



Babies and TV: striking a balance

As a new parent, it's a question that you're sure to have asked yourself - and probably struggled to answer. Are you going to let your baby watch TV? Since the advent of children's TV, whether or not babies should be allowed to become television viewers is a topic that seems to rarely leave the news.

There's no doubt that TV is a powerful medium, captivating even very young babies. In fact, you only have to see a baby engrossed in their favourite programme to understand that the TV can be a source of great entertainment. And, yes, as the realities of life bite and the necessity for 'getting things done' takes over, it is easy to slip into a habit of using the TV as a form of distraction.

Like many aspects of parenting, however, it is possible to strike a balance. For parents who choose to let their baby watch TV, this involves taking a responsible attitude to television viewing and following a few simple guidelines.

Be selective

TV can be a rich source of learning for your baby. However, you do need to select programmes carefully. Babies are highly impressionable and can absorb what they see and hear from a very early age - even though they can't tell you yet. Make sure that anything you allow your baby to watch is age-appropriate and moves at the right pace.

View in moderation

TV watching can become a habit, particularly if your baby is allowed unlimited access throughout the day, so it's good to establish a few rules early on. From the start, set limits on how much time your baby watches TV. Even better, set aside a specific time during the week when you and your baby can watch TV together. A maximum of 30 minutes a day seems sensible. By limiting the amount of TV time for your baby, you are also freeing up time for play, when your baby can explore toys, books or the space around them. Such activities can be just as useful for distracting your

baby. If you need to get on with chores around the home, a baby playpen provides a safe environment.

Join in!

Children's TV isn't just for kids. It's much better for your baby if you participate in their TV viewing too for a number of reasons. You are spending some all-important contact time with your baby. In addition, as a parent, you can point out interesting things that happen in the TV show, ask questions, name objects that you see, or encourage your baby to move to the music. You can also highlight behaviour that is good or bad so that your baby has an idea of what sort of behaviour you expect from them. By adding the 'personal touch' to your baby's TV viewing, you are helping to nurture the relationship between you and get 'added value' from the programme itself.

Get creative

Children's TV programmes can be a useful form of inspiration. The programmes that your baby views can be linked to other areas of play and your baby's interests. For example, after an episode of Thomas the Tank Engine, you could get out a toy train set for your baby to play with. Likewise, you could read to your baby from a book that is connected or get out the crayons and encourage your baby to draw.