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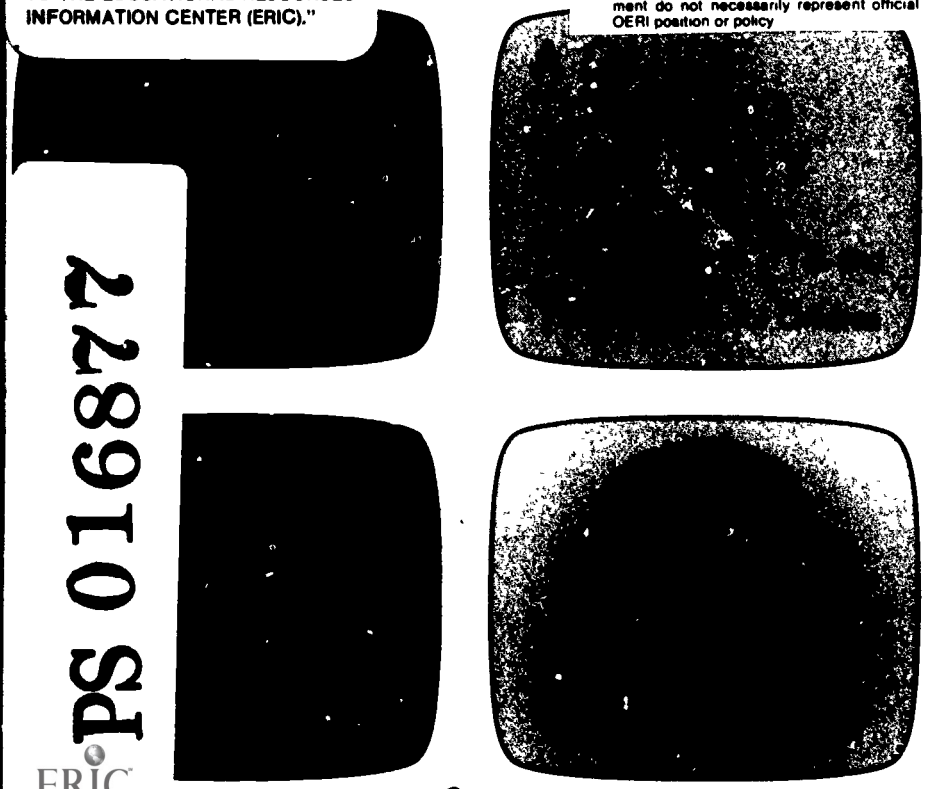
ABSTRACT

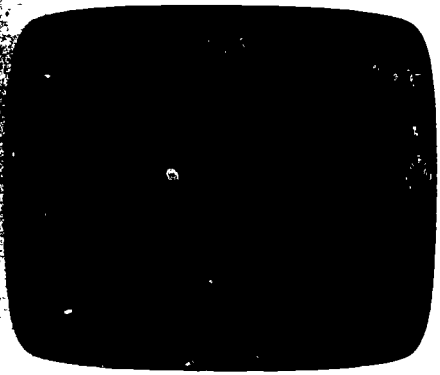
Adapted from a series of 20 monthly columns which originally appeared in Highlights for Children, Inc.'s "Newsletter of Parenting," the material in this booklet explores: (1) ways in which television influences viewers; (2) what television teaches; and (3) some positive aspects of television. It also suggests activities for parents which will enable both parents and children to increase awareness of television usage and the effects of television. Introductory materials discuss the television lifestyle of families, effects of different television programs, and parents' role in limiting the television viewing of children. How television influences children is discussed in terms of the absence of reality from television programs; superheroes and superhero play; functions and consequences of television's audio track; television commercials; and the effect of television on children's development of self-discipline, slow deliberation, and interest in rewarding activities. What television teaches is discussed in terms of the learning of social values from television, ways television promotes behaviors hazardous to health, and stereotyping in television programing. Discussion of positive aspects of television focuses on ways television viewing can broaden horizons and offer opportunities to grow. Each subtopic in each section of the booklet is supplemented with suggested activities for parents which aim to increase their involvement in the use of television. (RH)

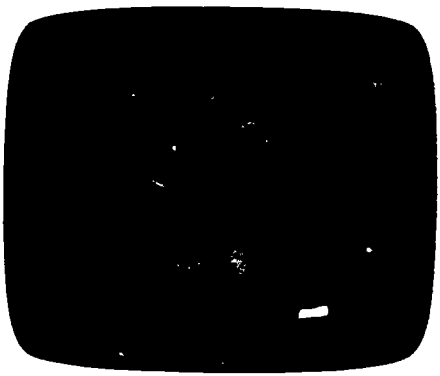
PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND TV

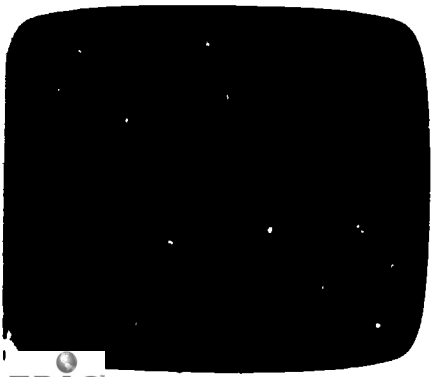


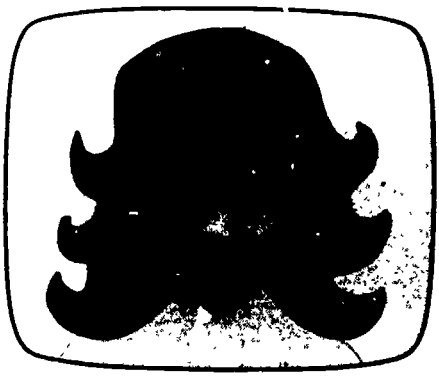
PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND TV

By Dorothy Singer, Ed.D., and Helen Bryman Kelly









d by Sue Parnell

The National PTA is the largest child advocacy association in the United States. Its goal is to improve the education, health, safety, and well-being of all children. For many years the National PTA has been concerned about the major influence that TV plays in children's lives. Therefore, it is pleased to cooperate with HIGHLIGHTS FOR CHILDREN in providing this booklet that shows how parents can make television a more positive experience for their children.

Since its founding in 1946, HIGHLIGHTS FOR CHILDREN has been devoted to a philosophy of "fun with a purpose." Each issue brings stories, articles, and activities into the child's own home that promote reading, challenge thinking and reasoning powers, expand the child's horizons, and provide models of wholesome behavior. Television is also an entertainment medium with tremendous teaching power. Unfortunately, the lessons learned are not always either wholesome or positive. HIGHLIGHTS is pleased to cooperate with the PTA in bringing this booklet to parents, in the hope that it will assist them and their children to become more discriminating and thoughtful TV viewers.

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts and talents of the many persons who have helped in the preparation of this book.

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The material in this booklet is adapted from a series of twenty monthly columns which originally appeared in HIGHLIGHTS FOR CHILDREN's *Newsletter of Parenting* between September 1979 and April 1981. Although some of the specific programs have since disappeared from prime time (and many reappeared in syndication), the concepts and activities are still useful in dealing with the "electronic box."

Dorothy G. Singer, Ed.D., the primary author, is co-director with her husband of the Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center. In addition, she is Professor of Psychology and former Director of the School Psychology Program at the University of Bridgeport and a Research Affiliate at the Yale Child Study Center. She is the author of many books and articles on childhood, imagination, and television. She has three sons.

Helen Bryman Kelly is a free-lance writer and the mother of three children. Ms. Kelly has been a teacher of English in junior and senior high school and Lecturer in Psychology at Albertus Magnus College. At the time of her collaborations with Dr. Singer, she was a consulting writer and editor at the Yale Child Study Center.


EMPIRE
STRIKES BACK

Television, the mechanical box, sits in our homes, the electronic member of the family. It hypnotizes us and lures us into its world of fantasy and action/adventure. It helps us to escape from our worries and cares, and at the same time it gives us news about war, floods, fires, and murders. Television can be a teacher, a friend, a source of knowledge and information—or it can affect our behaviors in negative ways.

The number of hours children spend in front of the television set is steadily increasing as families relinquish control, both in terms of programs and number of hours children are permitted to view. The average viewing time per week for elementary-schoolers ranges from 25 to 30 hours while preschoolers watch about 23 hours per week. According to a survey carried out by Temple University, more than half of the 2279 children surveyed, ranging in age from 7 to 11, reported that they were allowed to watch *whenever* they wanted; more than one third reported they could watch *whatever* they wanted.

