

## Television: babies and toddlers

Television might seem like a good way to settle a restless baby or a cranky toddler. It's also an easy way to give yourself a break. But too much TV can have negative impacts for small children. Here are some ideas to help you find a balance.

### TV time for babies and toddlers

Child development experts often recommend no TV at all before the age of two.

This is for the following reasons:

- Babies learn and grow best through interacting with real people, not people on a screen.
- There is no evidence that TV and DVDs support or enhance early learning.
- It's harder for under-twos to get good visual information from the 2D images on a screen.
- TV distracts infants and toddlers from toy play, and other play that might be of more developmental benefit.
- If TV is used for companionship, comfort, distraction or to promote sleep and so on, it might become a habit in later life.



Check out our article on [how children see TV](#). Recommendations about TV time make a lot of sense when you understand that children see TV differently from grown-ups.

### Making the most of TV time

If you decide to let your baby or toddler watch some TV, it's a good idea to put some thought into how your child interacts with the TV.

Toddlers enjoy programs more if you watch alongside them, and they will learn better if you are watching too. Watching TV with your baby or toddler means she can still get what benefits her the most – your responses to her and the world around her.

Choose some favourite programs that seem to interest your child, and watch only those. For example, babies and toddlers often enjoy simple and slow images found in



### did you know ?

According to research:

- TV and DVDs can't teach toddlers complex tasks or language skills as well as real-world interactions with carers.
- Under-twos don't understand the meaning of TV programs.
- The visual system doesn't fully mature until children are three, so screen images are harder for young children to process.

programs such as *In the Night Garden*, *Boo Bah* or *Teletubbies*. You could also buy some suitable DVDs.

When you're choosing TV or DVD programs for your baby or toddler, it's a good idea to avoid the following:

- programs and DVDs not specifically designed with the abilities of very young children in mind
- scary visual images and/or music: angry animals and monsters can frighten older toddlers once they are able to comprehend TV images. They might remember frightening images for a long time and can't understand the images aren't real
- advertising: babies can recognise logos and link them with exciting colours and happy sounds. But they can't understand that ads are there to sell them something. You can avoid ads by watching stations without them, recording programs and fast-forwarding through the ads, or watching programs on DVD.

### Limiting TV time for babies and toddlers

Try to turn off the TV when the program is over.

Having a TV on 'in the background' can reduce toddlers' concentration on play activities. Play is important because it's how children learn to work with objects, understand cause and effect, and interact with other people.

What about a TV in the bedroom? Most child development experts would say this isn't a good idea. It's better to keep the TV in a shared space.



Watching TV is a big effort for babies. It can make them really tired. In fact, if they're not old enough to turn their heads away, some babies will become distressed. Toddlers also get tired from the effort of paying attention to TV – but many will just walk away!

### Teaching children to be thoughtful TV consumers

Very young children, toddlers in particular, are old enough to see how you use the TV.

You can be a role model for using TV in appropriate ways:

- Try to minimise your own TV watching when your child is around. Let your child see you doing other things instead – listening to a CD or the radio, reading, working in the garden, going for a walk.
- Turn off the TV when you're finished watching a program. Avoid having it on in the background.
- Keep family mealtimes TV-free. Make them a time for catching up and enjoying your food. This helps even very young children learn about socialising – and table manners!

### What to do when the TV's off

We know: the reality is that sometimes TV is just the easiest option. It can keep the kids entertained when you need to get dinner, talk on the phone, or just take a break for yourself.

Here are some ideas to keep young children entertained without turning on the TV:

- Music or story CDs are a good option for very young children. These can be less overwhelming than TV images and sounds. Check out [Baby Karaoke](#) – an animated storybook of popular children's songs.

- Put together a special box of toys and objects that you bring out only at those difficult times of day when it might be tempting to turn to the TV. They don't need to be expensive or fancy – just things your child doesn't see all the time. For example, if you're cooking dinner, your toddler might like to play with some wooden spoons and plastic bowls.
- Set aside a cupboard or drawer full of things your toddler can safely explore – for example, plastic containers, drink bottles and so on. Let your child get at the cupboard only when you need a break.



The best stimulation for a growing baby brain is a caring responsive grown-up – lots of holding, comforting, rocking, singing or talking. TV and DVDs can't provide this responsive, emotional environment.

Rated ★★★★★★ (7 ratings)

#### More to explore

- ▶ Screen time and children
- ▶ Television and preschoolers
- ▶ Television and school-age children
- ▶ Why play is important
- ▶ Baby play and learning: in a nutshell
- ▶ Toddler play and learning: in a nutshell
- ▶ Activities for younger children
- ▶ Toys, games and books for all ages

#### Web links

- ▶ Young Media Australia - Fight-Free Media List
- ▶ Common Sense Media

Last updated	Last reviewed
05-07-2010	07-02-2012

#### Acknowledgements

Article developed in collaboration with the Australian Council on Children and the Media (incorporating Young Media Australia), Australia.

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