

# Do More...Watch Less: Be Screen Smart

## TV Background Noise Disrupts Child Play

Many parents watch the news or other shows as children play nearby. But new research shows that even when the television is just background noise, it may be disruptive to a child's normal development.

It's estimated that 75 percent of very young children in the United States live in homes where the television is on most of the time, even though the kids often aren't watching it. University of Massachusetts researchers recently studied how TV background noise might affect young children. The study, published in the 2008 journal *Child Development*, looked at 50 1-, 2- and 3-year-olds. Each child came to a lab with a parent and was allowed to play for an hour with various toys. For half the time, a television was on in the room, showing an episode of the adult game show *Jeopardy!* as well as commercials. During the other half hour, the TV was turned off.

As expected, the children paid little attention to the adult television show, glancing at it for less than a few seconds at a time, and less than once a minute. Even so, the distraction of the background noise had a significant effect on how children at every age played. When the television was on, the children played with each toy for significantly shorter periods of time, and focused attention during play was also shorter compared to how they played when the TV was off.

Researchers said that even though the children weren't interested in the show, background TV is an "ever-changing audiovisual distractor" that disrupts their ability to sustain various types of play. The finding is important because many well-meaning parents who wouldn't let their young children watch television may not realize that even adult programs that don't interest children still can have an effect.



"Background TV is potentially a chronic environmental risk factor affecting most American children," said Marie Evans Schmidt, a research associate at the Center on Media and Child Health at Children's Hospital in Boston and lead author of the study, in a news release. "Parents should limit their young children's exposure."

Adapted from an article by Tara Parker-Pope, from New York Times: Television may interfere with playtime, by Michael Temchine, 7/16/08, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/16/tv-background-noise-disrupts-child-play/>

## Did you know?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends:

- **No screen time for children under age 2**
- **Limiting screen time to 1-2 hours of quality programming for children 2 years old or older**
- **No screen media in the bedroom**

# WHY IT MATTERS!

## INTERACTION IS KEY FOR LANGUAGE!

- Studies prove background TV distracts both adults and children from interacting with each other
- Children, especially those under 3 years old, need their parents or caregivers to be engaged and talk to them, so they can learn new words and test them out

## PLAY IS IMPORTANT FOR BABIES' BRAINS!

- Play gives children a world they can create and master, providing opportunities to be creative, to grow stronger physically, and engage with others so they can be well-adjusted emotionally
- Kids need quiet time to play without distractions so they can develop their attention span and use their brains

# WHAT TO DO!

- Encourage active play every day, both indoors and outside
- Use the quiet time without TV to talk together about the day's events, what is happening in your family, what you're thinking and how you're feeling, and what you're hoping and dreaming
- Selectively choose what is on the TV, and talk with your children about what they might be seeing or hearing
- Share this information with other household members, so they also understand the negative influence of background TV



***“Scientists have so far come up with nothing to suggest that babies are better off watching a baby video than, say, watching Dad fold laundry.”***

*Into the Minds of Babes: How Screen Time Affects Children From Birth to Age Five*

