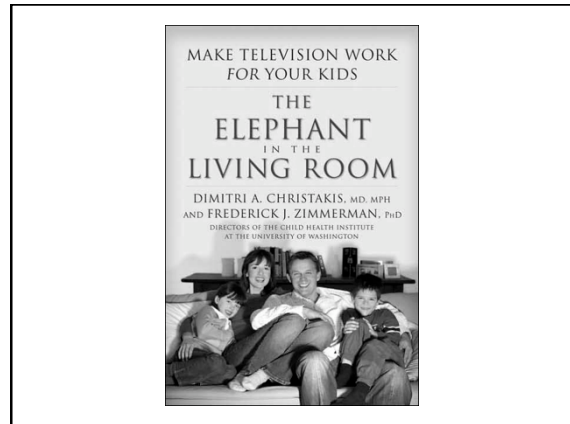


## Television and Child Development: How to do it right (A guide for parents)

Michael Karcher, Ed.D., Ph.D.  
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 Director of School Counselor Training Masters Degree Program



### Three “take home” points

- 1) Media is a real and powerful influence
- 2) Media should be a tool, not a crutch
- 3) Don't feel bad or guilty about using it, but use it wisely

### Effects across the age spectrum

- Infants (Attention Span, Language)
- Preschoolers (Behavior)
- School age (Obesity)
- Adolescent (Alcohol, Sex)

### My Early TV

- I watched TV where my mom could see
  - Now kids have TV's in their bedrooms
- Watched cartoons only on Saturday morning
  - Now cartoons are available 24/7
- Started watching at 4 years
  - Now kids start at 9 months

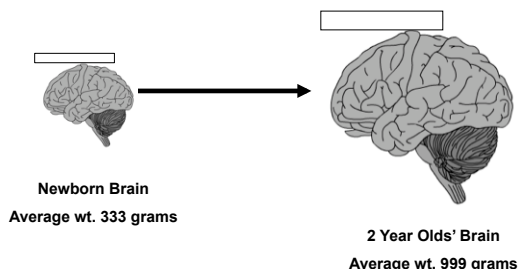
### How else has TV changed since we were kids?

- ✓ More violence in G-rated movies
- ✓ More commercials (now up to 16-21 minutes per hour)
- ✓ Branding of PBS shows
- ✓ Sit-Com families have become more acrimonious

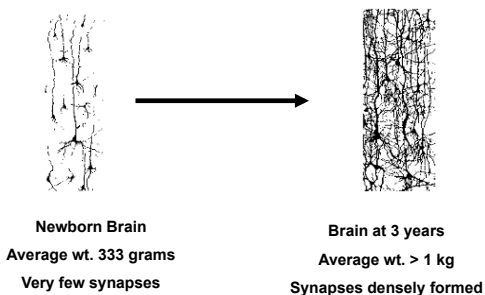
### Why focus on very young children?

- Critical window
- Significant exposure
- Early exposure predicts later viewing
- Much less studied
- Fast growing segment

### Why Early Media Matters



### Why Early Media Matters



### AAP Policy Statement

***“Discourage*** television viewing for children younger than 2 years and encourage more interactive activities that will promote proper brain development such as talking, playing, singing, and reading together.”

AAP Committee on Public Education *Pediatrics* 2001

### Early viewing and subsequent dependence

- Television viewing in preschool age predicts viewing at school age and beyond
- The more TV children watch before age 3, the more likely they are to protest having it turned off at age 6

### Reasons for infant viewing

Most Important Reason	% Citing
Teaches them or is good for their brain	29%
Is something they really enjoy	23%
Time for me to get things done	21%
Time spent together with sibling	9%

