

Back To School With No TV

Attention Parent! You are invited to attend a Back to School Parenting Seminar on Sunday, August 28, 2005, at 7:30, at the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church, Prince Charles Drive. Admission is free.

Only a few more days and the school bells will be ringing. Students from kindergarten to Grade 12 will fill the classrooms ready to learn again. Really! Would they really be ready and anxious to learn? Sad to say, a great number would not be ready nor anxious to learn. Why? Because they would have one serious roadblock to responsive learning--the television. For more than ten weeks far too many vacationing students would have become intellectually lazy, vocabulary-deprived, and imaginatively-stunned, simply because of the amount of time they would have spent all summer long in front of the television.

TOO MANY HOURS

By the time summer school break is over, students who remained at home and did not have part-time or full-time jobs, would have spent an average of ten hours each day absorbing the information, good or bad, that was being transmitted over the television waves. They would have accumulated more hours in television viewing than their parents would have done in working hours on their jobs. They would have watched about seventy hours a week and more than seven hundred hours during the entire summer break. In some homes, the television is never turned off, thus the sponge-like, inquisitive minds would have been bombarded by about 1500 hours of violent, seductive, and sexual material. Some children are known to watch television for nearly 24 hours non-stop at least three times a week, only pausing to eat, answering the phone, or talking to friends. In contrast, their hard-working parents would have exhausted just about five hundred working hours during the entire summer period. If children were getting paid per hour for watching television, they would be financially independent before leaving high school.

TOO LITTLE SLEEP

What is also obvious is that these hooked-on-television children spend very little hours gaining meaningful rest and sleep at the most appropriate times. In many homes, school-aged children stay up until the wee hours of the morning watching television. They fall asleep tired and drained, only to be awakened by another dosage of TV stimulation.

Parents must be reminded that school-aged children need an average of eight to twelve hours of sleep each day to grow healthy minds and bodies. I wonder how many get that during the regular school year! Research studies have shown that today's teenagers are the most sleep deprived of all generations before. Why? Because of the time they spend in front of the television.

Psychologist, Sarah Ledoux, in her article, "The Effects of Sleep Deprivation on Brain and Behavior," states that "Sleep is needed to regenerate certain parts of the body, especially the brain, so that it may continue to function optimally. After periods of

extended wakefulness or reduced sleep neurons may begin to malfunction, visibly affecting a person's behavior. . . Without sleep our brains deteriorate, and if the argument that brain equals behavior is true, then our behavior will also suffer accordingly." Now we know. Our children's brains are deteriorating for lack of sleep and at the same time are overdosed on negative, addictive information gained from hours of television viewing.

Kindergarten- to primary-age students need at least ten to fifteen hours of sleep each night, even during the summer months. This is why they take naps during the daytime. Teenagers can survive with eight to ten hours of sleep each day. Unfortunately, they are all only getting three to six hours of sleep a day. This kind of television addiction and sleep-deprived lifestyle lowers the immune system, numbs the senses, and creates non-responsive learners out of our children. No wonder so many are not interested in academic studies. They have become non-responsive learners.

Although parents may extend the television time during holiday periods, there should still be limits. It should not be a free-for-all, anything goes extravaganza.

WHO ARE THE PARENTS?

Who are the parents in your home? Are they Mr. and Mrs. Toshiba, Samsung, RCA, Hitachi, Sharp, or Zenith, Television sets? Are they the always-demanding, lazy, mom-I-want-to-watch-some-more-TV dependants in your home? Or are you the parents?

Here is a short quiz to help you find out who are the parents in your home?

1. Who always washes the dishes each day while the children are glued in front of the television set?
2. Who sets the time for the children to go to bed?
3. Who sets the time to eat?
4. Who stays up very late each night?
5. Who always makes up the children bed each day?
6. Who always picks up clothing off the floor?
7. Who always clears the dining room or coffee table after eating?
8. Who always sweeps the popcorn off the floor while others are watching a spicy movie?
9. Who gets sore throat from talking all day?
10. Who first says "goodnight" and goes to bed?

If a parent answered affirmatively to at least five of these questions, then the child is the "parent" in that home. Who should be the parent in the home? Isn't it obvious! I can hear you say: "The parents are the individuals who provided the egg and sperm and a protective dwelling for the offsprings to live." Who said that the provision of reproductive materials makes one a parent by default? The truth is the right to parent a child is not only gained through biological happenstance or legislative ruling, but it is obtained through dynamic, responsive, loving relationships.

HOW TO TAKE OVER THE HOME AGAIN

How can parents regain control of their homes again? First of all, parents would not be successful if they plan a "military coup." If this happens, there will be war in the house. The military generals will pull out their artillery of overbearing behavior, offensive language, and maybe physical confrontation. Parents must take over in a loving, but authoritative way. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Parents, before talking with the children, sit down together (mom and dad) and agree on principles, guidelines, and rules for the home that will involve adults and children. If you are a single parent with no other parent involved, make sure you also do this exercise by yourself. If you are divorced or a never-married single, and the other parent is actively involved in the children's lives, meet together and agree on these rules so both households will be governed the same way. These guidelines and rules should include, but not limited to, schedule of daily household chores, sleep time, meal time, television hours, curfew, and methods of discipline. Remember, these guidelines and rules must be sensible and reasonable.
2. Set a time (with no television on) with your children to discuss your new home management guidelines. Make sure you include them in the discussion. They can often have wise suggestions. If they participate in the decision making process, they would be more inclined to agree and go along.
3. Instead of being a military leader who just gives instructions and commands, become an integral part of this new home government. Do not require your children to go to bed a certain time while you remain up all night watching television. Place your name on the schedule for household chores. Take the time to have fun with your children. Make the time, at least once to twice a week to take them out of the home to some kind of fun-time activity.

Next week I will continue with the effects of television on the mind and guidelines for television viewing. You are also invited to attend a Back to School Parenting Seminar on Sunday, August 28, 2005, at 7:30, at the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church, Prince Charles Drive. Admission is free. **Barrington Brennen is a marriage and family therapist and counseling psychologist. Send your questions, comments or requests for counseling to P.O. Box N-896, Nassau, The Bahamas; or call 242-323-8772, or email question@soencouragement.org Or visit the website www.soencouragement.org for this article and many more.**