

The Media Family:

ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN THE LIVES OF
INFANTS, TODDLERS, PRESCHOOLERS
AND THEIR PARENTS

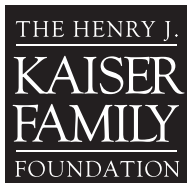
MAY 2006



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AND THEIR PARENTS**

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INTRODUCTION

Today's parents live in a world where media are an ever-changing but increasingly important part of their family's lives, including even their very youngest children. Baby videos designed for one-month-olds, computer games for 9-month-olds, and TV shows for one-year-olds are becoming commonplace. An increasing number of TV shows, videos, websites, software programs, video games, and interactive TV toys are designed specifically for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers.

One thing that hasn't changed is that parents have a tough job — in fact, maybe tougher, often with both husband and wife working and juggling complex schedules, and with a growing number of single parents. In this environment, parents often turn to media as an important tool to help them manage their household and keep their kids entertained.

And for many parents, media are much more than entertainment: from teaching children letters and numbers, to introducing them to foreign languages or how to work with computers, many parents find the educational value of media incredibly helpful.

“My daughter is learning a lot from the different shows she watches. She's so into it. I think it's important.”

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Irvine, California]

At the same time, there is growing controversy about media use among very young children, with pediatricians recommending no screen media for babies under two, and limited screen time after that. Most child development experts believe that the stimuli children receive and the activities they engage in during the first few years of life are critical not only for their physical well-being but also for their social, emotional, and cognitive development.

But scientific research about the impact of media use on babies and toddlers has not kept pace with the marketplace. As a result, very little is known for sure about what is good and bad when it comes to media exposure in early childhood.

On the positive side of the ledger, research does indicate that well-designed educational programs, such as *Sesame Street*, can help 4- and 5-year-olds read and count and that children that age also benefit from pro-social messages on TV that teach them about kindness and sharing. On the other hand, studies have also found that exposure to television violence can increase the risk of children behaving aggressively and that media use in early childhood may be related to attentional problems later in life. And while the producers of early childhood media believe their products can help children learn even at the earliest ages, other experts worry that time spent with media may detract from time children spend interacting with their parents, engaging in physical activity, using their imaginations, or exploring the world around them.

One thing this study makes clear is that for many families, media use has become part of the fabric of daily life. Parents use TV or DVDs as a “safe” activity their kids can enjoy while the grownups get dressed for work, make a meal, or do the household chores. Working parents who worry that they don't have enough time to teach their kids the basics feel relieved that educational TV shows, videos, and computer games are helping their kids count and learn the alphabet and even say a word or two in Spanish. When children are grouchy, or hyper, or fighting with their siblings, moms and dads use TV as a tool to help change their mood, calm them down, or separate squabbling brothers and sisters. Media are also used in enforcing discipline, with a TV in the bedroom or a handheld video game player offered as a powerful reward or enticement for good behavior. Everyday activities, such as eating a meal or going to sleep, are often done with television as a companion. And media are used to facilitate moments of transition in daily life: waking up slowly while groggily watching a couple of cartoons on mom and dad's bed, or calming down to a favorite video before bedtime.

“Media makes my life easier. We're all happier. He isn't throwing tantrums. I can get some work done.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Irvine, California]

Many parents of young children are quite enthusiastic about the role media plays in their lives and the impact it has on their kids. They are grateful for what they see as higher quality, more educational choices than when they were young, and for the wider variety of options they now have available. They see their children learning from TV and imitating the positive behaviors modeled on many shows. But it appears that the primary reason many parents choose to bring media into their children's lives is not because of the educational benefits it offers kids, but because of the practical benefits it offers parents: uninterrupted time for chores, some peace and quiet, or even just an opportunity to watch their own favorite shows.

At the same time, many parents feel an underlying guilt about their children's media use: primarily a sense that they should be spending more time with their kids and that they shouldn't be feeling so relieved at not having to be responsible for teaching their children their ABCs. Some express a suspicion that they may have set in motion something they soon won't be able to control: that today's good-natured educational shows will lead to tomorrow's sassy cartoons, and to next year's violent video games. And others also bemoan the fundamental changes they see from their own childhoods when they were more likely to play outside or to use their imaginations to make up their own play activities indoors.

“It makes life easier now, but in the long run, when they’re older and starting to run into all these problems, I think I’ll wish I wouldn’t have let them do it when they were five.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old in Columbus, Ohio]

Parents' beliefs about media — and their own media habits — are strongly related to how much time their children spend with media, the patterns of their children's use, and the types of content their children are exposed to. Two- and four-year-olds watching *CSI* and *ER* with their moms don't seem to be as rare as one might think. Parents who are big TV fans and hate the interruptions from their little ones are more likely to get a TV for their child's bedroom. Dads who play a lot of video games use that activity as a way to bond with their sons. And parents who think TV mostly hurts children's learning are more likely to limit their children's viewing and less likely to leave the TV on during the day. In short, children's media use is as much or more about parents as it is about children.

METHODOLOGY

This report presents the results of a national study to document how much time infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are spending with media, what types of media they're using, and what role media are playing in their environments. The study has two parts: a nationally representative telephone survey of parents about their children's media use; and a series of focus groups with parents, for a more in-depth discussion of issues raised in the survey. All statistical findings in this report are from the national survey; all quotes are from the focus groups.

The study concerns children ages 6 months to 6 years old. It focuses primarily on the role of electronic screen media in young people's lives, including television, videos or DVDs, computers, and video games. Occasional references to "children 6 years and under" or "children six and under" are made as shorthand and refer to children ages 6 months to 6 years old. References to children "under two" refer to children 6-23 months old.

A copy of the survey questionnaire and results can be found in Appendix A. A copy of the focus group discussion guide can be found in Appendix B.

The survey

The survey is a nationally representative, random-digit-dial telephone survey of 1,051 parents of children ages 6 months to 6 years old. The survey was conducted from September 12 through November 21, 2005. It was designed and analyzed by staff at the Kaiser Family Foundation, in consultation with Princeton Survey Research Associates. Fieldwork was conducted in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source, LLC. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is +/-3 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is higher. As many as ten attempts were made to contact every sampled telephone number. The response rate for this survey was 33%. Tests for statistically significant differences were all done at the $p < .05$ level. All times are presented in hours: minutes (e.g., 1:13 for one hour and 13 minutes).

Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week. In each eligible household, interviewers asked to speak with the parent who spends the most time with the target child.

In households where neither parent spends more time with the child, one was chosen at random for interviewing. The vast majority (81%) of respondents were mothers. It should be noted that only half (50%) of parents interviewed said they spent all or most of the day with their child; it is possible that parents' knowledge of their children's media use is limited.

"My kids watch at day care. She leaves the TV on for most of the day, but they don't watch that much of it."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

Focus groups

Eight focus group sessions were conducted between March 22, 2005 and March 1, 2006, in four locations: Columbus, Ohio; Irvine, California; Denver, Colorado; and Washington, D.C. Each session lasted approximately two hours and was moderated by a Kaiser Family Foundation staff member. There were generally eight participants in each group. Participants were recruited to the sessions by an independent research firm.

In each location, two groups were conducted: one with mothers of children between the ages of 1 and 3 years, and one with mothers of children between the ages of 4 and 6 years. Participants were required to have at least one television in their household and to say that their child watches television, videos, or DVDs at least several times a month. In addition, participants were screened to reflect middle-income families (between \$25,000 and \$100,000 a year in family income). The recruiting firm attempted to ensure that at least a third of participants in each group met each of the following criteria (reflecting the statistics found in the national survey): the child has a television in his or her bedroom; for the older groups only, the child plays video games at least several times a month; and also for older groups only, the child uses a computer at least several times a month.

The two focus groups in Washington, D.C., were recorded on video for purposes of creating a short tape representing topics frequently expressed during all eight groups.

AMOUNT AND FREQUENCY OF CHILDREN'S MEDIA USE

One thing this study makes clear is that even the youngest children in our society have a substantial amount of experience with electronic media. Perhaps not surprisingly, almost all children ages 6 months to 6 years old have watched television (94%) and videos or DVDs (87%). But use of “new” media among this age group also abounds. More than four in ten (43%) have used a computer, about three in ten (29%) have played console video games, and just under one in five (18%) have played handheld video games.

In a typical day, 83% of children ages 6 months to 6 years use some form of screen media, including 75% who watch television, 32% who watch videos or DVDs¹, 16% who use a computer, and 11% who play either console or handheld video games. The percent of children who watch TV in a typical day is somewhat smaller than the share who spend any time reading or being read to (83%) and listening to music (82%).

Kids who watch television and those who watch videos or DVDs spend an average of about one and a quarter hours on each (1:19 for TV and 1:18 for videos/DVDs), while those who play video games and use computers spend an average of just under an hour on each (0:55 for video games and 0:50 for computers). On the whole, the 83% of children who use screen media in a typical day spend an average of just under 2 hours (1:57) doing so.

