Choosing Appropriate Videos for Your Young Children

Ages 0-2

Doctors and researchers recommend no TV or videos for infants under the age of 2. Infants learn from real-life experiences and interactions with people; watching videos may even cause attention problems later.

Ages 2-5

Limit TV and videos to no more than 1 hour a day. Young children react to media differently than adults as they do not have the abstract thinking necessary to understand most themes, or to understand the difference between real and pretend.

Choose shows that engage children through interesting content, not flashy graphics or fast sequences. Stories should be easy to follow, with few cuts. Pace should be slow and steady. Joanne Cantor recommends videos for this age that are “all sweetness and light.”

Ages K-3

Kids in school are ready to see movies in the theater, if they are the appropriate movies. Limit your child’s media to educational shows and videos made for this age group only, not PG-13. Don’t show a video made for 9-year-olds to your 5-year-old. Know what your child is watching and why. Consider the needs and personalities of your own kids.

Scary Movies

Preschoolers don’t know that what is scary to them might not be real. If they see a scary monster on a video, saying “Don’t worry, it’s not real” doesn’t mean much. Fears can persist long after a child views something scary (Guernsey, 95). Watching movies with your children and talking to them will help them understand more. Large, vivid images and loud, scary sounds matter the most. What else scares children?

- vicious animals, witches, and monsters
- disasters, accidents, and violence vividly portrayed
- death or separation from a parent

Find out more about scary movies at www.joannecantor.com

If your child is afraid, here are some things you can do:

- turn off the TV or leave the theater
- hold their hand, have them sit on your lap, let them know they are safe
- ask them to talk about what was scary, or draw a picture
Cartoons
These are made for school-age kids, contain violence, and are usually inappropriate for preschool children.

How much is the TV on?
Background TV affects children’s ability to engage in pretend play, interactions with parents, and their efforts to learn language (Guernsey, 70).

Try not to have TV on when kids are playing, and keep the house relatively quiet when you are talking to them.

Parents’ Role
Parents model for their children how to watch TV: whether it is used for educational reasons, pure entertainment, or for relaxation. If parents are mindful themselves about their watching, their children will learn that TV and videos can be a teaching tool.

Preschoolers should not be watching nightly news, soap operas, game shows, sitcoms or crime dramas. They should watch children’s shows only.

What to Do?
• Keep a list of TV shows and videos that are appropriate for your child, and take it with you to the video store or the Library. Either pick out videos without your child present, or be very clear about what your child is allowed to choose: “You can pick out one Sesame Street video today. Which one do you want?”
• Time limits: 30 or 60 minutes a day, with choices limited to educational TV or short video. Also limits of what days of the week or times of the day kids can watch.
• Location of TV: Move it out of the living room (or make it less obvious), out of bedrooms, the kitchen, and out of the car. Make it harder to just turn it on. It will make it easier to not watch TV during meals, short trips in the car, and other times in the day when it can become background noise.
• If you love watching TV, try to TiVo your favorite shows, or wait to watch later in the evening when your children are in bed. Try to get your news from the radio rather than watching it on TV.
• Talk to babysitters and other parents about your expectations and your limits.

If you have suggestions, please let us know!
Bozeman Public Library Children’s Room ★ 406-582-2404 ★ www.bozemanlibrary.org
Resources for Choosing Videos:

[www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)
Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the media and entertainment lives of kids and families. They started the organization because they know families need trustworthy information to help manage their kids' media lives.

[www.parentschoice.org](http://www.parentschoice.org)
The Foundation's mission is to provide parents with information to participate wisely in their children’s learning outside the classroom. Their purpose is to search out and recommend products that help kids grow—imaginatively, physically, morally, and mentally—fairly priced products that are fun, safe, and socially sound. Parents' Choice reviews books, toys, music, television, software, videogames, websites, and magazines for children and families of all achievements and backgrounds.

[www.movies.yahoo.com/mv/moviemom](http://www.movies.yahoo.com/mv/moviemom)
Nell Minow's award-winning website, featuring reviews of current releases, classic videos, and guidance for parents, has been online since 1995.

[www.parentstv.org](http://www.parentstv.org)
The Parents Television Council’s primary mission is to promote and restore responsibility and decency to the entertainment industry in answer to America’s demand for positive, family-oriented television programming. The PTC does this by fostering changes in TV programming to make the early hours of prime time family-friendly and suitable for viewers of all ages.

Recommended Reading:

★ **The Elephant in the Living Room: Make Television Work for Your Kids** by Dimitri Christakis and Frederick Zimmerman (302.23). The authors analyze television’s impact on children and encourage parents to rethink, restructure, and reduce viewing in order to lessen television’s negative effects.

★ **Into the Minds of Babies: How Screen Time Affects Children From Birth to Age Five** by Lisa Guernsey (649.122) A science journalist and mother of two, Guernsey manages to extricate straightforward information and guidelines from the morass of research, articles, and debates on screen media and child brain development.