
FEATURE

What's wrong with TV and video for babies?

“Our babies love watching television. They learn so much, especially from the educational shows.”

“We live in a technological age. Children need to get used to electronic media from day one.”

“I like using DVDs for infants because they keep babies occupied while I do paperwork and tidy up.”



Sound familiar? Maybe you've heard a caregiver or parent express similar sentiments. Maybe you're hearing comments like these more than ever before. Maybe you're wondering what could be wrong with using electronic media with infants.

As you know, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the nation's largest organization of children's physicians, discourages the use of all electronic media with children younger than 2. The group issued a policy statement to that effect in 1999 and reaffirmed the policy, with updated research findings from the past 10 years, last fall.

What the findings show

The updated policy statement addresses three points:

1 There is no evidence of educational benefit of media use for children younger than 2.

According to the AAP, “the educational merit of media for children younger than 2 years remains unproven despite the fact that three-quarters of the top-selling infant videos make explicit or implicit educational claims.”

Studies show, among other things, that media use with children younger than 2 does not improve cognitive development or language skills.

2 Media use has potentially harmful health and developmental effects on infants.

Although studies on the health effects of media use on infants are lacking, the AAP sees ample reason for concern.

“In the short-term, children younger than 2 years who watched more television or videos have expressive language delays,” the AAP says. The long-term effects are not known.

In addition, television use as a bedtime routine “is associated with irregular sleep schedules” in children younger than 3 years. “Poor sleep habits have adverse effects on mood, behavior, and learning.”

3 Having television on all the time decreases adult-child interaction.

“Infant vocabulary growth is directly related to the amount of ‘talk time’ or the amount of time parents spend speaking to them,” the AAP says. “Heavy



PHOTO BY SUSAN GAETZ

television use in a household can interfere with a child's language development simply because parents likely spend less time talking to the child."

What to do?

The AAP offered a number of recommendations to pediatricians, parents, the media industry, and researchers. As teachers, we can adapt the recommendations to caregiving practices with infants in child care facilities. Consider the following:

- Avoid using television, videos, and other electronic media with children younger than 2 years.
- Sit down and read to children to foster their cognitive and language development.

SIT DOWN AND READ TO CHILDREN TO FOSTER THEIR COGNITIVE AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT.

- Play with infants as a way for them to learn problem-solving, develop reasoning skills, and think innovatively.
- At times when you cannot read to children or engage them in play, provide supervised independent play. Simply having a baby play with blocks or nesting cups on the floor while you tend to

things nearby is useful play time.

We can also inform parents about the AAP recommendations in the following ways:

- Stress to parents that unstructured play time is more valuable for an infant's developing brain than any electronic media exposure, despite the claims of media companies.
- Discourage parents from placing a television set in children's bedrooms.
- Recognize that media use is a reality for many families. If parents choose to use media, encourage them to review the content first. Encourage parents to watch the program or video with their child and talk about it.
- Encourage parents to re-think their own use of media for its potential secondhand effect on children—namely, reduced interaction with children because parents are distracted.

Reference

American Academy of Pediatrics. November 2011. Policy Statement: Media Use by Children Younger Than 2 Years. *Pediatrics*, Vol. 128 (5). Available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/10/12/peds.2011-1753.full.pdf+html>. ■



PHOTO BY SUSAN GAETZ