

# What parents **NEED** to **KNOW** about **TV** and their **CHILDREN**

This handout describes the **TOP 10 PITFALLS OR TRAPS** that parents have to deal with when **viewing** and **discussing TV** with their children.

## PITFALL

## EXPLANATION

- 1) Feeling guilty about media usage**

**Don't feel bad or guilty about TV**, but use it wisely. Most parents have concerns about their child's viewing, and many feel guilty about it. This shame hampers their ability to be thoughtful about media usage.
- 2) Eating in front of the set**

**Don't let your children eat while they watch TV**, or insist on healthy, low-calorie foods (e.g., fruits and vegetables). Snacking while viewing is common, and increases caloric intake.
- 3) Focusing too much on quality**

**Be selective about the programming your your children watch.** Use DVDs and digital recording technology to help you. While too much TV is a problem, what is viewed and how it is viewed is more important than the amount viewed.
- 4) Giving in to pester power**

**Be strong!** Relenting to children's demands for junk food is one of the ways TV leads to obesity.
- 5) Letting kids watch along**

**Co-viewing improves the beneficial effects of positive programs**, and diminishes the harmful effects of negative ones. If you can't be in the room watching with your children, at least be familiar with what they are viewing.
- 6) Underestimating commercials**

**Pay attention to commercials**, and talk with your children about what commercials are and how you feel about what they are selling. TV commercials are a powerful socializing force that is poorly regulated and unrated, whether they be junk food or alcohol.
- 7) Missing teachable moments**

**Take the opportunities TV provides** to reinforce positive messages and discuss negative ones. Even at its worst, TV provides ample chances to broach discussions about sex, violence, alcohol, and drug use.
- 8) Setting a bad example**

**Practice what you preach!** Be selective about what you view, and do not idly channel surf.
- 9) TV in child's bedroom**

**Keep bedrooms TV-free zones.** Children with televisions in their bedrooms watch more than those without one. Moreover, parents cannot monitor content.

**10) Mindless viewing**

**Teach your children to be aware of what the medium is all about.** Think about TV as you watch. Know that it has a point of view.

Adopted from the Elephant in the Living Room: Make TV work for your Kids (Christakis and Zimmerman [Rodale press]).  
[www.maketvwork.com](http://www.maketvwork.com)

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