

## Does television have a place in child care programs?

Hidden in a cupboard, or displayed proudly in the centre of the room, a large percentage of early childhood environments own a television set. Television, computers, electronic games or other similar technology used as experiences for children are appropriate when they are child focused, carefully planned, monitored and evaluated by carers. By sharing and discussing these experiences with children the carer is able to ensure that children are not exposed to violence, stereotypes or adult themes.

Most centres than not have a TV and video recorder to allow the children to watch television and video programs. We as carers need to be mindful that all the children within our care come from differing home environments, where the rules around watching television may be vastly different. We need to be respectful of parent's choices around what TV viewing their children are exposed to, especially when programming the use of TV into our curriculum's. Yes, you haven't misunderstood, I did refer to programming. From my many conversations with carers I have found that a common practice is to use TV as a crowd control technique—when teachers and carers want to carry out those routine duties. Carers need to consider what children in their care are watching and whether the experience has any educational value. I would suggest that at least one carer should sit with the children to assess the quality of the program content and to answer questions or extend on any discussion that might result from the children's TV viewing.

One article entitled, "TV off 'n' on" (Parenting SA, 1996), describes the effects of television viewing on children of different ages. It suggests that a child's age and stage of development makes a difference and should be considered:

Children under 6 years have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality on TV. They don't follow plots, tend to focus on the exciting bits and don't understand cause and effect. They can see cartoon characters as real and are open to the appeal of advertising.

Children from 6 to 9 years still have some difficulty working out the difference between fantasy and reality, especially if it looks like real life. Boys tend to admire and want to be like the powerful male hero.

Older primary school age children are likely to be disturbed by material, which is based on fact, as it could mean it could happen to them. They are curious about the teenage world, sex and fashion and can be misled by the way boy-girl relationships are shown in soaps.

Children's reactions to programs and characters they see on TV can vary after viewing. Distress may be acted out in many forms from children withdrawing and becoming anxious to loud outburst and re-enactments of events seen on TV.

Advertisements may be inappropriate for children's viewing so that if TV programs are to be used, taping TV programs allows the adult both to edit out all advertisements and to carefully evaluate the appropriateness of the show.

Centres with TV and videos can benefit from the discussions and reflections involved in developing policies and procedures about the use of this equipment in the program. All staff and families should be familiar with these policies.

Other points for parents and carers to consider include:

Remember that you act as a powerful role model. A child's viewing habits may be copied from you.

- Control the TV, don't let it control you.
- Sit with very young children and watch TV with them.
- Only turn the TV on when you chosen to watch a particular show.
- Use the VCR to tape programs for control and flexibility.
- Talk about programs. Discuss characters, stories and themes. Describe likes and dislikes. Ask questions such as "What would happen if you did what that person did?".
- Talk about moods after watching programs and ask children to come up with words that describe how they feel. Such as 'bored', 'happy', 'scared', 'sad', 'excited' or 'grumpy'.
- Provide opportunities for children to participate in other activities instead of TV viewing.
- Children need to learn skills which help them get on with others in the world. These are best learnt and practiced by doing rather than watching. Practice using the 'off' button on the TV set.

One final, personal comment. In my opinion, best practice and Quality Assurance would suggest that the best policy for TV in childcare is one that simply reads, 'Sell it, and engage children'.

*Reference: TV off 'n' on, Parenting the most important job in the world, caring for children (6 to 12 years), Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 1996 Family day care Quality Practices Guide, Principle 3.1 National Childcare Accreditation Council 2004*