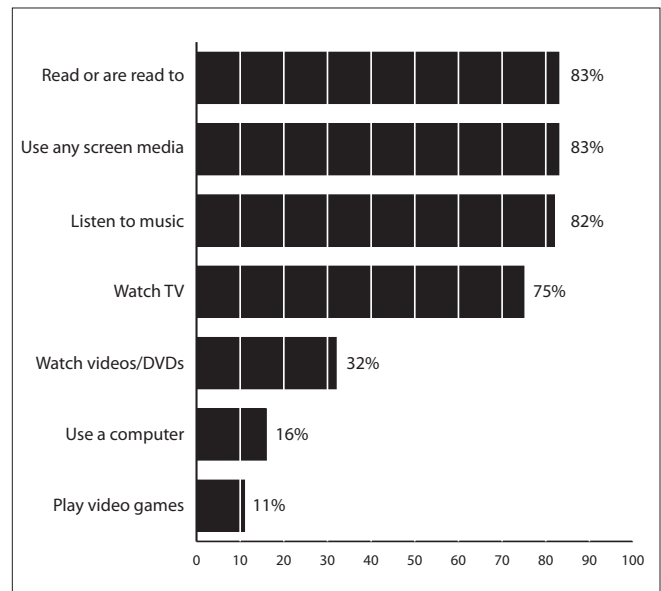
“For our little guy, TV time is all of us on the couch together. The cat comes and sits with us. We’ll talk about what’s going on. If it’s *Blues Clues*, we’ll answer back. We only do 20 minutes a night.”

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Irvine, California]

Among *all* children in this age group (a measure that takes into account both how many children use a medium and how long they spend with it), an average of 59 minutes a day is spent watching TV, 24 minutes watching videos or DVDs², 6 minutes playing video games, and 7 minutes using a computer, making the average screen use for all children in this age range about one and a half hours (1:36). The average time spent reading or being read to is 40 minutes.

CHART 1:

In a typical day, percent of children 6 and under who...



Note: Screen media includes TV, videos/DVDs, video games, or computers.

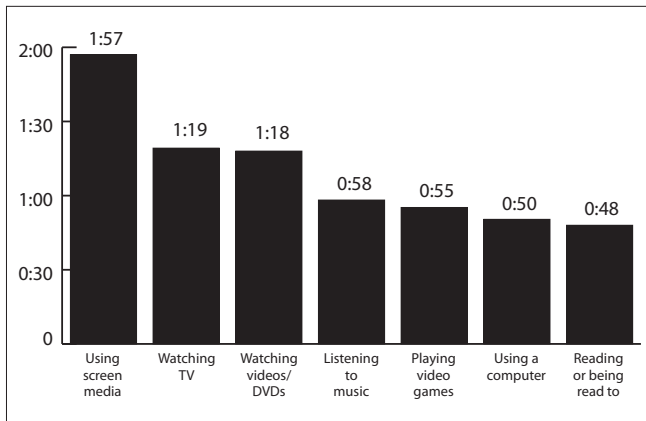
Of course, these are averages and so reflect a great deal of variation, from children who spend no time using a given medium, to those who spend an extraordinary amount of time with a medium. For example, a mother from Columbus, Ohio, said of her 4-6 year-old son: “He’s up about 12-15 hours a day. I give him about 3 hours playing with his toys. The other 12 hours he is in front of the TV.” On the other hand, another mom from Irvine, California, watches TV with her son for just 20 minutes a day.

Older children (ages 2-3 and 4-6 years) are more likely than younger children (under 2 years) to watch TV, use a computer, and play video games. When it comes to watching videos or DVDs, 2-3 year-olds are the most likely to do this activity, followed by 4-6 year-olds (children under 2 years old are the least likely). Older children are also more likely than younger children to read or be read to; however, older children are less likely than younger children to listen to music. (See Table 2.)

AMOUNT AND FREQUENCY OF CHILDREN’S MEDIA USE (continued)

CHART 2:

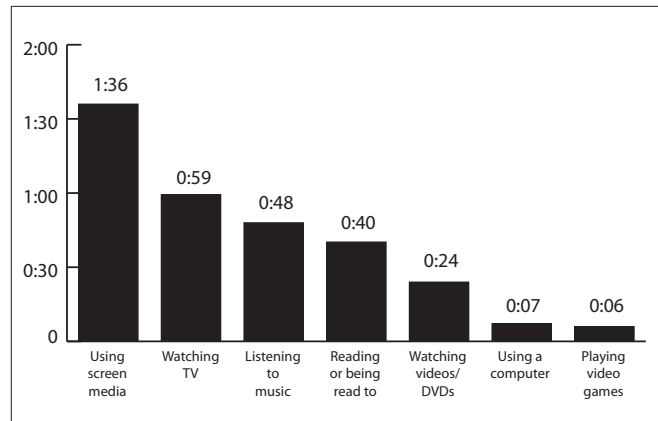
In a typical day, average amount of time spent by children age 6 and under who engaged in each activity:



Note: Screen media includes TV, videos/DVDs, video games, or computers.

CHART 3:

Among *all* children age 6 and under, average amount of time spent per day...



Note: Screen media includes TV, videos/DVDs, video games, or computers.

Frequency of media use

About two-thirds (66%) of children ages 6 months to 6 years watch television *every day*, somewhat less than the proportion who listen to music every day (70%) and who read or are read to every day (69%). About a quarter (24%) watch videos or DVDs every day, and nearly two-thirds (65%) watch them several times a week or more. Smaller shares engage in other forms of screen activity several times a week or more, including using a computer (27%), playing console video games (13%), and playing handheld video games (8%). Children between the ages of 4 and 6 years engage in most screen activities more often than those ages 3 years and under (with the exception of watching videos and DVDs). For example, 43% of 4-6 year-olds use a computer several times a week or more, and 24% play video games that often.

Media skills

Many children, even very young ones, are familiar enough with the media in their homes that they’re able to turn them on and off and use them by themselves, providing a degree of autonomy to their media use. The majority know how to turn on the TV by themselves (74%) and change the channels with a remote (58%), and nearly half (46%) can put in a video or DVD by themselves. Far fewer are able to use computers alone, although about one in five (19%) are able to turn on the computer by themselves, and one in four (28%) can use a computer without sitting in their parent’s lap.

Co-viewing by parents

According to the survey, in a typical day most parents whose kids watched TV were in the room and watching TV with their child all (40%) or most (28%) of the time; just 6% say they watched with their child none of the time. Parents are much more likely to report leaving their children alone to use a computer or play a video game, probably at least in part because children engaging in these activities tend to be older. In a typical day, 25% of parents whose children used a computer reported being with the child “none” of the time, while 31% said the same about video games.

In focus groups, several parents spoke about trying to avoid having to watch TV with their kids — this was a time for them to get things done. But some children seem to prefer to watch with their parents there. The mother of one 1-3 year-old from Denver said, “My son says he is lonely, and he wants me to watch with him. I go in occasionally.”

TABLE 1:

TV and video skills, by age

Percent of children who can...	6-23 months	2-3 years	4-6 years
Turn on the TV by themselves	38%	82%	87%
Change channels with the remote	40%	54%	71%
Put in a video or DVD by themselves	7%	42%	69%

TABLE 2:

Time spent using media and in other activities, by age

	In typical day, percent who did each activity				Average time among those who did activity				Average time among all children			
	Total	0-1	2-3	4-6	Total	0-1	2-3	4-6	Total	0-1	2-3	4-6
Reading or being read to	83%	77%	81%	87%*^	0:48	0:44	0:52*	0:48	0:40	0:33	0:42*	0:42*
Listening to music	82%	88%‡	84%‡	78%	0:58	1:04‡	1:00	0:53	0:48	0:57‡	0:50‡	0:41
Watching TV	75%	56%	81%*	79%*	1:19	1:02	1:28*	1:19*	0:59	0:34	1:11*	1:02*
Playing outside	74%	55%	80%*	81%*	1:51	1:43	1:47	1:56	1:22	0:56	1:26*	1:34*
Watching a video or DVD	32%	24%	41%*‡	32%*	1:18	†	1:20	1:23	0:24	0:13	0:32*	0:25*
Reading an electronic book	14%	11%	18%*	13%	0:42	†	†	†	0:05	0:05	0:06	0:04
Using a computer**	16%	2%	12%*	26%*^	0:50	†	†	0:50	0:07	0:01	0:05*	0:12*^
Playing video games***	11%	1%	8%*	18%*^	0:55	†	†	†	0:06	0:00	0:03*	0:10*^
Total used any screen media+	83%	61%	88%*	90%*	1:57	1:20	2:07	2:03	1:36	0:49	1:51*	1:50*

* Significantly higher than ages 0-1; ^ Significantly higher than ages 2-3; ‡ Significantly higher than ages 4-6; ** Including for games and other purposes;

*** Console or handheld; + Screen media includes TV, videos/DVDs, video games, or computers. It does not include electronic books; † Sample size too small to report.