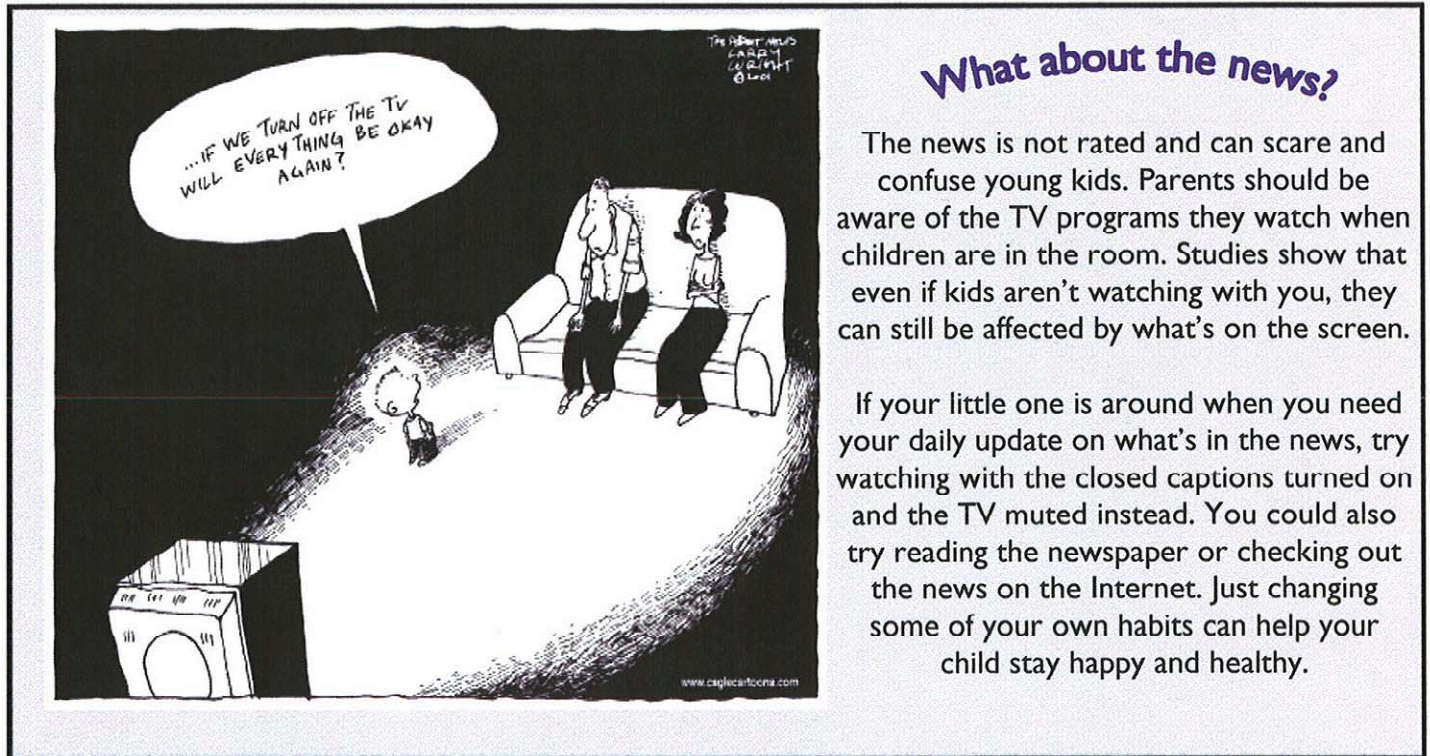
*by Lisa Guernsey*



MT NAPA PROGRAM  
Bozeman, MT 59717  
406-994-4103

[jnerison@hotmail.com](mailto:jnerison@hotmail.com)

***“Anytime the TV is on, children speak less and adults interact with them less frequently,” says Dr. Christakis, pediatrician and author of “The Elephant in the Living Room”.***



## What about the news?

The news is not rated and can scare and confuse young kids. Parents should be aware of the TV programs they watch when children are in the room. Studies show that even if kids aren't watching with you, they can still be affected by what's on the screen.

If your little one is around when you need your daily update on what's in the news, try watching with the closed captions turned on and the TV muted instead. You could also try reading the newspaper or checking out the news on the Internet. Just changing some of your own habits can help your child stay happy and healthy.



## PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

Adult TV, including quiz shows, talk shows, cartoons, and the nightly news are not meant for preschoolers. Be aware of what you or older siblings are watching when your little one is around. These programs may leave young kids scared or upset, so try not to watch them while they are in the room. Even if it looks like they aren't paying attention, they still might be affected by what you're watching.

*\*remember children under 2 years old should not watch any TV at all*

### Parts of this flyer developed by:

Dr. Dimitri Christakis and the My Healthy Child team at the Center for Child Health, Behavior and Development  
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