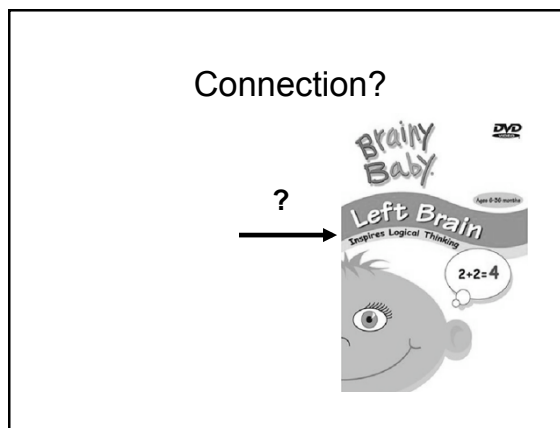
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### Testimonial #2

*“By 3 years old, if you’ve provided your child with these worthwhile entertainment videos, baby will be talking and understanding quite a bit.”*



One study examined relationship between type and amount of TV

- Predictor: Asked 1000 parents “On a typical weekday (weekend), how many hours per day does your child watch Baby DVDs/videos (e.g. *Baby Einstein, Brainy Baby*)?”
- Outcome: Child Development Inventory (Validated measure of infant Language Development)

### Results

Variable	Change on Language Development Scale related to ach activity
Reading Daily	7.07 (More, better)
Story Telling daily	6.47 (More, better)
Baby DVDs/Videos (daily hours)	-16.99 (the more TV, the worse)

Adjusted for gender, age, # siblings, prematurity, daycare, marital status, education, income, race/ethnicity, co-viewing of TV

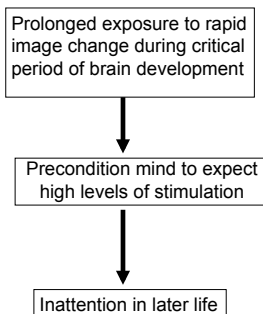
### What we find

- 1) More TV before age 3 → More likely to have attention problems at age 7
- 2) More cognitive stimulation before age 3 → Less like to have attention problems at age 7

### Why infants seem to enjoy TV: The “Orienting Response”

- First described by Pavlov (1927)—the guy who trained dogs to salivate
- “What is it reflex”—unlearned response with evolutionary or biological basis
- Why: all individuals stop what they are doing and tune in new stimulus—TV provides multiple “new stimuli” every minute.

### Book Authors’ Hypothesis



### Peer-reviewed Literature

- No rigorous research on these types of infant DVD products or “Edutainment” games
- Some evidence of high quality television programs (notably *Sesame Street*, *Blues Clues*) being beneficial to learning
- DVDs of select shows (e.g., documentaries) can be beneficial
- Age is important consideration (3-5 vs younger)



### Sesame Street



- Landmark program (1969)
- Extensively study: Positive effects of Sesame Street on number and letter recognition among boys especially.
- Magazine format chosen
  - Encourages interactions
  - Teaches age appropriate lessons
  - Repetition of content facilitates learning
  - Designed to increase sustained attention

### Conclusions for Infants

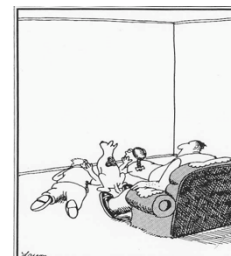
- Use of DVD’s and videos with babies/infants is associated with delayed language acquisition
- Early television viewing is associated with subsequent attention problems
- Although the direction of causality is unknown, studies of infants’ exposure (before they could manifest problem behaviors) suggests baby videos and non-educational TV leads to poor language and attention later.

### Implications

- No proven benefits to early infant viewing of media
- Concern about potential harms based on limited data
- Discouraging viewing before age 2 is prudent
- Limit exposure in first 3 years of life

### Into Childhood and Adolescence: Mashing the Couch Potato Theory

TV's Role in Childhood Obesity



In the days before television

### What we know about TV & obesity

- Yes, reducing television viewing reduces excess weight gain in children (Robinson)
- But the idea that TV keeps kids from being active (e.g., playing outside) is not really supported.
- No evidence from observational studies  
TV does not displace other sedentary activities
- No evidence from experimental study  
Reducing TV did not increase physical activity

### If it TV is not displacing physical activities or leading to more eating, then what?

- 1980's deregulation of TV increased options of channels
- More Channels, More Ads
  - More targeted → greater potency

### Why are kids so vulnerable?

- Under ~7 do not recognize “ads” as such



- US children see ~40,000 TV ads/yr
- 70% of ads during children's shows are for high sugar cereals, candy bars, & junk food
- Amount of ad time increased over years
  - 16 minutes of a one hour prime time show

Some Programs Promote good eating habits

**A Cookie is a Sometime Food**

But an apple is an any time food  
Yes a banana is an any time food  
Yes, a fruit is an any time food!

