to read if they are read to AND if they see their parents read.

What do kids who see their parents watch TV all the time do? You guessed it.