At the Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center, we have been studying how television affects the family. We have also been attempting to devise ways for parents—through example and instruction—to make a positive difference in how television affects their children's lives. To get parents thinking about the problem, we ask them how they use television. Does it take the place of family activities? Do they spend time in front of the set instead of playing games, reading, walking, or even talking with other family members? Has TV interfered with hobbies or sports? If the answers are yes, then parents should begin considering how to prevent the television set from taking over their children.

TV lifestyle

In interviews with parents of our most aggressive children, we found that the fathers and mothers were

more lax about the TV set than were parents of less aggressive youngsters, permitting their children to control their own viewing time. Indeed, one parent told us, "I feel safer with my child sitting in front of the television set than out there in the wilds of the street." These families, as compared with those in which children are light viewers, have a more limited range of outside interests and activities such as reading, music, and hobbies. The television set seems to be the major focus of their family life and recreational activities.

A pattern established by some of the families in our studies is one where the child wakes up, immediately turns on the set, goes to school, comes back, turns the TV on again, is joined by his or her parents who eat dinner with the set on, then all watch television together until relatively late at night. The parents tell us that there is little verbal interchange between family members during the evening. When the child is finally put to bed, there is no quiet period between television viewing and bedtime. In contrast to these families of high-television, high-aggression children, other families tend to control their children's viewing and, more important, have a fuller family life.

Program choices

Besides the sheer amount of television a child watches, our research has shown that the *types* of programs a parent lets the child watch have an enormous effect on development. We have found that children who are regular viewers of shows like "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" are less aggressive than children who are heavy viewers of action, cartoon, and game shows. The lightest television viewers and those who watch slow-paced children's programs like "Mister Rogers" are the most imaginative, cooperative, and seemingly happy children. They are also more likely to have imaginary playmates and to manifest richer, more advanced language structures.

Research further indicates that television's effect is likely to be greatest when TV is a child's sole source of information. Depending on the choice of programs, a child may begin to develop prejudicial attitudes concerning women and minorities. In one study, the children most prejudiced against black children were those who watched more violent programs, in which blacks were portrayed negatively, and few programs in which major black characters were depicted more favorably.

The parents' role

Let's examine how the parent can begin to limit television. Keep a record of one week's TV viewing by making a chart recording viewing hours. Once you have a record of each family member's viewing time, you can decide whether or not anyone is spending too much time sitting in front of the set rather than participating in other activities. You might elect to

impose some reasonable limits on your child. Can you suggest a hobby, game, or sport that can be substituted for TV viewing? If your child is reading less as a result of TV, suggest some books that are related to television, such as *Little House on the Prairie,* or books about sports, or science fiction.

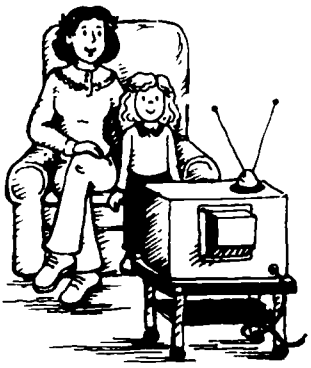
Next, involve your child in selecting programs. Suggest, for instance, that it might be fun to keep a "rating chart." Each night write down the names of the programs watched, then let your child rate them on a one-to-five-point scale from "disliked very much" to "liked very much." After rating each program, suggest that the child ask himself or herself two questions—"What did I gain from watching?" and "Was there something more interesting or more worthwhile that I could have been doing?" We have found that this simple device raises a child's consciousness about program quality.

Show your children how to use a television guide to make some judgments *before* switching on the TV set. Too many children, and adults as well, randomly choose their evening's entertainment *after* the set is on.

Finally, select some programs that the whole family can view together. This togetherness could lead to a fruitful discussion if the program is provocative and touches on issues related to your own concerns. We cannot overestimate the value of discussion and hope this little booklet will stimulate it among family members.

We don't expect you to try every exercise, but it may be that you will try one or two suggestions at one time, and one or two more another time. Most of all, we hope that our ideas lead you to develop games and activities of your own, so that television becomes a constructive experience in your family's life.

The real world of TV make-believe



Do you sometimes wonder whether your children have time for both the television and the rest of life?

If the omnipresent lens looms larger than life in your house and you feel powerless to match its magnetism, we're going to show you that television can be partners, parents. Just watch!

Watch a program your child watches every day. Watch the talking, laughing, sharing, and squabbling as well as the violence. Watch for tenderness as well as suggestions of sex. Watch Tweety Bird go splat or flat behind a slamming door or under a careening car only to plump up whole again ten animations later. Notice Wilma and Fred Flintstone manipulate one another, fight, and make up.

Or remember shows you watched as a child? Remember Princess Summer-Fall-Winter-Spring, the ingenue, wooing the naive but lovable Howdy Doody? Do you remember the Lone Ranger, that masked embodiment of altruism who would do good for goodness' sake?

What's missing from shows to which we as kids were, and your kids are, devoted is REALITY. No one *really* fights and makes up as fast as Fred and Wilma without burying some of their anger. A brief stint on a cruise ship rarely leads directly to satisfaction. And, of course, virtually no one lives after a car runs them over.

Yet those distortions *are* the reality of a child's world. And you can use these shows, *starting where your children are*, to add depth and dimension to their thinking, feeling, believing, imagining selves.

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

First, find an hour during which your children watch television and when you can arrange to sit with them and not be interrupted. Get a pencil and paper and keep it near the set. What you will do next is watch one show *with* your children. Let yourself go and accept the content. Live with it as you do when you watch an adult show you very much enjoy and can't bear to hear the phone ring in the middle of. Put yourself as much into childhood as you can.

Which show will it be? The choice is important. Think about which one of your child's favorite programs might appeal to the whimsical, imaginative part of yourself.

Sit before the tube, give yourself over to it, and enjoy. And PLEASE—put this aside and don't read it until you've been there for your delicious dollop of escape.

• • • • •

OK. The show is over. No one is with you. Take up the pencil and paper, and write down some things the characters did that seemed important to you.

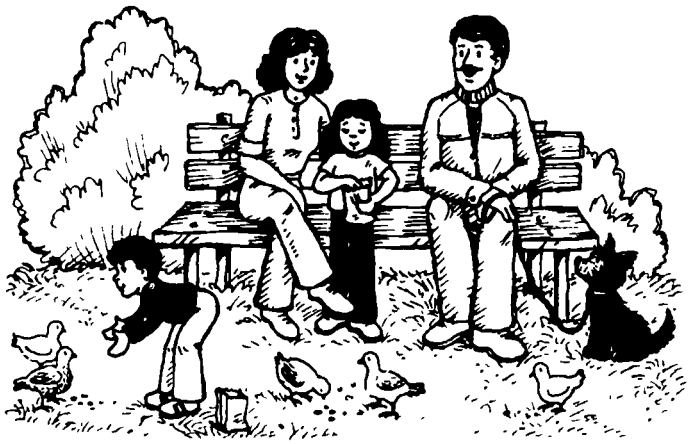
Check the actions you believe your children accept as real. Star those checked items you also felt were realistic. Then at dinner, at bedtime, at an odd moment over a snack, ask your child about one of the events you starred. What was real about it? How did you feel watching? Could the same thing have happened to you?

Try *not* to undermine or criticize the child's perceptions. The important point is for you, as an adult, to learn a bit about how your children

think about, and are affected by, what they see on TV.

Our research at Yale indicates that children who play make-believe games are the ones who make a clearer distinction between reality and fantasy than children who do not play imaginatively. By suspending your adult understanding of reality and playing pretend games with your children, you can help your child develop a clearer idea of what is not real.

Television can help you foster your children's imagination. if you use the fantasy elements they see and go on from there. For example, if Fred Flintstone drives a car, you can ask if it is possible for a "caveman" to have a car when cars were not even invented. Could Fred really have a pet dinosaur? Can you make believe that Fred has other pets? What could they be? Can you make believe that Fred and Barney play other games besides bowling? What could they be? Remember to reinforce the pretend or make-believe elements—you are both playing a game.