**I Eat the Colors of the Rainbow**

I eat the colors of the rainbow...  
Veggies and fruit that help me grow  
Red...red...some of my favorite foods are:  
Apples, cherries, strawberries and tomato  
Orange...orange...some of my favorite foods are:  
Carrots, oranges, peach and sweet potato

**I Love Fruit**

Whoa-oo-oo!  
I love fruit! It really tastes good now  
I love fruit! It really tastes good now  
So good Oh yeah I love fruit!

Fruit's fun to eat, so juicy and sweet now  
Fruit's fun to eat, so juicy and sweet now  
So fun to eat I love fruit

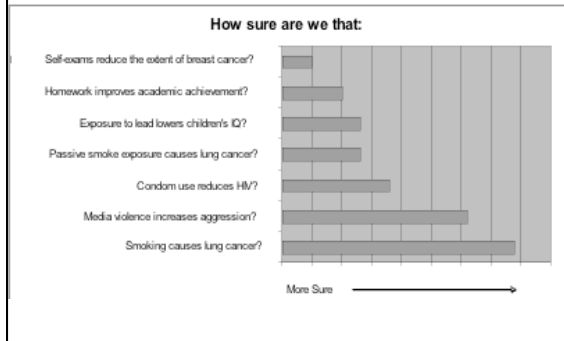
### So, you don't believe that commercials/ads are a problem?

- How much could ads account for, you ask?
  - After controlling for the effect of the foods advertised TV there was no longer an association between TV and weight gain
- Each additional hour of TV watched →
  - 167 calories retained per day among children
- We know that just 100 excess calories per day for 1 year leads to → 10 lbs excess weight gain by adults

### TV and Aggression

- **People who watch violent television as children behave more aggressively even 15 years later, according to one of the few TV violence studies to follow children into adulthood.** The study linked violent TV viewing at ages 6 to 9 to such outcomes as spouse abuse and criminal convictions in a person's early 20s. (see Associated Press, March 10, 2003)
- The debate in scientific circles about media and violence is over.
- But it is alive and well in the public arena

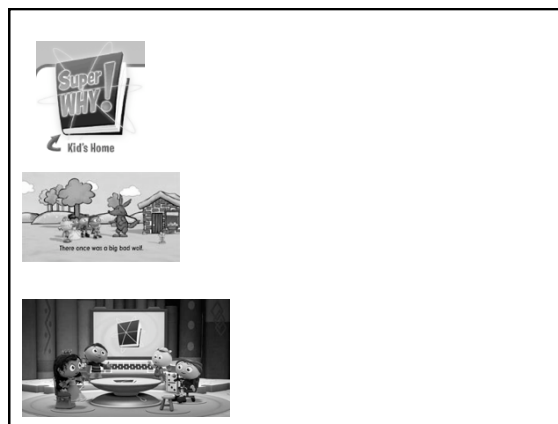
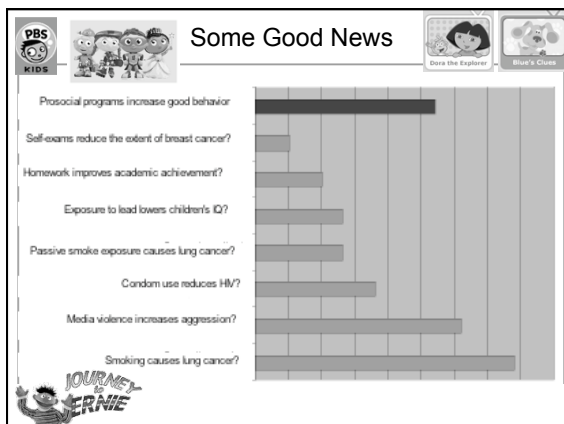
### How big an effect?