TABLE 3:

Frequency of media use, by age

	Percent who engage in activity every day				Percent who engage in activity several times a week or more			
	Total	0-1	2-3	4-6	Total	0-1	2-3	4-6
Listening to music	70%	73%	72%	67%	89%	89%	90%	89%
Reading or being read to	69%	58%	69%*	75%*	90%	83%	93%*	93%*
Watching TV	66%	43%	72%*	73%*	85%	70%	91%*	92%*
Watching videos or DVDs	24%	18%	32%*‡	21%	65%	44%	73%*	69%*
Using a computer	8%	2%	4%	13%*^	27%	4%	18%*	43%*^
Playing console video games	3%	0	2%*	6%*^	13%	<1%	7%*	24%*^
Playing handheld video games	2%	0	1%	3%*^	8%	0	3%*	14%*^
Going online	2%	<1%	1%	3%*^	7%	<1%	3%*	12%*^

* Significantly higher than ages 0-1; ^ Significantly higher than ages 2-3; ‡ Significantly higher than ages 4-6.

AMOUNT AND FREQUENCY OF CHILDREN'S MEDIA USE (continued)

CHART 4:

In a typical day, time spent with screen media, by age:

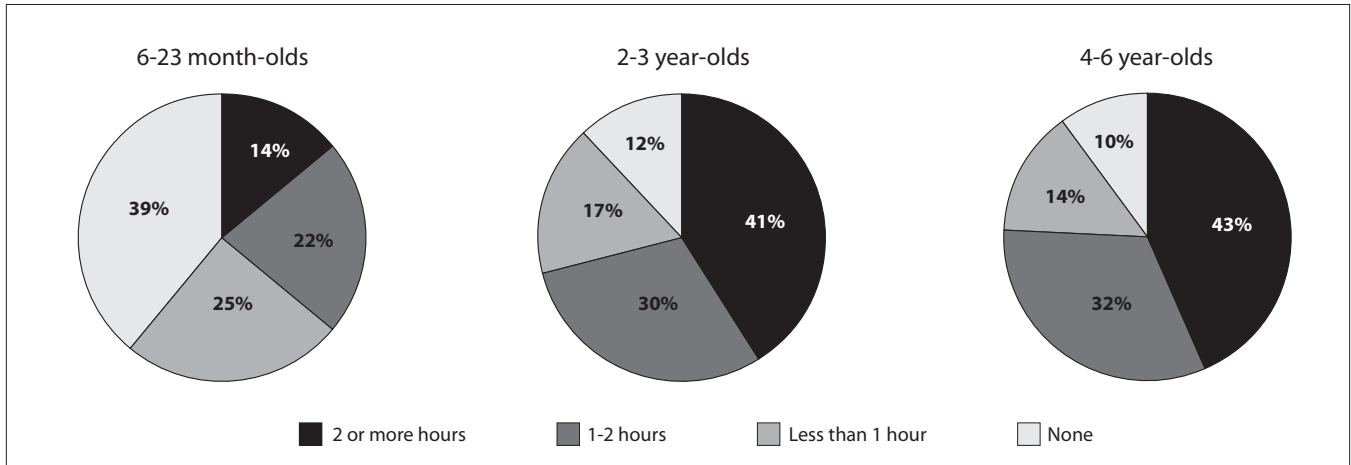
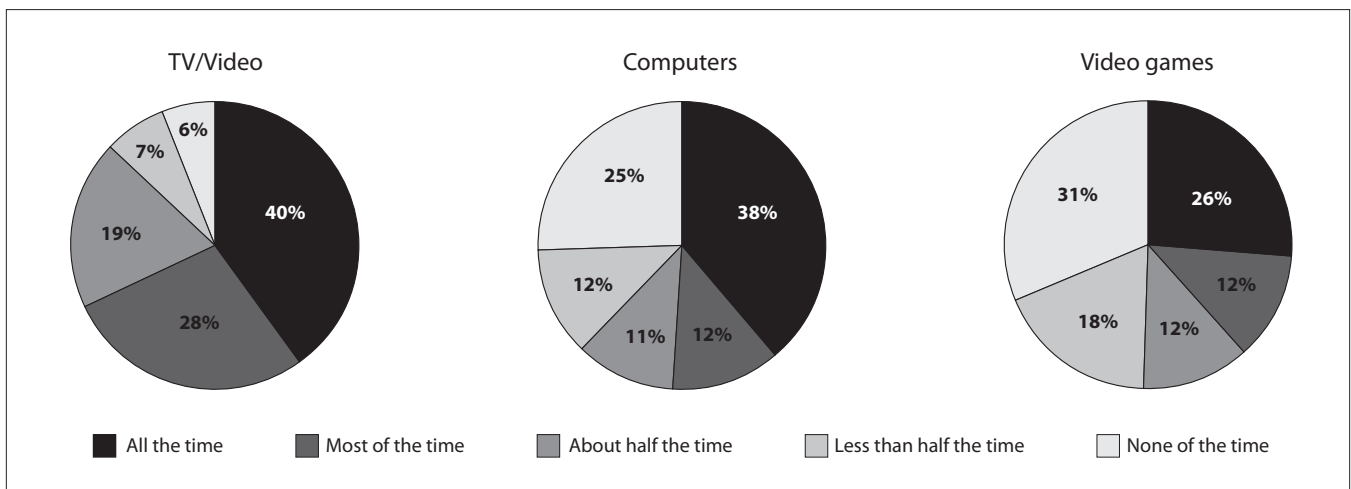


CHART 5:

Among children who use each medium, percent of parents who use it with them...



Large numbers of young children are growing up in homes with parents who watch a lot of TV themselves, put the TV on during meals, and leave the TV on for much of the day, whether anyone is watching it or not. Recent research is beginning to point to “background” television as an important possible influence on young children — perhaps because of the potential to interrupt the child’s play and concentration on other activities, perhaps because it may indicate that the parent’s attention is less focused on the child, and perhaps because the content of such background television is less likely to be designed specifically for children.

“I always have it on. I need the noise.”
 [Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

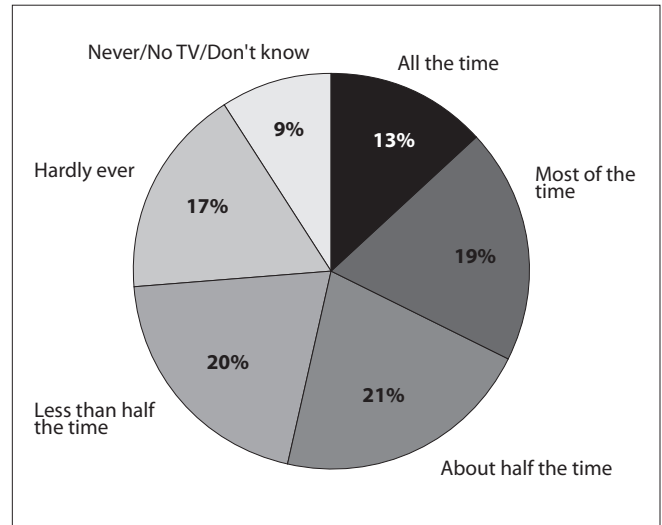
Heavy television households

Nearly a third (32%) of children who are 6 years and under live in households where the television is on all (13%) or most (19%) of the time. In addition, 30% live in households where the TV is on during meals all (16%) or most (14%) of the time. As two mothers of 1-3 year-olds from Ohio described it, sometimes it’s the moms who put the TV on (“I just have it on to keep me company”), and other times it’s the dads (“My husband turns it on as soon as he gets home from work every night”).

Interviewer: How much of the time is the TV usually on in your house?
Mother: All the time, mostly because my husband likes to turn it on and then walk away. It’s just on. It’s background noise.
 [Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

CHART 6:

Percent of children 6 and under who live in homes where the TV is left on, whether anyone is watching it or not:



Perhaps not surprisingly, children who live in “heavy TV households” (those where the TV is on all or most of the time) are more likely to watch TV and spend more time watching than those who live in households where the TV is on half the time or less (an average of 25 minutes more per day, 1:16 vs. 0:51). The same pattern is true for children who live in households where the TV is always or mostly on during meals, compared with those where the TV is on less often during meals (33 minutes more per day, 1:22 vs. 0:49). Children who live in heavy TV households are less likely than other children to read or be read to daily (64% vs. 72%), and they spend slightly less time reading on average (36 vs. 42 minutes per day).