Perhaps you can now make up some pretend situations to help your child learn the distinction between real and not real. One game we like is to take a family incident such as a visit to the park. We talk about all the things we do there—swing, dig in the sand, roll in the

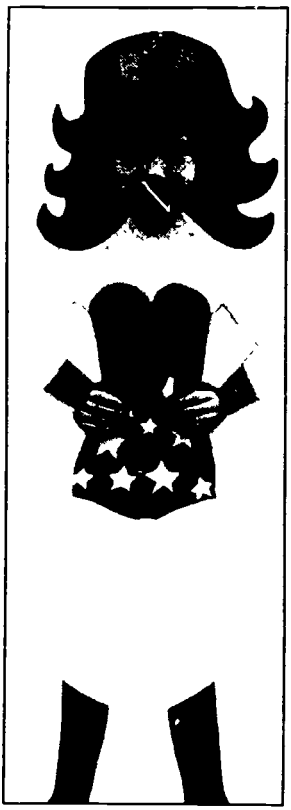
grass, wade in the brook. Now, make up something we can't do, but let's pretend we could. Some of the things we thought of were: fly up to a tree branch, snap our fingers and make a pie appear, hunt a lion, find an elf. Each time our children suggested an item we asked, "Is it *possible* or is it *pretend*?" Interjecting some *real* or *possible* items in the game helps to sharpen the distinction between reality and fantasy. For example, "picking a flower" could be real, "making a daisy chain" could be real, "dropping a pebble in the brook" could be real. Thus, allow your children the opportunity to offer both possible as well as impossible events.

This game can use any event you and your children have recently experienced. You can watch TV with your children and also play the game by asking your child to *add* an event to the story that *could happen* or that is *pretend*. Such games sharpen your children's awareness of the fantasy elements in the story and can turn television-watching into what we hope it becomes for your family—an active rather than passive event.

Only birds and bats and bugs can fly (and superheroes, too)

"Only Birds and Bats and Bugs Can Fly" is a song that Fred Rogers' puppets sing on "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood." The lyrics help preschoolers understand that they must not imitate the flying leaps of Superman, Wonder Woman, or Spiderman. These superhuman beings can overcome just about all the laws of nature that physically limit and confine us lesser beings.

The desire to be a superhero is compelling in most children. Whenever we visit a local nursery school and watch Scot, Lisa, or Kevin put on their dish-towel capes, we are impressed by the intensity of their transformation from helpless little preschoolers into big, powerful superheroes. They race around the room shouting "Batman!" "Pow! Pow!" and pretend they are flying on some urgent mission.



Children may feel angry and frustrated, and sometimes get out of control, especially when others such as grown-ups have the final say about what they can or cannot do. Adults can recognize these feelings and still understand why rules and discipline are necessary. Young children simply *experience* these feelings.

Playing a superhero allows

a youngster to be powerful, angry, and strong. Superhero play can be a means for expressing harmful or vengeful wishes that a child feels his parents would find objectionable.

When a child plays the superhero, he can also experience a sense of mastery and control over his own fears of mutilation or destruction. Children see danger almost everywhere—when they stand in a lighted room and look into a dark one, when they are left alone with an unfamiliar babysitter, when they start school, when they awake at night and noises or shadows on the wall become mysterious monsters.

Even before the days of television, children identified with heroes. Think of Merlin the Magician, Aladdin and his magic lamp, or Greek heroes such as Hercules, Achilles, or Jason. Just as Achilles was vulnerable only through his heel, Superman can be conquered only by kryptonite. But children feel vulnerable most of the time and have no magic to protect them. They are small and dependent on adults to protect and care for them. The appeal of a superhero who can do anything, who never cries, never gets hurt, and always wins in the end can be understood if you put yourself in your child's world.

Many parents worry, though, about this attraction for superheroes and are concerned when a child starts to play one of these superhero characters, loses control, and ends up hurting another child. Parents and nursery

school teachers have also voiced concern about the repetitive form the superhero games take.

At the Yale Television Center we have observed the children who are habitual imitators of superheroes. They play less imaginatively than the light television viewers and their games tend to follow rather simple patterns day after day. They run around the room shouting the names of the TV characters, but rarely do they elaborate on a theme or channel the interest in superheroes into an extended make-believe game with a story line and plot. Many of them are aggressive and use their "superlegs" or "superarms" to strike other children. What starts out to be a pretend, fun situation rapidly deteriorates into a fight demanding teacher intervention. We have found that the most aggressive children in an ongoing study of about 350 preschoolers are the ones who are the heaviest viewers of superhero cartoons.

Boys are not the only ones who watch these shows and imitate these characters. Girls who are heavy superhero viewers are as aggressive as the boys in free play in the nursery schools. We define aggression as physical—a child hitting another child or destroying property.

Preschoolers need our help in learning how much they can safely imitate when they play "superhero" and which actions would be dangerous to copy. They need help in making the distinctions between the real world and that of fantasy and make-believe. If you permit your child to watch Saturday morning superhero shows, we suggest the following activities:

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

- Make a list of the apparent and the more subtle superhuman powers that appeal to your children. Try to understand how your children view the superheroes.

What characteristics do you think your children admire in the superhero they usually imitate?

- Watch a program with your children and then ask them some questions. Why do you like the superhero? What things can he or she do that you can do? What things can he or she do that you cannot do?
- Lastly, use the child's interest in superheroes to turn to books. Read myths and legends of ancient heroes and read or retell them to your children. Discover the world of superheroes through the classics:

Adventures of the Greek Heroes by Mollie McLean and Ann Wiseman (Houghton Mifflin, 1973.)

Tales of the North American Indians by Stith Thompson (Harvard University Press, 1966.)

Time-Ago Lost: More Tales of Jadhu by Virginia Hamilton (Macmillan, 1973.)

World Folktales by Atelia Clarkson & Gilbert Cross (Scribners & Sons, 1980.)

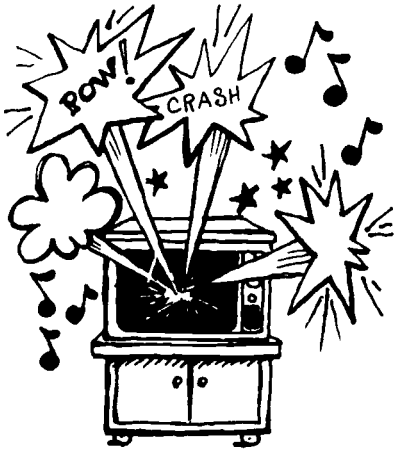
The Magic Boat & Other Chinese Folk Stories by M.A. Jagendorf & Virginia Weng (Vanguard, 1980.)

Do you have an ear for TV?

What would TV be without sound? Imagine a car chase without the sounds of screeching brakes, or a knockdown, drag-out fight without the sounds of splintering furniture and shattered glass.

The *mood* would be gone! In fact, music, canned laughter, ticking clocks can *create* a mood. And mood, anticipation, excitement, eerie feelings, scary feelings are a big part of the pleasure of entertainment.

Music can help you remember things, too. Jingles bring commercials to mind even without the words. For hundreds of manufacturers, music means profits. The music *captivates* you, and makes you *receptive* to the message.



If music captivates and sets mood for you as adults, it wields even more power over children.

It is not always easy to make direct connections between the sound/action combinations of TV programs and the way your children behave. But by using some research methods, we now know that certain kinds of TV shows and certain kinds of behavior seem to be paired. For example, do your own children ever come to dinner right from the TV and seem unable to sit still? That may be a result of the tension produced by the high-pitched, feverish pace of a TV show.

Werner Halpern, a psychologist, reported that many of his young patients who were hyperactive were heavy viewers of television—especially if they watched programs with fast-paced formats and lots of loud music

and loud voices. Our research at Yale found that children who watched action-detective and quiz shows were more aggressive in the nursery schools than the teacher would expect on the average. The arousal and frenetic activity seemed to have as much or more of a direct impact on children's behavior than violence or aggressive acts.

We may be stimulated by television, but we may be missing some things as well; the noise level may be blunting our sensibilities. Here are some activities that might help both you and your child view television with a bit more awareness of how sound plays a vital role in enhancing your enjoyment.

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

The next time one of your favorite shows is on, look at the show but turn off the sound:

1) Write down what you see happening on the scene.

2) Write down what you think the characters might be saying to each other.

3) Describe any sound effects you imagine the producers have added.

4) Describe the kind of music you think might be playing.

Now—try this:

Listen to a program that is new to you—but don't look!

1) Describe to yourself what you think is happening in a scene.

2) Try and describe the face and figure of each character speaking—how old are they?—are they male or female?

3) Describe their clothing and how they walk.

4) What are the sound effects making you feel?

5) What mood does the music create?

It might surprise you to see how dependent you were on both sight and sound, and how you may have tended to rely on the concreteness of the program—leaving nothing to your imagination.