### Strength of association

- "The correlation between violent media and aggression is larger than the effect that wearing a condom has on decreasing the risk of HIV.
- It's larger than the correlation between exposure to lead and decreased IQ levels in kids.
- It's larger than the effects of exposure to asbestos or the effect of secondhand smoke on cancer."

*Quote by Brad Bushman, Iowa State University in Washington Post article, Friday, March 29, 2002*



### Conclusions: Children and Teens

- TV and eating go together, but what kids eat is what seems most affected by TV (and most affects weight)
- Advertising to children is effective— So, beware.
- Advertisements are the hidden hand in the childhood obesity epidemic

### What to do?

- Discourage eating while viewing
- Limit advertising to children (public policy) and limit your children to stations without ads (e.g., Nick Jr and PBS)
- Promote “media literacy” (among parents and children) to better understand what is “educational” TV and explicitly prosocial vs. cartoons of little educational value.
- Remember, strictly limit TV before age 3; then after, allow educational (ad-free) television and avoid violent shows.

### Media literacy: What parents can do about violence on TV and movies?

- “Violence Discussions” (“Mediate intake” or explain the violence in shows seen by children)
  - Ask your child if characters sad, mad, or scared?
  - Who might be hurt? How do they feel now?
  - How does their mommy, daddy etc feel now?
  - What could you have done instead without hurting anyone?
- These discussions discredit violence as viable problem-solving tool, foster empathy, and decrease identification with the aggressor.

### Summary of Media Literacy

- Behaviors (good and bad) on the screen are mirrored in real life
- Find and encourage good ones
- Mediate the effects of bad ones

### Concluding points: Notice Similarities to Tobacco

- Not everyone who smokes gets cancer
  - Not every young child who watches TV is harmed by it
- Not every cancer victim smoked
  - Not every child with a health or behavior problem watched TV when young
- Smoking is not the only factor that causes cancer, but it is a *major* factor
  - TV is not the only factor that causes health and behavior problems, but it is a major factor

### Public Misconceptions

- A. TV is harmless
- B. TV is harmful

In fact, ...

*TV viewing is a social phenomenon that can be harmful or beneficial depending on how it is used.*

### Top 10 pitfalls

- (10) Feeling guilty about media usage
- (9) Eating in front of the set
- (8) Focusing too much on quantity
- (7) Giving in to pester power
- (6) Letting kids watch alone

### Top 10 pitfalls (cont)

- (5) Underestimating commercials
- (4) Missing teachable moments
- (3) Setting a bad example
- (2) TV in bedroom
- (1) Mindless Viewing

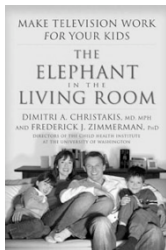
### Three “take home” points and one plea for support

- 1) Media is a real and powerful influence
- 2) Media should be a tool, not a crutch
- 3) Don't feel bad or guilty about using it, but use it wisely
- 4) Support public television (KLRN): For every \$ families give, that's one \$ less they need to take in from ads

<http://www.maketwork.com/>

- [Common Sense Media](#)
- [MediaWise](#)
- [Parents Television Council](#)
- [Cable Puts You in Control!](#)
- [Kids Risk Guide on Media and Kids](#)
- [Center for Screen-Time Awareness](#)
- [Navigating the Children's](#)
- [Media Landscape](#) American Academy of Pediatrics
- [Parents Against Junk Food](#)
- [ParentCenter](#)
- [SuperNanny](#)

### Thanks



- This presentation was adapted from one made by the authors of “The Elephant in the Living Room.” After reading the book, I was so impressed, I contacted them, and they sent me their slides.
- Consider buying their book and reading it to better understand these issues.