“We’re trying to cut back. My 7-year-old is always asking to have family time and talk.”
 [Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

PARENTS' MEDIA USE (continued)

TABLE 4:

Relationship of household media patterns to children's media use

Child's TV Viewing	TV on in household		TV on during meals	
	Always/ most of the time	Half the time or less	Always/ most of the time	Half the time or less
Percent who watch TV on typical day	84%*	70%	84%*	71%
Mean hours watching TV for kids who watched	1:31*	1:13	1:37*	1:09
Mean hours watching TV for all kids	1:16*	0:51	1:22*	0:49
Percent who watch TV daily	80%*	59%	79%*	60%

* Significantly higher than "half the time or less."

Parental media use

As noted above, the amount of time parents spend using media could be relevant to children's media use patterns in several ways: because of children's exposure to adult content; because competition over TVs and computers may influence which media children use and whether they have them in their rooms; and because parents may model media consumption habits that influence their children.

On a typical day, 83% of parents of children ages 6 months to 6 years spend at least some time using screen media at home, with those parents averaging just over two hours (2:13) of screen media use. Sixty-eight percent watch their own shows on television (for an average of 1:36), 45% use a computer at home, and 6% play video games.³

"If I want to watch TV, I'll have him watch on the portable DVD player."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

Children whose parents spend more time watching TV and using other media are more likely to watch TV themselves. For example, children whose parents use screen media for more than 2 hours in a day are much more likely to watch TV that day than children whose parents spend less than an hour using screen media (81% vs. 64%), averaging 28 minutes more TV time per day (1:14 vs. 0:46). However, they don't spend less time than other children reading or being read to.

TABLE 5:

Parents' media use

	In a typical day, percent who use each medium	Average time spent among those who used each medium
Watch TV	68%	1:36
Use a computer	45%	1:31
Play video games	6%	*
Use any screen media	83%	2:13

* Sample size is too small for reliable results.

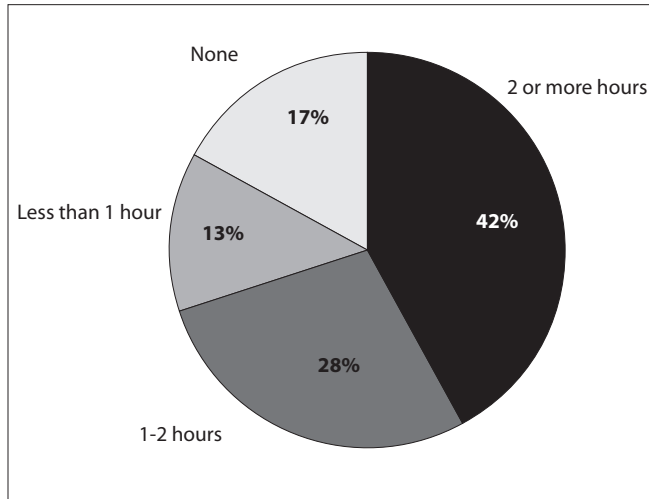
In addition to their own television use, many children are also exposed to television when their parents are watching adult shows. Among the 68% whose parents watched their own shows on TV, 61% (or 41% of all children) were in the room with the parent at least some of the time, and 29% (or 20% of all children) were in the room all or most of the time while the parent was watching.

"I usually don't get to watch TV until they go to sleep because I like the science fiction horror shows, and I don't want them to watch that."

[Mother of 1-3 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

CHART 7:

Amount of time parents spend using screen media, in a typical day:



In focus groups, many parents told of only watching TV at night, so their kids weren't exposed to "adult" content. Others talked about their children interrupting them while they were trying to watch their own shows; these parents would sometimes put up with the nuisance, postpone their viewing, or get their kids their own TVs (the most common reason parents gave for putting a TV in their child's bedroom was so the parent and other family members can watch their own shows). As the mother of a 3-year-old from Denver noted, "I try to take over the TV when I want to watch something; then he has to watch what I am watching. We fight over the TV." Some parents in the focus groups felt they could watch their own shows without it having much of an impact on their kids. For example, the mother of a 1-3 year-old girl from Irvine said: "I watch *CSI* ... [S]he will sit down and watch with me. I don't know how harmful it is to her. It's sometimes gory, but it doesn't seem to bother her. She hasn't had any nightmares from it."

"For a little while we weren't really supervising, but then we found him quoting from a movie called *Mansquito on the Science Fiction Channel*."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

Some mothers said they monitor what's on the family TV more closely than their husbands do. "My other problem is my husband," said one mom of a 4-6 year-old boy from Irvine, California. "He'll watch whatever's on. He watches things that I don't want my son to see. The TV will be on in the living room,

and my son is in the living room. My son wants to see the blood and gore. My husband doesn't care." Another thing that concerned some parents was children being exposed to the commercials found in non-children's TV. "I've had to go into a lot of things with my kids that I don't want to because of the commercials," said the mother of a 4-6 year-old from Irvine.

"I tend to watch the old *ER*. I had to stop because my daughter tried to give my (younger) son CPR."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Irvine, California]

One positive aspect of parental media use that some mothers mentioned was the possibility that their husbands and sons could bond while playing video games. One Denver-area mom was considering getting a video game player just for that purpose: "I think [playing video games] is something my husband and my son would bond over. Right now they don't have much in common. With work and school and homework, they only get a couple of hours on the weekend." Another mother from Irvine said that video games already played that role with her 4-6 year-old son: "For us it is a bonding experience. My son will watch his dad play and play with him. They bond while they are interacting."

"I don't think media has anything to do with how I am as a parent. I would never sit her in front of the TV so I could go do something. I learned a long time ago that the dishes can wait until tomorrow. It can all wait. I've seen my 15-year-old grow up in the blink of an eye...I take advantage of all the time I can get."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Irvine, California]

TABLE 6:

Relationship of parental media use to children's media use

	Total parent media use on typical day		
	<1 hr	1-2 hrs	>2 hrs
Child's TV viewing			
Percent who watch TV on typical day	64%	78% [^]	81% [^]
Mean hours watching TV for kids who watched	1:13	1:14	1:31 ^{^†}
Mean hours watching TV for all kids	0:46	0:57 [^]	1:14 ^{^†}
Percent who watch TV daily	59%	68% [^]	69% [^]

[^]Significantly higher than <1 hour; [†]Significantly higher than 1-2 hours.

PARENTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT CHILDREN'S MEDIA USE

Why parents want their kids to use media

Focus groups indicate that many parents are encouraging their children to spend time with media because they think it's good for their kids, and because it gives them a chance to get things done without their children underfoot. Indeed, in focus groups parents speak about "getting" their kids to watch certain videos or TV shows, or about DVDs being better than TV because they're longer and afford a longer chunk of time in which to get things done.

"They wake up and get to watch TV while I shower and get dressed. It keeps them in my sight line."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

Many parents speak of the numerous demands on their time and of their strong need to keep their kids occupied while they get chores done. As a mom from Denver said about her 1-3 year-old, "If he is watching TV, I can get other things done. I don't have to constantly watch him." Some parents spoke about the fact that they simply can't let their kids play outdoors unsupervised. Others pointed out how much trouble their children could cause inside the house if they are left unmonitored: "If the TV isn't on, he's putting the 'Orange Glo' all over my daughter's bedspread. That makes more work for me."

"He's a good little boy. He won't bother anything. He won't get into stuff. He's glued to the TV."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old from Columbus, Ohio]

Many parents also talked about how important it is for them to have "me" time, which often means getting their kids set up with a TV show or a DVD. The mother of a 4-6 year-old from the Denver area pointed out that: "Being an adult is hard. There are times when my interacting with my children is best served by me having an opportunity to allow them to do something alone so I can regroup. When I got laid off a couple of weeks ago, I didn't know it was coming. I got blindsided. I couldn't have interacted with my children that night. I couldn't have done it. 'Let's watch *Finding Nemo*, kids. Here are some chicken strips, here are sippy cups — I'll see you in about an hour and a half.'"

The educational value of television

In the national survey, parents are fairly evenly split on whether, in general, TV mostly helps (38%) or mostly hurts (31%) children's learning (22% say it doesn't have much effect either way). But in focus groups, many parents cited "learning" as one of the positive things about television, and indicated that they thought their children were learning from TV. Several mothers mentioned being surprised by their children saying a word in Spanish or being able to count. The mother of a 4-6 year-old from Denver said, "My daughter started saying something to me in Spanish — I don't know a word of Spanish. [TV is] definitely educational." Another Denver-area mom said, "My 2-year-old can count to 10. I haven't really practiced that much with her. She did it. Where else would she have possibly learned it?"

