

2001

How Can I Help My Child Become A Critical TV Viewer?

Tom Lee

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Recommended Citation

Lee, Tom, "How Can I Help My Child Become A Critical TV Viewer?" (2001). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 241.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/241

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A weekly question/answer column

How Can I Help My Child Become A Critical TV Viewer?

Tom Lee answers:*

Someone is always making money from television viewers. Just as we should be careful and responsible when someone is trying to sell us something, we should be careful and responsible about what we “buy into” as TV viewers.

There are two questions children and parents should think about: how much TV do you watch and how do you watch TV?

- The average home has the television on 7.5 hours a day. Parents should set limits on the amount of TV viewing and the types of programs viewed. This can be done by setting a maximum amount of time, number of programs or by limiting viewing to certain times of the day whichever is easiest to monitor.
- Studies show that children who watch a moderate amount of TV (1-2 hours a day) do better in school and show more creativity than children who watch no TV or too much TV. However, 1 hour of something worthless is less helpful than an hour of something educational or something that entertains without being vulgar or violent.
- Parents should watch TV with children when possible and help them learn to critique what is shown. Talk back to the TV, ask your child questions or count the number of times something happens or is done. Consider keeping a TV log and have children write down the show watched, the type of program and a grade for the show. Discuss their viewing at the end of the week and suggest things they could do with their time rather than watch a “C” program because it is the only thing on.

* Tom Lee is Utah State University Extension Family and Human Development Specialist