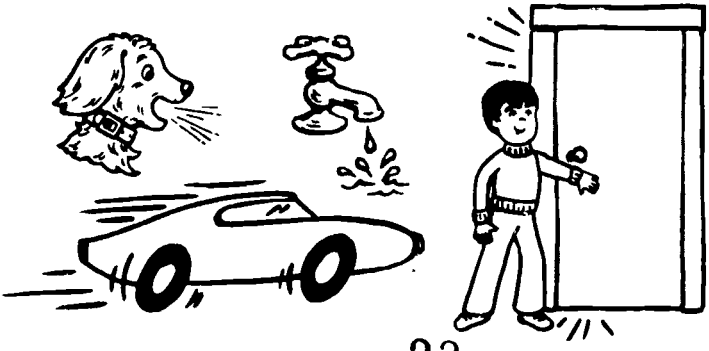
Now that you understand how sound is used, you can help your child sharpen his or her sense of hearing, her or his attention to music and voice tone as a very special and separate way to communicate.

You might like to repeat one or both of the exercises you did, this time with your child.

A preschooler obviously will be able to tell you only a few things without the sound, or when he shuts his eyes. But that's all right—even if he can tell you what is a happy voice, a female voice, an old person's voice—he's beginning to listen! Your older child probably can repeat both exercises just as you did.

Now have your child list all the sound effects in ten minutes of a favorite program—doors close, footsteps, a car starts, glass breaks, a door bell rings. Then make up a scene, or tell a favorite nursery tale. Ask your child to make the sound effects, or create a mood by humming a tune that is scary, eerie, or funny.

You might like to continue your sound tour by thinking about your house. How many sounds can you hear?—refrigerator motor, a clock ticking, a floor creaking, a bell ringing, water dripping, rain on the roof, a dog barking, the wind blowing, and so on.



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TV on time

If on Monday you tell a four-year-old, "Sunday we will visit Grandma," by Tuesday the child will ask, "Is today Sunday?" That's why, in a household with young children, one of the most oft-repeated words is "wait!"

Even adults today have trouble waiting. Quick-start, easy-end plots on TV programs are just one facet of a speedy-rewards life: instant dinners, fast-food drive-ins, instant car washes, instant banking, and instant lotteries. TV didn't create the demand for quick and easy solutions. What we do see, however, is that TV both reflects and reinforces the pace and style of life today. You might say that TV has become an instant gratification institution.

Preschoolers may snatch instead of patiently waiting their turn to play with a toy. As you work with your child to develop patience, the quick solutions of TV shows set up a real conflict. Depending on how much TV and what kinds of shows the child watches, you, the parent, may lose.

As your children grow, they will become less demanding than they were as preschoolers and more able to concentrate on tasks. With your guidance the 8- or 10-year-old begins to discover that worthwhile things require persistence and commitment. But children who spend many hours watching TV may not develop the self-discipline, slow deliberation, or care to do rewarding things that take time—keeping up a garden, painting, playing a musical instrument, writing, doing a science

experiment, or making gifts and cards for loved ones. If the TV heroes and heroines who solve their difficulties so quickly become the children's models, your children are more likely to expect instant solutions to problems and may become increasingly resistant when faced with a challenging task.

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

How can you help your children understand that the time it takes to do life's tasks is not presented realistically on television; that events happen much more slowly in day-to-day living than the cameras and the scripts suggest?

- Watch a TV show with your child. Ask him or her to find all the clues that suggest time of day. Check the

meals. Did the characters say they're having lunch or dinner? Are people going to sleep? How quickly did a scene shift from day to night or from morning to evening? What clues did you get from the props? Does the dialogue tell you that time has passed? Did a character use words like *tomorrow, next week, good morning,* or *good night*? Did the producer show that time had passed using lighting to show day or night, props or clothing to show changes of weather?

- Talk with your child about a dramatic show. Ask your child if he or she believes things in real life can happen as quickly as they do on TV.
- If you watch a TV program and an argument is resolved quickly, use this opportunity to point out that in real life, people need time to think things over. Reassure your child that people need time before they come round and make up.

We suspect that producers may now be rediscovering that people enjoy and will watch serial productions. "Roots," "The Holocaust," "The Adams Chronicles," "Upstairs, Downstairs," and other programs have been serialized. The American TV audience tuned in, not out, anticipating each installment. Certainly the fact that so many of us watch situation comedies or soap operas suggests that we are all intrigued with the on-going events of other peoples' lives. We seem to like a mixture of continuity and delay.

"Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," a program for preschoolers on Public Television, is one of the few programs that allows an idea or theme to last one or even two weeks. Children can follow the theme and, even if they miss a show, pick up the idea when they tune in again. The repetition is *not* boring for a preschooler. Hearing about an idea again and again helps a young child grasp the information at her own rate and understand the idea.

A look at TV commercials

It's TV hard-sell time—November—the last call for parents to run right down to the nearest store and buy, buy, buy! This is the season advertisements saturate the airwaves, have the most impact on children, and are most likely to crack your control. Advertisements for children air about every seven minutes. If they are average viewers, your children see about 25,000 commercials a year. Advertisements beamed to children cost advertisers an estimated $400 million annually.*

Do commercials manipulate? Do they create needs rather than help fulfill needs you already have? Are some successful commercials making promises that can't be kept? The answer to both questions is "yes and no."

Let's begin by thinking about the impact of advertising on you, the adult viewer. Some commercials manipulate you by promising outcomes or benefits most people want anyway and will usually seek somewhere. Everyone needs to clean house or have it done sooner or later; everyone likes to look nice; everyone wants to love and be loved; everyone wants to relieve pain. But does everyone need to pay as much as they do for the products they want? Much of what you pay for when you buy a nationally advertised product is the actors' and producer's salaries, the cost of TV air time, and the air fare for actors and producer to place the product in a setting that will look most alluring to you.

Now to the second question: are some successful commercials making promises that can't be kept? For the most part, ads for adults are not deceptive. Often

*Figures from Broadcaster Advertisers Report (BAR), last nine months 1975.

they are simply ambiguous or exaggerated, or they flash enticing visual representations of a product. Of course, most of you *know* that what happens in an ad is pure fantasy and, if you are careful to watch for your emotional response, you can exercise intelligence and willpower.

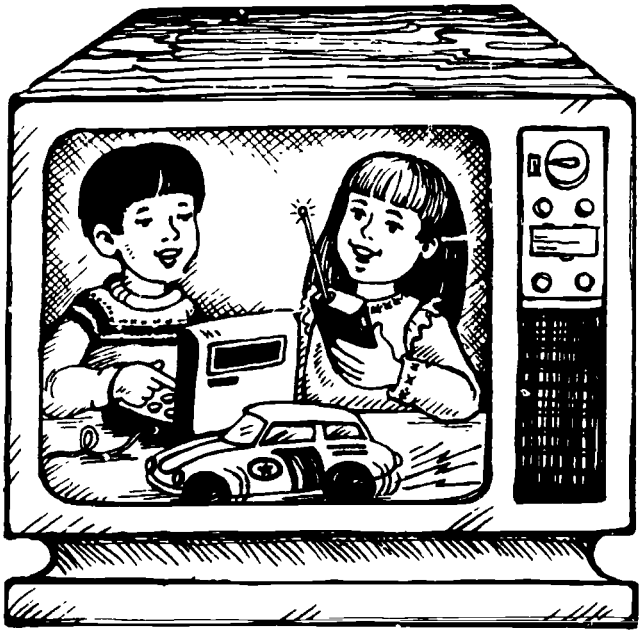
"Not so your children," caution the experts, the federal government, and Action for Children's Television (a nationwide consumer group) officials. Because of the nature of children's mental, social, and moral development, advertisements may foster brand loyalties, create expectations, and interfere with parent-child relationships.

Protections that work for adults do not work for children. For example, information about price, size, and number of components is an important aid in helping an adult decide whether to buy, but this information is beyond the comprehension of most children. When a child sees an ad for a doll pictured in a beauty pageant setting or a race car set on TV, he or she

wants what is pictured in the ad. The child does not notice disclaimers shown in the last five seconds when a voice says, "Actual purchase includes . . . other components must be purchased separately."