"Out of the blue one day my son counted to five in Spanish. I knew immediately that he got that from *Dora*."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

Mothers are also enthusiastic about the different experiences children are exposed to through television and videos. "[My son] has developed a passion about the ocean and angler fish because of *Nemo*," said one Denver mom. "He fell in love with that character. That door wouldn't have even been open if it wasn't for *Finding Nemo*." Another Denver mother said her 4-6 year-old son was "always telling me what is right and wrong from the things he sees on TV. It has opened doors in being able to talk to him." Several mothers mentioned the "diversity" TV brings their young children. As one mom from Columbus said, "I think they are exposed to a little bit more diversity. I think that it's good for them to be comfortable with that...to know that it's okay for everyone to be different."

"My daughter knows...her letters from *Sesame Street*. I haven't had to work with her on them at all!"

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

“It shows them a world that they aren’t familiar with. We live in the suburbs. She watches *Dora* and learns a little bit of Spanish.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

Some parents feel they need media to help them with their child’s education. As one mother from Irvine, California, said, “I think they (media) are in a way necessary. So much more is expected of kids these days... When you go to kindergarten now, you can’t just go and play with toys. You have to know how to write your name and spell. It’s all about what you know.” Most parents seemed to think their children would learn what they needed to know just fine without media, but they would be under a lot more pressure to do the teaching themselves. As the mother of a 1-3 year-old from Denver said, “I don’t think it’s important to use it as a learning tool, but for me to use it to keep them occupied.”

The national survey indicates that there is a relationship between parents’ attitudes about the educational value of television and how much time their children spend watching TV. Children whose parents think TV mostly *hurts* learning are *less likely* to watch than those whose parents say it mostly helps or doesn’t have much effect one way or the other. For example, 48% of children whose parents say TV mostly hurts learning watch every day, compared to 76% of those whose parents believe TV mostly helps children’s learning. Likewise, children whose parents say TV mostly hurts learning spend an average of 27 minutes less per day watching than children whose parents think TV mostly helps.

It is not possible to tell from this survey whether parents who think TV hurts learning are more likely to restrict their children’s viewing, or whether parents whose children spend more time watching TV develop a higher opinion of television’s role in learning, or whether some other factor is influencing this relationship.

“I just don’t have time to sit on the computer with him to try and teach him all this other stuff.... I’m not going to put him on it if I have to teach him how to use the mouse or something else.... I am like — play it at your dad’s and break *his* computer.”

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

TABLE 7:

Relationship of parental attitudes to children’s media use

Child’s Media Use	Parent attitude towards TV		
	Mostly helps	No effect	Mostly hurts
Percent who watch TV on typical day	84%‡~	75%~	64%
Mean hours watching TV for kids who watched	1:27~	1:16	1:12
Mean hours watching TV for all kids	1:12‡~	0:57~	0:45
Percent who watch TV daily	76%~	71%~	48%

‡Significantly higher than “No effect”; ~Significantly higher than “Mostly hurts.”

Educational value of computers

When it comes to using computers, most parents think this activity helps rather than hurts learning (69% vs. 8%, with 15% saying it doesn’t have much effect).

Many parents feel that since their children are going to have to use computers later in life, getting familiar with them at an early age is a benefit in and of itself, regardless of what they’re doing on the computer. One mother from Irvine said, “Anything they are doing on the computer I think is learning.” Another mom from Columbus said, “I think they get more skills from the computer. Our world is so computer-oriented. I certainly didn’t know how to use a computer when I was 3.... If I had a choice of the computer or TV, I would definitely choose the computer.”

“They’ll survive without the video games and TV.... I don’t think they’ll survive without the computer. When they’re older, they aren’t going to have a cashier to check them out at Kroger.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

Other focus group mothers pointed to certain features of the computer that they found beneficial, such as interactivity or the parent being able to control the content through specific software. The mother of a young child from Irvine said, “The computer is far more interactive than TV. His mind is more active when he is using the computer. It’s more of an analysis and figuring things out.” A Denver-area mom (of a 4-6 year-old) said, “I think you have more control over the computer. If they’re watching TV, you don’t know what the lesson is going to be. With the computer you can put in specific software or go to a specific website.”

PARENTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT CHILDREN'S MEDIA USE (continued)

"I don't spend nearly as much time with my son as I need to. He has learned huge amounts through the video and computer games that we have...I'm very grateful for the computer games. My kid learned his colors and letters from the computer. It's been very beneficial to us."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Irvine, California]

Another mother from Denver (of a 1-3 year-old) described one of the CD-ROMs she and her daughter enjoy using: "They have a 5-a-day vegetable game. My daughter doesn't like to eat, so we show her all the different foods that are good for her. We make things on the computer, and then we will go downstairs and make them to eat. She seems to eat better after we play the food game."

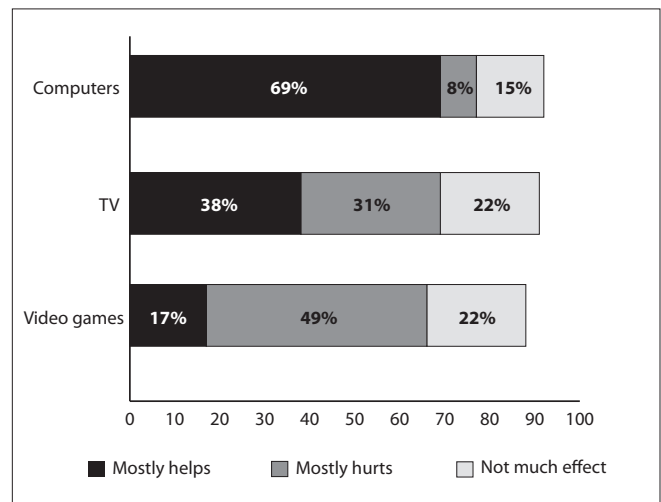
Despite the advantages some focus-group mothers pointed to, many others expressed a lot of concerns about having their kids use the family computer. There was a sense that most of what children can learn from a computer they can also learn from TV or videos — without as much parental oversight and without as much risk to expensive equipment. As one mom from Irvine said, "If they're on the Internet, I have to be right there with them. That can be annoying because I don't always have the time to sit there while my 3- and 6-year-old go on the Internet. It isn't that fun for me to watch the same *Dora* clip 20,000 times. I would rather do other things." Some pointed to the safety of the Nickelodeon TV channel over the Nick Jr. website: one mom said, "If I leave my son on Nick Jr. for just a minute, he will click on every possible ad or whatever, and there will be a thousand things open," while another noted, "If they're watching Nickelodeon, you know they aren't going to have any porn sites popping up."

Educational value of video games

According to the national survey, most parents think playing video games hurts rather than helps learning (49% vs. 17%, with 22% saying not much effect). In the focus groups, parents didn't indicate having as much experience using educational video games as they did with TV, computers, or videos and DVDs. One mother of a 4-6 year-old from Columbus did have experience with an educational video game: "My daughter and I played a Mickey Mouse (video) game where you had to...move the cursor around to find different things. If you find the remote, you can go back to the TV, and it will show a clip. It's like thinking."

CHART 8:

Percent of parents who say each medium mostly helps or hurts children's learning:



Focus group parents also felt that video games tended to be more violent, especially those for the older kids. Some worried about the types of games young children see their older siblings play: "My older kids play...a lot of the violent stuff. They let [my younger son] play one time, and the poor child was traumatized.... He couldn't even sleep that night. He kept telling us about it all night."

Many parents noted that their younger children tried to mimic either their dads or their older siblings by playing with game controllers, but just got frustrated because they couldn't do it properly.

Conversations with pediatricians

Relatively few parents (15%) say that their pediatrician has ever discussed their child's media use with them. Parents with higher income and more formal education are more likely to say their pediatrician has discussed this with them (for example, 22% of college graduates, vs. 11% of those with a high school education or less). There is no indication from these data that children whose parents have discussed media use with their pediatrician are less likely to watch TV or that the household media environment is different for these children than for those whose parents haven't had those discussions.

Even the youngest children are growing up in homes where media are an integral part of the environment — with multiple TVs, VCRs, computers, and video game players in the home; TVs left on much of the time (many with large screens and surround sound), whether anyone is watching or not; TVs in children's bedrooms; and portable DVD players and handheld video game players ready for children on the go.

Television

Nearly all children ages 6 months to 6 years (99%) live in a home with at least one television. Eighty-four percent live in a home with two or more televisions, and nearly a quarter (24%) live in homes with four or more TVs.

A large majority (80%) of these children live in homes that have cable or satellite TV, and about half (53%) live in homes where the largest TV is 30 inches or larger (25% have TVs 40 inches or larger). Four in ten (40%) have a television with surround sound, and two in ten (20%) have TiVo or some other type of digital video recorder. The presence of TiVo in the home was not related to either the amount or type of shows children watched.

VCRs and DVD players

Nearly all (93%) children ages 6 months to 6 years have a VCR or DVD player in the home, and a third (33%) have a portable DVD player. In addition, nearly one in five (18%) have a television or DVD player in their car.

