

Too Much Television Can Lead to Violent Behavior in Youth – 5/28/09
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Can you remember what life was like before there were 250 channels on television and the newspaper, not the internet, was the primary source of information? The wonders of technology have given us access to all the information we could ever want but what are the effects of this access, especially to children?

According to Ohio State University Extension, nearly all American households have TV's, usually in more than one room, and on average youth are spending three to five hours per day and 21 to 23 hours each week glued to the television set. With summer upon us, those numbers will most likely increase. During this viewing time, children are exposed to roughly 26 violent acts per viewing hour! If some of our youth's behaviors are modeled by what they see on television, what does that tell us?

A number of studies have linked televised violence to aggressive behavior in children. Besides aggressive behavior, some other effects include accepting violence as a social norm and increased fearfulness that the world is dangerous and harm will come to them. Desensitization is another affect, this involves children becoming less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.

There are many ways that parents can help children understand the seriousness of violence on television and help reduce some of these negative effects. Here are some tips:

Watch a TV program with your child and count how often violence is shown. Discuss these acts and have your child suggest ideas of how the conflict could have been better handled without using violence.

Watch an evening news program with your child and compare what you see on the news with violence in your child's favorite programs. Talk about the results of real life violence, such as death, and how that can affect people close to the victim. Also discuss the consequences associated with committing acts of violence.

Monitor what your children watch and set limits on the amount of time spent in front of the TV or playing videogames. In addition to reducing the exposure to violent acts, you will also be opening up time for activities that will benefit them more such as reading or playing with friends.

There are many opportunities for youth to be involved in the community during the summer months. Several programs are available through local business, community organizations, and of course, the local 4-H office. The more youth are involved outside the home, the less time they will spend in front of the television.

For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.