

By Felicity 2006 Senior Editor, Sci-Tech News

Television Is Bad for Children

But not as bad as it was once thought

A new study shows that children who spend more time watching television spend less time interacting with their family and playing creatively. Children watch television more than any other activity. Researchers from University of Texas at Austin and Harvard Children's Hospital wanted to understand whether and how this affects children's health and behavior. Dr. Elizabeth Vandewater and her colleagues surveyed 2,900 children ages 12 and under around the United States and analyzed all of the children's activities over two 24-hour periods, one randomly chosen weekday and one weekend day. The data was gathered by the child's primary caregiver. The researchers compared time spent watching television with time spent on homework, reading, creative play (such as arts and crafts), active play (such as soccer) and interaction with parents and siblings. The results have shown that children who watched television more interacted with parents and siblings and played creatively less. It was also found that older children who spent more time watching television spent less time on homework. However, a somewhat surprising find was that television did not interfere with reading or with playing outdoors. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recommended that children under the age of two should not watch television and children older than two should watch no more than two hours of television daily. "When AAP made these recommendations, we actually knew nothing about how much time infants and toddlers were spending in front of the screen. Now we know that time spent watching television is negatively related to time spent with parents." "It's certainly true that American children are less active than they need to be, but I wanted to know whether or not that's television's fault," says Vandewater. "The evidence doesn't really bear that out. If television is implicated in a problem like childhood obesity, it's likely something about the content, not the time spent watching it." Dr. Vandewater current research is concerned with the impact of interactive media use, such as Internet and video games, on children's well-being (academic achievement and social adjustment).