“While my daughter has her princess movie in, my son can be upstairs playing his *Blues Clues* CD-ROM... It gives them their own space and their own quality time to be apart.”

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

Video games

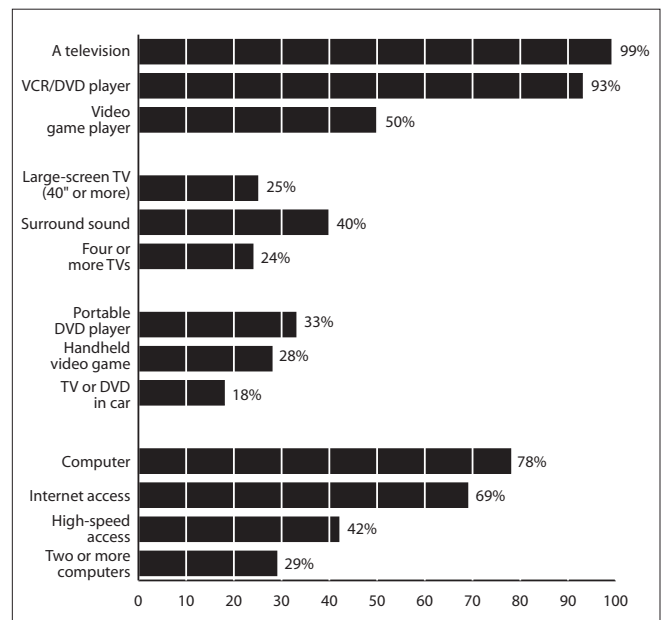
Half (50%) of children 6 years and under have a console video game player in the home, and nearly three in ten (28%) have a handheld video game player. Children ages 4-6 are more likely than children ages 0-3 to live in homes with a console video game player (54% vs. 46%), and with a handheld video game player (34% vs. 22%).

“I told my kids we weren’t going to get an Xbox... because we have the computer. To me it’s just one more thing that I would have to fight over with them. I’m big on entertaining yourself — go play. Don’t just sit here vegetating.”

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

CHART 9:

Percent of children age 6 and under who live in a home with...



Computers

More than three-quarters (78%) of children 6 years and under live in a household with a computer, and about three in ten (29%) live in a household with two or more computers. Nearly seven in ten (69%) have Internet access in the household, including 42% who have high-speed Internet access (26% have dial-up access).

MEDIA IN THE BEDROOM

Most children 6 years and under *don't* have TVs or other media in their bedrooms, but many do. One-third (33%) of parents report that their children have a TV in their bedroom (19% of children ages 1 year or younger, 29% of children ages 2-3 years, and 43% of those ages 4-6 years). Some parents also report that their children have a VCR or DVD player (23%), while far fewer say they have a video game player (10%) or a computer (5%) in their bedroom.

“The TV is on all the time. We have five TVs. At least three of those are usually on — her bedroom, the living room and my bedroom.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

More than half (51%) of children with a TV in their bedroom get cable or satellite, while 22% get only regular channels, and 25% have a TV that is just used for watching videos or playing video games. Among those with a TV in their bedroom, a third (33%, or 11% of all children) spend half or more of their TV-watching time watching in the bedroom. More than half (54%) of children with a TV in their bedroom have their own room. The remainder share a room with a brother or sister (31%) or with a parent (15%).

The most common reason parents name for having a TV in their child’s bedroom is that it frees up other TVs in the house so other family members can watch their own shows (cited by 55% of parents whose kids have a TV in the bedroom). Other commonly cited reasons are: it keeps the child occupied so the parent can do things around the house (39%); it helps the child fall asleep (30%); and that it’s used as a reward for good behavior (26%).

“My reasoning was that my little boy was extremely intelligent since birth. At one year old he was... putting his own DVDs in, skipping scenes, changing the volume. I thought it was a real good thing for him to have his own TV because TV helped him grow at a very young age.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

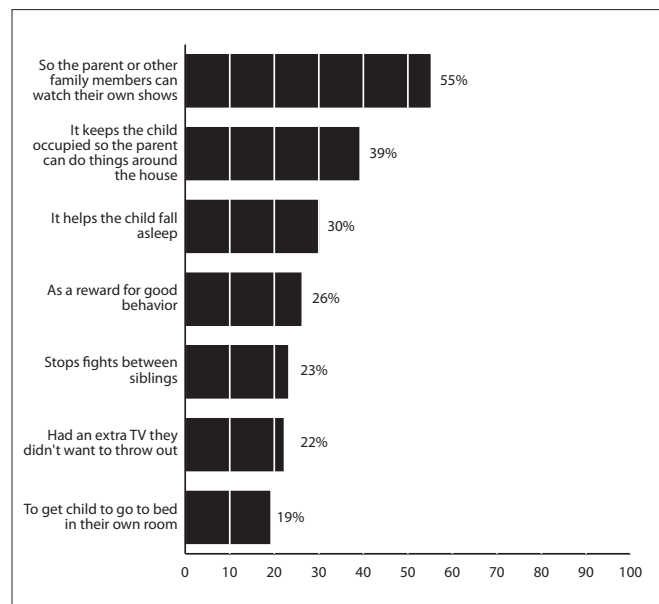
TABLE 8:

Percent of children with media in the bedroom, by age

Items in bedroom	Total	0-1 year	2-3 years	4-6 years
TV	33%	19%	29%	43%
VCR or DVD player	23%	12%	22%	30%
Cable/satellite TV	17%	10%	12%	23%
Video game player	10%	2%	5%	18%
Computer	5%	3%	3%	7%
Internet access	2%	2%	1%	2%

CHART 10:

Why parents put a TV in their child’s bedroom:



Note: Among the 33% of children with a TV in their room.

TABLE 9:

Relationship between bedroom media and time spent with media

Television	TV in bedroom	No TV in bedroom
Percent who watch TV in typical day	88%	68%
Average time watching among those who watched	1:30	1:13
Average time watching TV (among all kids)	1:19	0:49
Percent who watch TV <i>every day</i>	82%	58%
Videos	VCR/DVD player in bedroom	No VCR/DVD player in bedroom
Percent who watch videos in typical day	40%	30%
Average time watching videos (among all kids)	0:33	0:22
Percent who watch videos <i>every day</i>	36%	20%
Video games	Video game console in bedroom	No video game console in bedroom
Percent who play video games in typical day	34%	5%
Average time playing video games (among all kids)	0:16	0:02
Percent who play video games several times a week or more	54%	9%

Note: All differences statistically significant.

Falling asleep to TV

Most parents don't put their children to sleep to the TV (67% don't have a TV in their child's bedroom, and of those who do, 40% say they "never" put their child to bed with the TV on). However, as noted above, sleep crops up several times in the survey as among the reasons that many parents decide to put a TV in a small child's room. Among parents with a TV in their child's bedroom, three in ten (30%) say one reason they put a TV there is that it helps their child fall asleep, and about two in ten (19%) say they did it to try to get the child to sleep in his or her own room (instead of in the parent's room). Among children with a TV in their bedroom, 37% (or 12% of all children) go to bed with the TV on half the time or more.

Focus groups indicate that children respond very differently to TV in terms of whether they fall asleep to it or not. As the survey indicates, some moms say the TV helps their child fall asleep. For example, the mother of a young boy (3 years or under) in Denver, Colorado explained why she put a TV in her son's room this way: "I did it so I could watch my TV. I also wanted it so he would watch and fall asleep." Another mom from Columbus, Ohio, said "My 2-year-old will literally bounce in his crib to the *Wiggles*. As soon as I turn it off, he lies right down and goes to sleep." But several mothers said they could never put their child to sleep with the TV on, because the child would just stay awake watching. For example, another Columbus-area mother said "I can't put a TV in his room because he'd never go to sleep.... He'd watch it all night long if we let him."

Relationship of bedroom media to time spent using media

Children with media in their bedroom are significantly more likely to use these media regularly and spend substantially more time using them overall. For example, children with a TV in their room are far more likely to be daily TV watchers (i.e., parents say they watch TV "every day") than those without a bedroom TV (82% vs. 58%), and those who *do* watch spend more time in front of the screen (1:30 vs. 1:13). Similar patterns hold for children with a VCR, DVD, or video game player in their room. There is no relationship between TV in the bedroom and time spent reading in a typical day.

"I hate video games, and I don't want to see them in the living room. If they want to play them they have to do it in their room."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Irvine, California]

It is not possible to know from this study why children with bedroom media spend more time watching. At least three explanations are possible: that the presence of each medium in the bedroom leads to greater use; that children who are the heaviest users are the ones who are more likely to get their own sets; or that some other factor explains both why the parent decided to put a TV in their child's room and why the child spends more time watching (for example, because the parent believes TV is good for their child, or because the parent wants to spend as much uninterrupted time watching their own shows as possible).