Let's see what you as a parent can do to help your child deal with TV commercials. If we just take any two-hour period as a sample, it will become quite clear that your child is being bombarded by fast talking, quick pacing, bright lighting, loud music, and wide-eyed, laughing, jumping, smiling characters urging him or her to buy that product. Let's then start with a typical Saturday in October and look at the ads from 8:30 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. Here's what I found interspersed among the dramatic moments of the shows—twenty-eight commercials (or fourteen ads an hour) as follows:

- Ten ads for *toys*
- Eight ads for *sugared cereals,* (two of these ads featured two kinds of cereal, so in effect ten cereals were advertised)



- Five ads for *candy and gum*
- Five ads for *fast foods* (french fries, milk shakes, hamburgers)

The toy ads generally showed a group of children playing together. Toys were structured: dolls, metal cars, or miniature space toys modeled after characters in *Star Wars*. Each of the ads showed the children using several items of a line. For example, the Barbie Doll had numerous outfits that are sold separately. The miniature space figures were shown as part of a group with the implicit message, "There's no fun playing with only one character." A child would need several to reenact a scene. The *voiceover* (a *male* announcer) raced through the disclaimer, "Each item sold separately," to comply with the various codes that advertisers are supposed to follow. I'm not sure the children understood that rapid message. You can explain to them what it means.

The sugared cereal ads generally feature an animated figure sharing the scene with a child. In one case, Fred Flintstone and Barney were selling Fruity Pebbles and Cocoa Pebbles. The fact that many children like Fred Flintstone is an added factor in their desire to comply with his message to buy these sugared cereals.

Candy ads were for the kind that stick to your teeth—bubble gum and candy bars heavy on chocolate,

caramel, and "cookie crunch." These candy eaters are smiling and laughing, oblivious, it seems, to the harm these sweets may be doing to their shiny white teeth!

Now, I'd like to be fair and describe a different kind of ad that was also shown during the same two-hour period that day. These ads are called Public Service Announcements (PSAs). They are provided to the broadcasters by various public-interest groups and generally deal with health issues, organizations such as Boy or Girl Scouts, or information about government, energy, or conservation. There were four of these PSAs on during the same period of the twenty-eight commercials. Two of the four were related to nutrition. For example, one said to "exercise your choppers." Animated figures (three teenagers) urge you to chew such hard foods as carrots, nuts, celery, or pumpernickel. The other ad suggested that you drink water instead of soda because "water has no calories" and is good for your body. This ad, by the way, was preceded by an ad for gum and was followed a few minutes later by an ad for sugared cereals. One wonders how effective these two health-related messages can be when they are simply outnumbered by the eighteen sugared cereal, candy, and fast-food messages!

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

The best way for you to sense the effect of advertising on buying decisions is to experiment with your shopping behavior and choice of brand-name products. Enter a store, go along the aisles, let yourself respond when you feel drawn to a product. Reach for it. (Even if you usually buy store brands, this time pretend you were going to buy the one that attracts you.) Put it in your cart and then ask yourself:

- Do I really need this product?
- Did I pick it because I remembered the brand

name only, or because some particular quality or function was stressed in the ad for it?

- Did I think about the product's actual claims or was I impressed by a movie star or sports figure who gave the product a testimonial?
- What do I remember about the ad—the music, sound effects, lighting? Did the producers make the product look enticing? Does it look quite that special on the shelf?
- Did a persistent jingle or tune make me want to buy that product?

As a follow-up to this experiment, you might think about one of the nationally advertised brands you buy, watch for the commercial about it and ask yourself:

- Was it as good as the ad said it was?
- Would I ever buy it again?
- Did I really need it, use it, talk about it to friends?

Once you've become self-conscious about your own susceptibility to TV advertising, you will probably also want to help your children become more aware.

Watch television next Saturday morning with your child. Make a chart listing the number of commercials you see in the two-hour period. If your child can work a stopwatch, time each commercial. How many minutes of commercials were there? At the end of two hours, count up the commercials and separate them into categories as I did. What do you find?

- Describe and explain a Public Service Announcement to your child. Try to spot them on Saturday morning. What are they advertising?
- Think of one commercial you saw that morning that had many children in the ad. Talk about the ad—would the product seem as exciting *without the children* involved with the product?
- Turn off the sound when an ad comes on. What did you learn about the product just from watching the ad but not *hearing* the words?

- What sound effects can you find in an ad? Watch one and jot down any special noises. Toy ads are good for these effects.
- Look at lighting; listen to music. How do they help a product look more inviting?
- Does the camera help sell the product? How? Look at close-ups, special effects such as magical figures appearing, disappearing, or flying.

Finally, explain these words to your child:

- Each sold separately
- Batteries not included
- Assembly required
- Part of a balanced breakfast

Try to explain to your child that famous people are paid to say good things about a product. You might also point out that owning a toy probably won't make anyone the most popular child on the block for more than a day. Even the children acting in the commercial may never want the toy, especially if it breaks easily.

Remember, too, to explain how the camera zooms in to make a toy look bigger than it really is. Perhaps you might ask your 8- or 9-year-old the same questions you asked yourself and then compare answers. And certainly you will want to urge your older child to read labels when shopping and to ask friends about advertised products she or he wants to buy. Urge children to think before buying so they too can learn to develop as discriminating consumers and to avoid the shiny lures set out by advertisers.

Things to watch for in children's advertising

(Based on the Children's Advertising Guidelines from he Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc.):

- Is the size of the product made clear?
- Does the ad clearly indicate what is included in the original purchase?

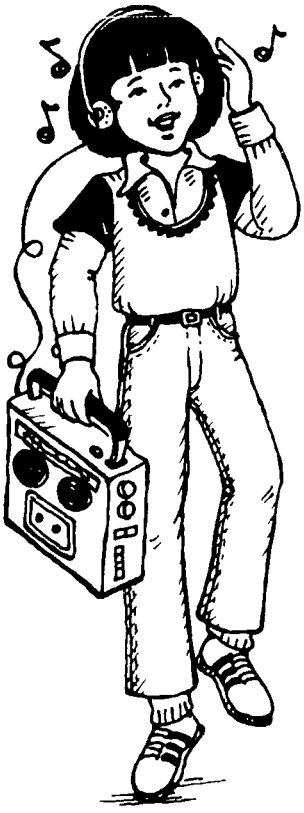
- Are separate purchase requirements clearly indicated?
- If batteries are needed, is this clearly stated?
- If assembly is required, does the ad clearly say so in language that a child will understand?
- Are other essential disclosures clearly voiced or worded, legible, prominent, and in language understandable by the child audience?
- In ads featuring premiums, is the premium offer clearly secondary?
- If fantasy elements are used, are they clearly "just pretend"?

The Better Business Bureau has free pamphlets available.

Children's Advertising Review Unit
Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc.
845 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Learning social values from television

As a child grows, she or he is constantly searching, trying to find out what is expected in society. How should one talk, dress, walk? What is the correct social behavior? What is the correct moral behavior? Until the child is about seven or eight years old, the parent is the usual model, but as the child moves into the upper grades in elementary school, peer pressure becomes powerful and children tend to imitate each other or the children in the higher grades. But there is also another source of pressure attempting to influence your child's personality and identification and that influence is right in your living room—your television set.



Questions about values are almost always complicated and few of us have an easy time answering them. All of us, in our own ways, try to teach our children values. As parents we may talk about respect, caring, sharing, loving. Are our children learning these values from television?

Many network officials claim that television's main function is entertainment—not education—*not* the teaching of social patterns or moral philosophies. We feel that a good television program directed to children should do both—entertain and educate.

Children develop their values in part by what we tell them is right, but primarily by trial and error. The way favorite TV characters respond will be a model for your children. How do the characters relate to one another? Do the characters treat each other with respect? Do men ask women for help or advice when a sticky decision must be made? Do children have independence and responsibility? Are the problems people have to face on TV the ones you face most of the time? Are children seeing real people making important decisions about issues of real consequence?

Television can be a positive social and moral influence if parents are willing to prescreen programs and watch with their children those that they feel are worthwhile. Discussing the content is beneficial, especially if parents relate the issues to their families' own experiences.

Remember our column on superheroes? Children can learn about *courage, power,* and even *rescuing* from these programs. Although their presentation is exaggerated, these are values we admire. Perhaps a child will never don a cape and rescue a friend from the clutches of a villain, but he may at some point intercede to protect a smaller child from a bully!

A child may learn, too, that families are able to solve their differences though discussion rather than through anger and violence. Many times on "Family Ties" Mr. Keaton, through his own example, shows his children how to share, how to treat each other with respect, how to help with chores so that each family member contributes to the well-being of the whole.

"Happy Days" has as an underlying theme in each episode the importance of caring for other people and respecting them. Fonzie and Richie stick up for each other; they are loyal to each other; and they are concerned about each other's welfare. Watching this program together with your children offers you many opportunities to discuss the positive social values that relate to friendship as well as to families in general.

