

## Television viewing by preschoolers: Research shows it can have positive effects

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### **The Bottom Line:**

This systematic review found that television viewing had positive effects on some preschoolers, particularly if the programs were educational and if a parent was present to comment on content. The research showed that watching television increases a child's knowledge, promotes racial tolerance and stimulates imaginative play.

Aggressive children who watched action programs or cartoons became more aggressive, but non-aggressive children did not become aggressive from viewing these shows. Children who watched a lot of cartoons were found to have more difficulty paying attention.

The authors conclude that the effect of TV watching depends on the type of show, whether a parent is present, and the child's characteristics (e.g., if they tend to be aggressive).

### **What problem is being addressed?**

Small children, and even infants, are increasingly exposed to television viewing instead of playing or interacting with adults or other children. A study published in the May 2007 issue of the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine<sup>1</sup> shows that about 40% of infants just 3 months of age are exposed to television on a regular basis. The proportion increases to 90% for children aged 2 years.

Both parents and professionals are concerned about the effects this may be having on children's intellectual, physical and social development. Television viewing has been linked to violent or aggressive behaviour, sleep problems, substance abuse, poor school performance, and obesity.

### **What intervention is being tested?**

This systematic review looked at how television viewing affected children's knowledge, their attitudes towards children of other races, their imaginative play, aggression, and desire and ability to engage in social interactions with other children and adults.

### **What is the *real scientific evidence*?**

The authors reviewed 12 small controlled trials that examined the effects of television content on preschoolers. Although television viewing by infants is increasing, no studies were found on this age group.

Children who viewed educational programs such as Sesame Street or Mister Rogers' Neighborhood increased their general knowledge, showed greater acceptance of children of different races, and showed increases in imaginative play compared to children who watched cartoons or general television shows.

Children who watched cartoons for extended periods were found to have greater difficulty paying attention.

The studies also found increased aggression among children with high initial levels of aggression who watched action shows or cartoons. Children who were not aggressive at the start of the study did not become so from watching those programs.

Having a parent present during viewing who commented on content seemed to increase the benefit of the television viewing.

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The preceding is a summary of:

Thakkar RR, Garrison MM, Christakis DA. *A systematic review for the effects of television viewing by infants and preschoolers*. Pediatrics 2006, 118: 2025-2031.

<sup>1</sup> Zimmerman FJ, Christakis DA, Meltzoff AN. *Television and DVD/video viewing in children younger than 2 years*. Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine 2007, 161: 473-479

What does the American Academy of Pediatrics say? Read the [Academy's Parent Guidelines](#) for television viewing by children and adolescents. (links to article below)

[Click here](#) to link to the Canadian Pediatric Society's guidelines for Promoting Good Television Habits in your child.

(links to: <http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/behaviour/ManagingMediaUse.htm>)