MEDIA RULES

Among the 94% of children ages 6 months to 6 years old who have ever watched television, a large majority (85%) of their parents say that they have rules about what their child can or can't watch on TV (63% say they enforce these rules all of the time, while 22% say they enforce them less often than that). A somewhat smaller majority (60%) say they have rules about how much *time* their child can spend watching TV (31% enforced all the time, 29% less often).

A similar proportion of parents have rules about which video games their children are allowed to play and how much time they can spend playing them. A slightly smaller proportion have rules about computer content or time. (See Chart 11).

"I set a timer. My kids know when it goes off they have to stop."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

Children living in households with rules about TV time are less likely than those without such rules to watch TV in a typical day (76% vs. 84%). And among those who do watch, those with TV time rules spend less time watching (1:15) than those without such rules (1:26). When it comes to computers and video games, there is no significant difference between children whose parents do and do not have time rules in terms of the percent of children who use these media or the time spent using them.

In focus groups, many parents spoke about keeping an eye on the amount of time their children spend with media, and making sure it isn't excessive — but not through formal "rules." As the mother of a 1-3 year-old in Irvine said, "It isn't really a rule. There is time for that, and time for other things. That's just the way things are. We don't say it's a rule because if we did, he would immediately want to break the rule."

But to a large extent, discussion in the focus groups centered more on parents *trying* to get their kids to watch media — so the mothers can get other things done — rather than *limiting* the time kids spend with media. Parents spoke of "getting" their kids to watch certain shows or DVDs, and of the advantages of programs that keep children's attention longer.

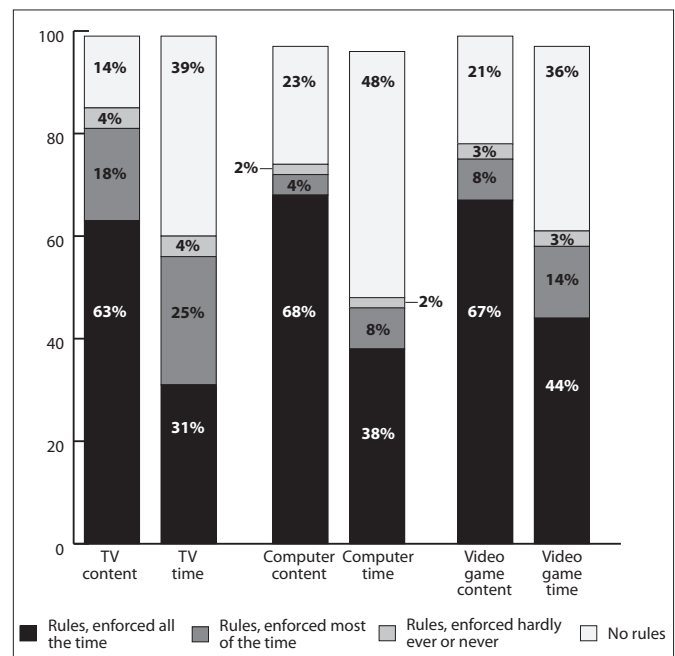
"I've had situations where I've said that he's been on the computer long enough today, let's try something else. It isn't a rule. It's just time to do something else."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Irvine, California]

Some parents in the focus groups mentioned the TV ratings. One mom from Columbus said, "I have it blocked on all my children's TVs with the V-Chip. Anything past TV-13 they aren't allowed to watch.... I think it's a great thing." Most parents talked about selecting shows or products based on familiar brands — PBS, Nickelodeon, Disney. At the same time, a number of parents said their younger kids had been exposed to content through older siblings, without the parents being aware of it ahead of time. For example, the mother of one 1-3 year-old from Denver said, "My 7-year-old watches this horrible stuff. I don't even know what it's called. I don't see how he watches it. My younger child watches too because he's lonely, so he goes in with his brother."

CHART 11:

Among those who use each medium, percent who have and enforce rules about...



Calming children down or pumping them up

Just over half (53%) of parents say that TV tends to calm their child down, while only about one in six (17%) say that TV gets their child excited. The rest of parents either say: TV calms and excites their child equally (9%); it depends on what the child is watching (8%) or on the child's mood or time of day (3%); or they don't know (10%). Television's effect on children does not vary reliably with the child's age or gender. Children who watch mostly entertainment shows are more likely to be calmed by TV than are those who watch mostly educational shows (72% vs. 50%).

"When he watched the *Buzz Lightyear of Star Command* video from the library, he was a monster child. The very next week I got *Teletubbies*, and it was completely opposite. He was very mellow."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

In focus groups, parents describe a range of responses their children have to TV. A number of parents talked about how TV can calm their children down. The mother of a 4-6 year-old from Irvine said, "My son is really hyper. That's a time when I can get him to actually calm down and watch a little TV.... He will slow down and that helps change his mood.... It's much better for him and for me."

"She plays along with what she's watching most of the time. She's dancing. She's not being a couch potato..."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

But another mother, from Columbus, said, "My 2-year-old is so rambunctious you cannot turn your back for a second. With TV I notice that his temperament changes. He gets more wild and hyper when he is watching the stuff that he likes." Many parents pointed to a positive energy their kids get from watching TV as well as dancing and responding to the screen. "My kids will stand in front of the TV and hop and clap," a mother of a 1-3 year-old from Columbus said. Others describe kids who "zone out" or appear hypnotized by the TV. "The TV kind of turns their brain off, that's what I don't like," said one Denver mother.

"I think [TV] builds confidence and self-esteem. My daughter was very introverted until she was about three and a half. She was very shy. ...By her acting out with her imaginary friends on the TV or *Dora*, it just really brought her out. It really opened her up in preschool and she is really doing well."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Irvine, California]

Imitating behavior from TV

Nearly seven in ten parents (68%) say they have seen their child imitate some type of behavior from TV. Far more parents say their child imitates positive behavior, such as sharing or helping (66%), than say their child imitates aggressive behavior, like hitting or kicking (23%). Parents of children ages 4-6 years (83%) and of children ages 2-3 years (77%) are more likely than parents of children under 2 years (27%) to say their child imitates any type of behavior.

"She was going around kissing everyone with her mouth open. She wanted to be like Ariel and Eric." (From Disney's *The Little Mermaid*.)

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

Boys in both age ranges (2-3 and 4-6) are more likely than girls to imitate aggressive behavior (nearly half — 45% — of parents of boys ages 4-6 say their child imitates aggressive behavior). Children who primarily watch kids' educational programming are more likely than those who primarily watch kids' entertainment shows to imitate positive behavior (76% vs. 59%).

"My daughter just sits in the beanbag chair watching TV. If it's something that she's really into, she just sits there with her mouth hanging open."

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

TV'S EFFECT ON CHILDREN (continued)

TABLE 10:

Imitating positive or aggressive behavior from TV

Percent whose parents say they...	Ages 2-3 Years			Ages 4-6 Years		
	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls
Imitate positive behavior	75%	75%	75%	80%	79%	82%
Imitate aggressive behavior	24%	31%†	17%	33%*	45%†	21%
Imitate neither	23%^	20%	25%	17%	17%	17%

* Significantly higher than ages 2-3; ^ Significantly higher than ages 4-6; † Significantly higher than girls in this age range.

Response to commercials

In focus groups, when asked to list the positives and negatives of TV for their children, many parents mentioned commercials as a negative. But when asked how many commercials their children were exposed to in a typical day, most parents seemed at a loss to guess, and estimates ranged from 5 to 100. Many parents indicated that their children liked commercials and were influenced by them. "She pays attention to the commercials more than the shows," said the mother of one 1-3 year-old from Columbus. "That's what gets her attention." Several talked about their children memorizing things from commercials. A Denver mom (of a 4-6 year-old) said, "My kids are — 'I want that, I want that, I want that.' They commit things to memory for months." But one mother said she thought the commercials just went right past her kids: "I don't think they watch them....I don't think they're paying attention."

"I want this, I want that, I want chocolate cereal."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

At the same time, a couple of parents mentioned that ads give them gift ideas, and they're grateful for them. The mother of one 1-3 year-old girl from Columbus said, "My daughter's birthday is next week. She saw a commercial for a Strawberry Shortcake doll toy. She said she wanted it for her birthday. If she hadn't seen the commercial, she wouldn't have known about it. I was glad that I was in the room and she could tell me that."

"I would be at a total loss if it wasn't for commercials at Christmas time. I wouldn't know what to get my kids. They know what they like when they see it on TV."