Sometimes a special feature can be useful for a discussion about friendship. In the TV movie "Lord Fauntleroy," Cedy, the poor youngster who later becomes the young Lord, has a deep and trusting friendship with Mr. Hobbs, a storekeeper on Hester Street in New York. When Cedy has to separate from this dear friend, he expresses his friendship through his farewell gifts and, later when Cedy becomes rich, he continues to write to Mr. Hobbs and share his confidences with him. Mr. Hobbs is much older than Cedy, and this gives you an opportunity to discuss with your children how friendships can take place between younger and older persons as well as between children of the same ages.

The friendships among the girls on "The Facts of Life" or the doctors on "M.A.S.H" offer you a chance to

talk about friendship with your teenagers. Jo, Tootie, Blair, and Natalie may tease each other, argue, and fight, but they also help each other out of difficulties and share with each other. Hawkeye and B.J. may joke and play pranks, but we know they will be loyal to their friends in the hospital camp and will make many sacrifices for each other. They give each other support in sad moments and celebrate each other's triumphs with complete joy.

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

Teaching children how to make decisions about values is one of a parent's most challenging responsibilities. Because children watch so many television shows, we encourage you to watch with your children. TV programs are part of your children's education about life-style, friendships, and social values.

- First, watch some of the programs that are your children's favorites. Jot down some qualities you admire in the stars of each program. Make a list of problems they confront. Watch some samples of each kind of show—fantasy, situation comedy, adventure shows. Are values presented in the same way in each?
- Ask your child to find some characters on television who are friends and make a list of the female friends and male friends. Are some friends a boy-girl pair? Find an example of how a character in a TV story expressed concern about his or her friend. Find an incident on TV when one friend seems to hurt or disappoint his or her friend. Talk with your child about why this happened. How did the friends make up? Discuss with your child what some of the qualities are that you admire in the TV characters who are friends.
- What activities do the characters do together?

Do children interact with parents? Do parents do things with each other? Do they talk about how they feel?

- Finally, ask your child to write down or tell you three things that make her or him feel happy. See if he or she lists qualities or material things. Talk about this.

Caution: TV may be hazardous to your health

Behaviors rather than diseases now account for the bulk of the nation's health hazards. Cigarette smoking, for example, is "the single most important preventable cause of death"; alcohol consumption is a factor in more than 10 percent of all deaths in the United States; and the leading cause of mortality among the 15- to 24-year-olds is motor vehicle accidents. Although lap and shoulder belts could help prevent serious accidents, 80 percent of Americans, including teenagers and young adults, fail to use them.

We know from research that children absorb and learn from television—especially from programs viewed regularly. Many of the characters and incidents depicted on television may be conveying the message that excessive alcohol use, failure to use seat belts, cigarette smoking, and eating non-nutritive foods and liquids are acceptable patterns of behavior.

Children watch about 4 ½ to 5 hours of TV a day, and much of this is adult programming. In a study of health issues on commercial television, Dr. Bradley Greenberg

of Michigan State University reported on ten prime-time fictional series during the 1979-1980 season. His staff coded items dealing with smoking, drinking, and drug use. Sixteen hours of each show were analyzed, and drinking was the most frequent culprit. Among 380 total drinks on the ten shows, 195 were alcoholic beverages.

Dr. Greenberg found, too, that many of these prime-time programs included items he labels "deception," such as the characters "faking a headache," "pretending to be a doctor," "mislabeling illness," "making a joke" out of serious illness.

In terms of food messages, various studies have looked at foods advertised on TV. What is of more concern, perhaps, is the number of non-nutritious foods portrayed on the *prime-time programs themselves.* Research at Columbia University has found that the single largest category of food portrayed was non-

nutritive beverages—which comprised 36.4 percent of the total television diet—with alcohol the most frequent beverage. Other drinks were coffee, tea, and soda. Coffee supplied 14 percent of the prime-time diet. Children watch their favorite characters consume a diet that meets the "dietary goal in only 50 percent of the foods portrayed"—an unhealthy model for children and adults to watch.

Norman Lear, the noted television producer, stated at a recent conference dealing with children and health issues on television that actors and actresses may smoke or take a drink on television "largely because the director, or the actor himself, is looking for a bit of 'business' to go along with the dialogue." Sometimes an actor reaches for a cigarette to fill in a pause during a long speech. Sometimes an actor "stuns" another character by a remark; the character reacts by reaching for a cigarette or by pouring another drink.

We know that children copy hair styles, clothing, body expressions, and language of their favorite characters—certainly they will copy their food and beverage tastes as well. Actors *can* be positive models for children. When Fonzie used seat belts, there was "a run on seat belts in stores," according to Mr. Lear. If actors refuse a cigarette or say no when offered a drink or put on seat belts when driving or drink milk or emphasize eating proper foods at their meal time, these ongoing messages are bound to reach the audience.

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

- First, determine for yourself how many negative health messages are conveyed by television programs. Watch two or three of the family's favorite prime-time shows. Write down on a chart the name of the show, the

date you watched it, and how many times you heard a reference to or saw the following consumed: alcohol, including wine and beer; coffee or tea; snack foods.

The following week you might try to find incidences of people getting into cars with or without wearing seat belts. Divide your chart in half. Put the name of the program on top of each section and write down the categories "seat belt"—"no seat belt." Tally the number for each program you watch.

You might want to try your own lists of TV health hazards—check up on cigarette smoking, eating on the run, "deceptive messages" such as faked illness, and so forth.

When you have tried the above, see if you can find characters who *refuse* an alcoholic beverage or ask for a substitute such as water or milk.

After you have tried your record keeping, let your child try it after you help set up the chart.

- Once you and your child become aware of the negative health messages, try *talking back* to the TV set during the programs. For example, if a character gets into a car, tell him to put on his seat belt. If someone lights up a cigarette or accepts one from another actor, yell out for him or her to refuse. If someone offers a character a drink, shout "NO" or tell him or her to ask for milk or juice or water. If someone says, "Here's some candy"—call, "NO! Eat some fruit." Why not try this "game" for a couple of programs with your children?

Active awareness of the negative health messages coupled with *positive* alternatives by you and your children could lead to an improvement in both your habits and your children's. You might even find yourself refusing that drink or that cigarette—or even that chocolate bar. Like parent, like child. Remember, you are the most important model in your child's life.

TV stereotypes: women, elderly, and the handicapped

Where have all the old folks gone? They certainly don't seem to be on television.

"Sugar and spice and everything nice"... that's what little girls are made of in TV Land.

Paul asks, "Will I catch what she's got?" He is looking at Bernice, a new child in nursery school, sees her withered arm, and he's frightened. Paul has had very little contact with crippled, blind, retarded, deaf, or other disabled children. He watches a lot of television, but rarely does he have the opportunity to see these children on his favorite shows. When we think about families on television, we see physically attractive people. No one appears to be deaf, blind, retarded, or crippled, or otherwise portrayed with any of the handicaps that affect people in the real world.

Begin to help your family understand that no one should be caged by stereotypes. Women, black people, old folks, Orientals, handicapped people, adolescents can be and are more than a stereotype allows. Perhaps examining the way TV represents some of these groups, you will open new possibilities for yourself and your growing children.

The pattern of family life in the U.S. has changed over the last three decades. There has been increasing mobility, so that many of us don't live near our own parents. Many children are being raised in towns where old people are rarely seen. This is where television can play an important role. If indeed we do not have sufficient contact with the elderly, we could begin to form some perceptions of them through the programs we watch.

The elderly are underrepresented on television com-

pared to their numbers in our society. Old people rarely appear in commercials except for products such as sleeping pills, dental cleansers, or decaffeinated coffee. We know from research that old people are heavy television viewers, but television does not give them their fair share of people to identify with.

There are about fifty million people in the United States who have some form of physical or mental disability. Television could play a powerful part in

presenting a more accurate picture of the ways in which people with handicaps function in society. Next time you watch television, see if you can spot handicapped people in the crowds of extras, in a classroom, or in the background at a restaurant. Rarely will you see people on television reflecting the handicaps that exist.

Girls are presented on both educational and commercial television as "happy," "warm," "caring for others." Women and girls are also portrayed as "helpless," "less effective," "more deferent," and "punished" if they are active. Although over half the females shown on television are married, this is true for only one-third of the males. Females who are young and beautiful are the main victims of violence on TV, and usually males are the aggressors. Males, however, are also "more rational," "more stable," and "smarter."

