



CANADA'S CENTRE
FOR DIGITAL AND
MEDIA LITERACY

Managing Television in the Home

Television watching should be a fun and relaxing activity for kids and adults alike—but too often it's a source of family conflict.

If you're concerned about television, banning it isn't a practical solution. Instead, you need to learn to co-exist with television by managing how much your kids watch, and what.

Take control of your family's viewing habits by using some of these strategies:

- Start young. It's wise to work on developing good TV viewing habits well before your children start school. As they grow older, it will become more difficult for you to enforce restrictions or influence their tastes.
- Limit the amount of time your kids spend watching television, especially on school nights. Make sure they're involved in other activities such as sports, hobbies and playing outside. It's easier than ever to watch dozens of episodes of their favourite shows in one sitting. Set a time limit **before** kids start watching, and make sure that it includes **all** screen time – TV, video games, computers, etc. Young kids, especially under two, should watch screens as little as possible.
- Monitor what your children watch, and whenever possible watch with them and discuss the program. See our tipsheet [Coviewing With Your Kids](#) for more tips on how to find teachable moments while watching TV with your children.
- Kids model their behaviour on that of their parents—so take a hard look at your own viewing habits, and if necessary, change them.
- Encourage your children to watch a variety of programs: sports, nature and science shows, the arts, music and history shows. There's a lot of great TV programming out there that makes learning about the world interesting and fun.
- Consider the best place for your television set. When your children are small, use the old adage "out of sight, out of mind"—and keep the TV in a room away from where your family spends most of its time. When your kids get older, you might want it to be in a more visible place for easier monitoring. Never put a television set in a child's bedroom! When kids start watching TV or videos on portable devices, make sure to collect them at least an hour before bedtime.
- Don't leave your TV on when you're not watching it. Turn it on for a specific show, and turn it off again when the show is over. This makes television a special experience that your children can look forward to.



- When your children's friends come to visit, insist on some "no-TV" time. Don't be afraid to restrict viewing of certain shows, even if your children's friends are allowed to watch them. You have the right to protect your children from inappropriate viewing and they will accept your concern as a sign of caring.
- Make sure your kids know that it's their right to say no to programs they find too frightening when visiting friends or relatives.
- Tell the parents of your children's friends about your television rules. It's hard to control what your children see at other houses, but if parents talk about their TV rules with others, it's easier to protect children from unsuitable programming.
- Make sure your caregiver or sitter knows about, and follows, your TV rules.

Tips for Managing Children's Television Viewing

- **Record favourite shows for later viewing:**
By recording them ahead of time you can save TV watching for times when it does not interfere with other activities. Recording TV shows also decreases the temptation to channel surf and makes it easier to keep track of how much television is being consumed.
- **Watch television together whenever possible:**
That way you know what your child is watching and can be there to answer any questions.
- **Choose commercial-free television for young children whenever possible:**
Canada has lots of high-quality, commercial-free, educational programming for children. Avoid shows that are just program-length commercials for spin-off merchandise. When watching children's videos online, wait until the pre-roll ads have finished before your kids watch.
- **Create a library of favourite television programs:**
Young children love to watch the same shows over and over again so it's worth investing in some high quality children's programs on DVD. You can also expand your library by swapping DVDs with friends and neighbours.
- **Use a streaming service:** Streaming services such as Netflix, Shomi and CraveTV can be a great way to get children's programming on-demand, without ads. Make sure to set up a separate profile for you and your children so that the service always recommends age-appropriate programs. Most streaming services also have the option to set parental controls:
 - ⇒ Netflix: <https://help.netflix.com/en/node/264>
 - ⇒ Shomi: <https://community.shaw.ca/docs/DOC-3642#parentalcontrols>
 - ⇒ CraveTV: <http://help.cravetv.ca/>
- **See what's available at your public library:**
Most public libraries now offer a large selection of children's videos. Many Canadian libraries also have National Film Board collections that include many high quality children's productions.



- **Find your favourite programs online and bookmark them for later:**
For example, did you know that Sesame Street has its own YouTube channel? When using YouTube, make sure to turn off Autoplay (switch the toggle at the top right of the screen to “Off”)
- **Use the mute button:**
TV advertisements are designed to be extremely engaging to kids. Muting the sound when commercials are playing will lessen their seductive power.
- **Use commercial time for fun activities:**
Get snacks during commercials or use the time to get children moving by having them stretch, run around the room or do somersaults.
- **Educate kids about advertising:**
Help kids understand that commercial TV is a business -- and its job is to sell viewers to advertisers. Explain that marketers spend a lot of money trying to convince people to buy their products -- a thirty second commercial often costs more to produce than a thirty minute TV program. Talk about common strategies used in commercials aimed at kids. Look for words that come up again and again in advertising. Help children learn to question the claims made in commercials.

Television: Taking Action

Voice your opinions

- If you want to lodge a complaint about television content, send a letter to the offending station or network. For local television stations — consult your telephone book. For all other stations and networks — look for contact information on their websites.
- If you don't receive a satisfactory reply, send a letter of complaint to:
 - [Canadian Broadcast Standards Council](#)
 - [Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission](#) (CRTC)
- Concerns about advertising on Canadian television should be directed to:
 - [Advertising Standards Canada](#)
 - [Canadian Broadcast Standards Council](#)
- For streaming TV, complain directly to the streaming service.

Community Action

- Organize a Screen Free Week event at school, or through a Guiding/Scout unit. This North American event happens twice a year and involves hundreds of schools, libraries and individuals. For ideas on how to host an event, visit our [Screen Free Week](#) tip sheet.
- Celebrate UNICEF's [International Children's Day of Broadcasting](#). Ask your local community channel if your child's class or Guiding/Scout unit can produce a segment or show to be aired on the day of the event.
- Ask toy stores to stop carrying toys for young children based on violent TV shows and movies aimed at teens.

