

FAMILY TALK or FAMILY TV? :

Five Family Critical Viewing Tips to Create TV Learning Fun!

Our "winter" so far has been pretty mild, allowing us to enjoy the outdoors more. About now, I'd guess we're wishing for a bit more of that lovely unseasonable weather, instead of the ice and cold. When the weather turns nasty, we turn on the TV, and then are sometime surprised at the not-nice actions and conversations we experience. Does your TV spend more time these days with your kids than you do? Are you worried about what they see and learn? If so, it may be time to rethink your family viewing habits and learn to communicate as a family by discussing what you are viewing, as well as interacting more actively by playing family games (and I don't mean video games!!). Here are five specific learning tips you can follow:

1. Take some time to watch TV with your kids. Look for examples of how people treat each other. Look at the kinds of values that programs teach. Talk to your child about what you notice, comparing the TV attitude to what you see your children do. "Did you see how that guy just treated his friend?! I'm glad you talk face to face to your friends when you disagree, instead of talking badly about them behind their backs." Limit one night a week to "Ban the TV night in the _____ Family!" At first it will seem impossible, but even the children learn to value a peaceful home this way!

2. Talk back to the TV. Challenge ideas and statements made. Often, a few well-timed comments about your family's beliefs and values can be more effective than a month of lectures. Challenge the overly thin female models and the muscular male models as stereotypes, and then discuss what "real men and women are made of!"

3. Talk with your children about the difference between real life and make-believe. Be sure to point out that in real life, solving problems usually takes much longer than 30 minutes and that it can be done in a peaceful manner. Use family meetings to discuss problems in your family, and follow a problem-solving process clear through to evaluating how the solutions you create might actually work before trying one! Young children, who are not great time-masters, cannot be expected to realize the finality of death when their "heroes" are 'killed' and then 'reappear' next week, same time, same place, same channel!

4. Challenge kids to figure out what gimmicks and techniques advertisers use to sell their products when watching commercials. Count the number of commercials in one hour of Saturday Morning Cartoons, and then discuss the content of these commercials - as well as the loudness of the pre-determined, overly-loud volume during the commercial as compared with the actual program.

5. Make at least one critical viewing comment each time you watch TV with your kids. This will help teach your kids to think about and question what they are watching. Soon they will catch on and may start making critical comments of their own which will make you proud of having taken the time to use the television as a teaching tool. Examples of critical comments are:

- * "I wonder why they only show young, thin people."
- * "If the cereal tastes so good and is so good for you, I wonder why do they have to put a toy in it to get you and I to buy it?"
- * "What would happen to that guy if he crashed all those cars in real life?"
- * "He isn't talking to his parents the way you talk with me - thanks for your respect."

Find out more about communicating as a family, call your local extension office to request one of the many excellent publications for families on parenting and family communication topics.