Our reseach at Yale found that third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade girls who watched a lot of game/variety programs and reruns that show women in demeaning ways (shows such as "I Love Lucy" and "The Jetsons") were more prejudiced against girls than their classmates. This finding does not prove that television causes prejudice, but the results suggest that some kinds of programs may encourage prejudgment and fixed notions.

There *is* a bright side. There have been exceptions—Ironside, the detective in the wheelchair; Longstreet, the blind insurance investigator. These programs are no longer on prime time, but when they were around they presented handicapped people as competent, capable, and intelligent. "Little House on the Prairie" regularly featured two characters who were blind.

"Paper Chase" featured an excellent portrayal of an elderly lawyer who was witty, upright, and just. Grandma and Grandpa Walton were the idealized grandparents. The warm relationship between Rockford and his father may have been a secondary theme in "Rockford Files," but it was there and

presented a model for fathers and sons. Barnaby Jones, the ex-cop turned private detective, was generally portrayed as benevolent, fatherly, and wise.

There have been some specials about old people such as "The Rocking-Chair Rebellion" for youngsters to view. "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman" was a touching story of a fictitious black woman's life, and the final scenes showed an old woman of great dignity and courage. Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles, blind musicians, have performed on television and serve as models for others. The wheelchair basketball players featured on the news or the Special Olympics for handicapped children allow the television audience to witness the courage and lively spirit of the participants.

Fred Rogers of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" has done much to help young children understand the world of the handicapped. "Sesame Street," "Zoom," and "Big Blue Marble" have also presented segments dealing with the handicapped.

Some TV women are serious, capable, realistic, honest women. Laura Ingalls is still a delightful model for young girls, as is Barbara on "One Day at a Time." In checking with some of our neighbors' children, we found that "Barbara is great—smart and pretty," but when asked about Laverne of "Laverne and Shirley," many of these same preteens said, "She's ridiculous," or "She makes us laugh but we don't want to be like her." It's refreshing to hear these comments from young viewers, but *these* girls talk about the programs with friends and with their parents. They measure the characters they see on TV against the women they read about in magazines and newspapers or against the women they meet in daily life.

The danger is that young viewers model their behavior on TV roles. Dr. George Gerbner, a prominent television researcher, found that children and young people who watch a lot of television accept and behave like stereotyped characters.

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

- Explain to your child what a stereotype is—that it is a distorted, exaggerated view of a person. Use television situation comedies, specials, or dramatic shows to point out to your children that TV presents only part of the picture.
- Watch a TV program with your children. See if you can spot any old people. Write down who they are, how they are portrayed, what they are doing. Find pictures of old people in magazines and newspapers. What are they doing?
- Talk about old people who are judges, presidents of countries, senators—people in important and powerful positions where experience counts. Interview a grandmother or grandfather. Tape the story of his or her childhood. Take a walk through town. See if you can find old people working in stores, working around their houses, engaging in hobbies. Talk to them—it will be fun to make a friend.
- Alert your children to look for handicapped people on TV. Do you see them in minor roles, or as extras? Do you see them at all?
- Watch for abuses of the handicapped. Do you see them portrayed as helpless, stupid, incompetent?
- Try to imagine a handicapped person playing a role on one of your favorite programs. Would it work? What might be different?
- Find stereotyped women on TV—those who don't seem like real people. For example, find:
  - a helpless or childish woman
  - a "dumb blonde"
  - a domineering mother
  - a "goody-goody" cute girl
- Ask your child to draw a person in a nonstereotypic role—For example, a man ironing or a grandma on a bicycle.

- Finally, we recommend some books to read together and for discussion:

  All Together Now by Sue Ellen Bridges (Knopf, 1979).
  Deenie by Judy Blume (Dell, 1974).
  Fire on the Mountain by Edward Abbey (University of New Mexico Press, 1978).
  Follow My Leader by James Garfield (Viking, 1957).
  Free to Be You and Me by Marlo Thomas (McGraw, 1974).
  A Pictorial History of Women in America by Ruth Warren (Crown, 1975).
  Simon's Night by Jon Hassler (Atheneum, 1979).

The television gift

We've been asking you to join us as gentle but constructive TV critics, to view television with a cautious analytical eye, and to watch for some potentially disruptive side effects. But let's not overlook the *good* television programming.

Television can be a window on worlds we might otherwise never have a chance to explore. "The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau"; "Universe"; "CBS Special Reports"; "I, Claudius"; "Roots"; "Holocaust"; "Against The Wind"; public television's opera, ballet, and concerts—together they take us to the worlds of science, politics, history, and the arts. Each of us can live only so many experiences; through the mass media we can learn about how others live and have lived.

On television you can see the arts in action as producers use camera effects, animation, acting techniques, stage sets, props, and music to create moods and reinforce ideas. Television gives us the gift of fantasy, a gift many of us rarely have time to give ourselves. It can make us laugh, move us to tears, and even inspire us to reach out and help others. One mention on TV of a person in need usually brings forth generous responses from viewers all over the country.

By watching television we can observe how others have solved life's problems and add to our list of alternative solutions. Afternoon specials are particularly good for helping young adolescents resolve conflicts. Generally, these stories present young people facing such diverse issues as stealing, handicaps, loneliness, poverty, old age, drugs, and even death

For those who love literature, "The Scarlet Letter" and "Once Upon A Classic" were available last year. People who had never seen a ballet or opera could watch "The Nutcracker Suite" or "Othello." The Boston Symphony and the New York Philharmonic's Young People's Concerts gave millions of viewers the oppor-

tunity to hear great music at no cost. And what better way for parents to remember how it feels to be a teenager than to watch and pay close attention to a quality program showing a slice of adolescent life?

Practically speaking, television can partially fill the gap in your children's education if they, like so many

others, spend little time reading. Many of the movie classics bring to us the world's greatest literature. If you've ever seen W.C. Fields as Mr. Micawber in the movie "David Copperfield," you've watched a Victorian novel by Charles Dickens come to life as a moving, funny, inspiring story about a young boy's struggles growing up in a world of very complicated adults.

Please notice: We said that television CAN broaden your horizons and offer opportunities to grow and change. You, the viewers, are the essential ingredient! You must be *open* to these experiences, aware that television offers opportunities to think, learn, and expand. And we have a few suggestions about how you and your children can best take advantage of all that TV offers.

We have found that through discussion people integrate TV experiences and develop new ideas. Our own research at Yale demonstrated that teenagers who watched six afternoon specials over a six-month period and talked about them with two group leaders made significant changes in their behavior. They related more to their parents, increased time spent on homework and study, and began to control their TV-viewing time. In another study we found that elementary school children who watched "Swiss Family Robinson" and discussed the program with their teachers became less self-centered and were more willing to make friends with children who were not necessarily like themselves. These children also were more willing to accept the idea that fathers could do things with their daughters and mothers could do things with their sons. We found that preschool children who watched educational children's programs and then discussed them with their nursery school teachers had better understanding of the material on the show than children who did not have such discussions.

Again, note: Each of our studies mentions opportunity for *discussion*. Passive watching does not seem to bring

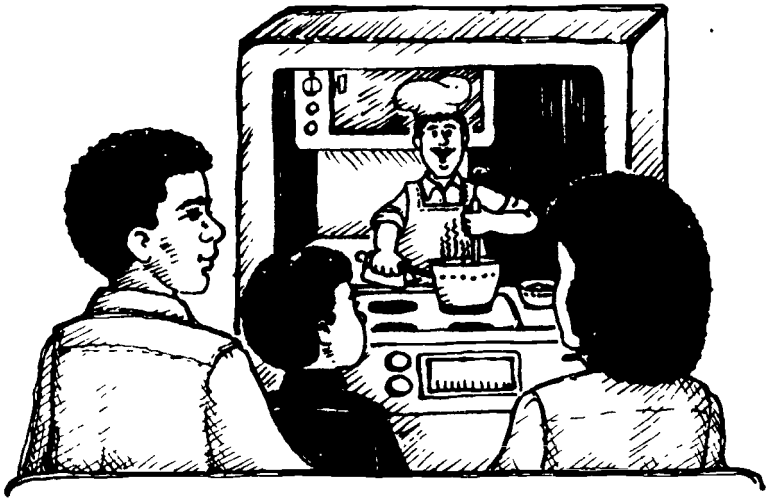
gains in either social or academic learning. We have even found that children who watched "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" became more imaginative—especially when an adult talked about the program content with the child.

One of us experienced this kind of "talking about TV" on a recent train trip to New York City. A gentleman nearby kept reliving "Friendly Fire," the TV program he had seen the previous night. As he retold the story, he made many side comments about the moral issues in the plot. Two commuters began to share in the discussion, each gaining further insight concerning the story's intent. How satisfying this was to share our ideas and comments with each other—and how satis-

fying to learn from each other, with TV serving as the springboard for this exciting conversation. Just as this happened on the 7:50 A.M. train, it can happen in your home with your children. Many parents of teenagers have told us that "One Day at a Time," with all its share of silliness and exaggeration, has touched on many problems of the divorced parent trying to raise two children. And certainly "Family Ties" or "Domestic Life" can lead to discussions about trust, sharing, cooperation, sibling rivalry, respect for the elderly, and family values.

Television can help you and your children learn about careers, hobbies, and interests you might not have known about any other way. TV characters might inspire you to revive a rewarding hobby. For example, here are some of the "gifts" your family could enjoy year-round.

- *Sports:* Families often enjoy televised football or basketball, warm and snug on a cold winter afternoon. And many *families* have become avid tennis players because the game is now televised.
- *Cooking:* We're delighted that some of the cooking hosts are men. One of our sons has become an excellent



cook—and we are sure the male model on television didn't hurt a bit. Cooking with your child is a pleasant way to spend a rainy day.

- *Gardening:* If you have never tried to pot a plant or seed a salvia, the garden tips on "Captain Kangaroo," "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," "Crockett's Victory Garden," and even "NBC News" will perhaps give you enough confidence to try. You and even your preschooler could start a small window-box garden.
- *Music:* Symphonies, solo performances, opera—it's worth a try to listen to classical music with your children. TV could be a child's first introduction to a form other than rock or disco. Saving up for a trip to a live concert might be a treat for a special occasion.

Remember, selective viewing gives you the freedom to enjoy the gift of TV and to share specific kinds of programs with each family member in his or her unique way. We hope you will consider carefully what you choose to spend your time watching.

A look at local children's television

A puppet named Arthur in Miami, Florida, tries to teach his friend George about accepting blame for a mishap. Schoolchildren in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, demonstrate gymnastics or learn how to bake. These events are taking place on locally produced television shows. Some of the most entertaining and educational programs can be found in your own hometown. Many of these may never be shown nationally, but they are models of what can be done if a local producer is willing to explore his or her community from a child's perspective.

The "Trolley Show" is a magazine format show on KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh. This show, a weekly half-hour program, is aimed at children aged seven to twelve. Each show features children from a different local school. Arthur Greenwald, the producer, uses two young hosts, a boy and a girl, who introduce the various segments. Such features as a "Superkid" (a youngster who is an outstanding athlete or musician or writer) or a "class act" highlighting a particular group activity in a school are regular items. The use of a trolley moving through town weaves the various segments of the show and is unique since Pittsburgh is still served by numerous electric trolleys.

A regular segment on the "Trolley Show" is called "Who Cares," wherein children can report on trivia about their school such as number of windows, number of blackboards, and so forth. "Laughbreak" gives the children a chance to tell some jokes or ask riddles. The program sometimes has a cooking tip or how-to sports tips or a profile of an athlete. Recent programs have included such items as how to make jewelry; a recipe for blintzes; a visit to a factory in Pittsburgh where kiddy rides, such as a rocketship, a horse, and a racing car are

made, repaired, and stored; and a glimpse at part of a school's production of *The Wizard of Oz*.

"Arthur and Company" is produced by Jackie Bailey in Miami, Florida, on WPLG-TV. This weekly show, like "The Trolley Show," is geared for an elementary-school-aged audience but the cast is predominantly puppets, led by Arthur. Arthur has several puppet friends who regularly appear with him while people on the show take minor roles. For example, an owner of a pet or strange animal might be a guest, or a tugboat captain might give us information as we watch a film about tugs. Through the antics of the puppets we learn about problems and experiences of growing up. A segment I particularly enjoyed was one that dealt with telling the truth. One of the puppets broke a glass frame by mistake. They were visiting an art gallery with their puppet teacher "Miss Leonard." One of them threw a ball and the puppet who failed to catch it inadvertently broke a glass frame. As part of this segment, the camera switched to children in a local school who were asked, "What would you do?" This is a regular feature through which children are given a chance to comment and learn positive social values.

Jack Metzger is responsible for writing much of "Arthur and Company," as well as for giving his voice

to more than twenty puppet characters on the show. Camma Ward makes the various puppets who are colorful and have their own unique personalities. Some of the more recent shows have included information about how luggage gets on and off an airplane, how spaghetti is made, and how tugboats can move larger ships. There are also features on various kinds of animals, craft projects, and music. The show's strength lies in the emphasis on feelings and attitudes. Arthur is a lovable character who helps children sort out a complex, often confusing world.

With shows such as these and many others, such as "Newsbag," "Kids' World," "Great Space Coaster," "New Zoo Review," "Vegetable Soup," and "Big Blue Marble," one wonders why cartoons such as "Tom and Jerry" are so popular. One possible answer is that cartoons monopolize Saturday morning, while most of the shows I've just described appear only once a week and are simply outnumbered by cartoons, situation comedies, or old movies. Although the producers claim their current shows are less violent than in previous years, our research at Yale University finds that preschoolers who watch "Tom and Jerry," "Woody Woodpecker," and similar cartoons are the children who hit others or destroy property in the nursery school.

PARENTS' ACTIVITIES

As parents you may wonder if there is anything you can do to bring quality television programs to your community. In Los Angeles, the Pasadena School District cooperated with the local station and helped design a show called "Serendipity" for five- to eleven-year-olds. This weekly program features field trips to local places of interest and helps children learn about their community.

Constant pressure and a united group of parents and

educators in a continuous dialogue with the station executive can eventually lead to a more serious effort on the station's part to come up with programs that not only entertain but educate your children. Parents could form an advisory board composed of parents, teachers, and psychologists who can approach a local television station manager and work with the programming department to formulate plans for programs suited to a particular age group. If you have access to cable in your community, the local programmer may be particularly receptive to a channel devoted to children's programming.

- In the future, satellite networks will link local stations to each other and thus stations will share and exchange programs, allowing for diversity of programming. Suggest this idea to your local TV station.
- Because of the expenses involved in production, several stations can band together and share expenses. For example, one company called Field Communications contracts programs from independent producers based upon ideas that emanate within the children's programming department of the company. The resulting programs are then aired over five Field Communications stations.

You may live too far from your local television station or lack the time or organizational ability to carry out the suggestions above. Here are some things you can do right in your own home.

- Parents can use a local television guide such as the daily newspaper or Sunday section to make an effort to find the programs geared for children—daily, weekly, or specials.
- Parents can both limit the amount of time children spend in front of television and control the kinds of programs their children watch.
- Writing letters to the local TV station can let the manager know your needs.

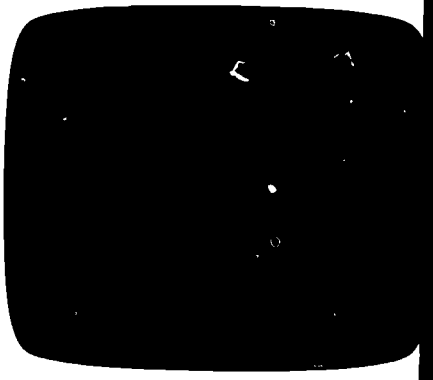
Conclusion

What is the future of television? We have already seen the enormous growth of cable, and predictions indicate that within the next decade more than half of the homes in the United States will have cable access. Will this mean more and better programs for our children? Will there be several cable channels devoted to children's programming? Or will cable become a mirror of network fare? How much television will children watch in the future?

Our hope is that parents will become more involved in how they use the existing television programs (the exercises included in this booklet provide suggestions

for such involvement) and begin to invent their own games and ideas that suit their individual family needs. We hope, too, that parents will become more actively involved in organizations that lobby for quality children's programming such as the Parent-Teacher Association or Action for Children's Television. We as parents can have an input into television through our letters to station managers and to sponsors of products on television. We also can have an input by seeing that our children learn about how television works and how they can become critical consumers of the medium. There are numerous curricula available for schools to use in the classroom for these purposes.

Our children will be comfortable in the world of videogames, computers, and interactive television as these technologies expand if we encourage them to become active users rather than passive players. This may mean closer monitoring of your child's activities, help with learning how a computer can perform through simple designing of programs, and careful selection of programs to view on television and videogames for your children to play. Technology calls for greater involvement on the parent's part so that we become masters rather than the slaves of our own scientific advancement.



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