[Mother of a 4-6-year-old, Denver, Colorado]

TYPES OF TV SHOWS WATCHED

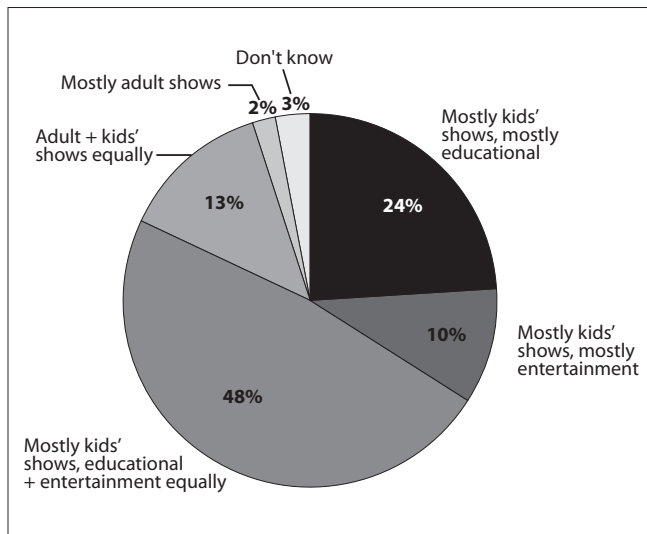
Among parents whose children watch TV at least several times a month, the vast majority (83%) say their child watches mostly shows specifically for kids around his or her age (2% say the child watches mostly shows for all ages, including adults; and 13% say the child watches both types of shows about equally). More parents say their child watches mostly educational shows (24%) than say their child watches mostly entertainment shows (10%), but a plurality (48%) say their child watches both types of shows about equally.

“A show can seem fine one minute, and in the next minute Tom pulls a gun on Jerry.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

CHART 12:

Percent of children who watch...



Note: Among those who watch TV at least several time a month.

In focus groups, a number of parents indicated that their young children watch mature content and that both the child and the parent seem fine with that. For example, the mother of one 4-year-old from Denver said, “*The Punisher*, my son loves that movie. He’s more mature.” Another said she “goes by her child’s personality” in deciding what he can or can’t watch. “Not a lot of people would be comfortable with a 4-year-old watching medical shows where they show people coming in and bleed-

ing and crying,” she said. “Obviously it is a tragedy. But he really loves the human body.” Another mom from Irvine said, “I try not to really shelter my daughter... She’s two. She wants to watch *Jurassic Park*...There’s a dinosaur [that] ate a guy — that’s what dinosaurs do — they eat people and animals. She understands that. She doesn’t get freaked about it. She even watched *Chuckie* the other day. She thought it was funny.”

“I’ve found that my kids are usually about a year ahead of what the games or movies say. My son is two so I look at ones for 3-4 year-olds. I always pick one that is above their level to help them learn.”

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

Many parents in focus groups say they are guided by brands in choosing what their kids can or can’t watch. One Denver mom said that children’s TV shows are “all pretty much educational now. They help teach the kids how to help each other and how to love one another. Everything on Nick is like that.” Another had a similar feeling about PBS: “I like my kids to watch PBS because it’s more of a learning thing instead of the cartoons. I have no problem with them watching PBS for two hours straight. They have all those good learning shows.” But one mother of a 4-6 year-old from Columbus said she made a mistake thinking she could go by the brand alone: “I thought you could trust Cartoon Network because of the name. I just recently paid attention to what he was watching and saw it. I said, ‘What the heck!’ I couldn’t believe it.”

“Because of the rules that I have set forth he doesn’t ask to watch things that he can’t watch.”

[Mother of a 4-6 year-old, Denver, Colorado]

A number of parents in focus groups talked about the influence of their older siblings on what their younger kids see on TV or videos. The mother of one 1-3 year-old from Denver told about a time when her young son watched the movie *Alien vs. Predator*: “He liked it...When I saw it I couldn’t believe my older son let him watch it. I thought he would be up all night, but it didn’t bother him at all.”

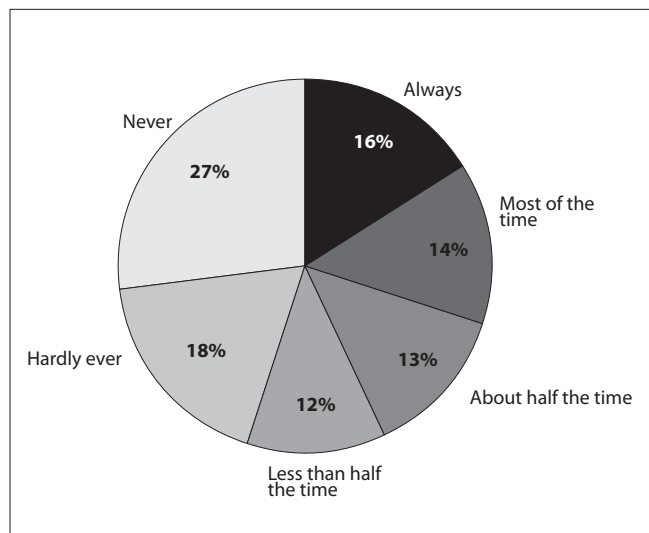
TV AND FOOD

Watching TV while eating meals or other snacks is fairly commonplace among young children. Indeed, 30% of children 6 years and under live in homes where the TV is on most (14%) or all (16%) of the time during meals. In any given day, about half (53%) of all children eat a snack or a meal in front of the TV.

In focus groups, one mom of a young boy from Irvine described the scene in her home: "I'll turn on the TV in the morning, and [my son] will watch cartoons. My kids will have breakfast, and then we take my daughter to school. I'll turn the TV on for him when we get home.... We'll usually watch TV when we're eating lunch.... He thinks that you only eat in front of the TV."

CHART 13:

How often the TV is on during meals, among children age 6 and under:

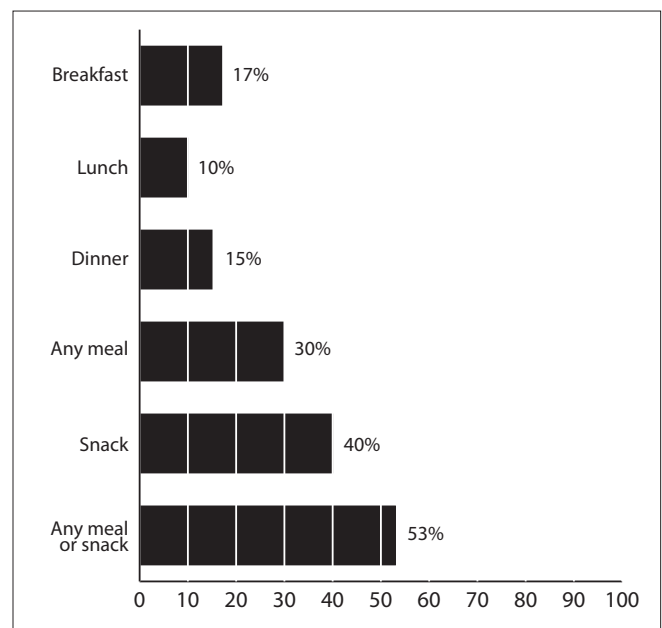


In talking about commercials, many parents spoke about their children's strong reactions to food ads. The mother of a 1-3 year-old from Denver talked about what happens when she has to drive her young son home from her office: "We have to drive past Chuck E. Cheese to go home. It's such a big ordeal....[E]very time he watches [the commercial] he will throw a huge fit. Any time I see that mouse come on the screen, I change it." Another said, "They [commercials] really work on my son (4-6 years old) already. He'll see something in a Burger King commercial. He'll tell me that we have to go to Burger King today. It doesn't mat-

ter what we're doing, we have to go." One mom of a 4-6 year-old said her daughter's favorite food commercial is on the Internet, not TV: "We have a link to a commercial for diet cherry vanilla Dr. Pepper. She loves it, so she watches it over and over."

CHART 14:

In a typical day, percent of children age 6 and under who eat snacks or meals in front of the TV:



Most parents in the focus groups found their children's susceptibility to food commercials annoying, but one Denver mother found it funny: "When my daughter was about 15 months, she would say 'ba, ba, boppa ba' [hums McDonald's jingle]. The first time she did it I cracked up. It was hilarious. I noticed that every time she saw the golden arches she would do it. She recognized it"

"My daughter would eat a cheeseburger from McDonald's every day if I would let her. She sees it on TV, and she will come to me right away saying that's what she wants for lunch."

[Mother of a 1-3 year-old, Columbus, Ohio]

Much of this study's data on children and computers has been presented in various other sections of this report, but this chapter is designed to bring the basic information together in one place.

Among all children ages 6 months to 6 years old, about four in ten (43%) have used a computer at some time. In any given day, 16% use a computer, for an average of 50 minutes. About a quarter (27%) of children in this age group use a computer several times a week or more; the rest use computers less often (15%) or not at all (57%).

About three-quarters (78%) of children this age have a computer at home, and about three in ten (29%) have more than one computer. Forty-two percent have high-speed Internet access, 26% have dial-up, and the rest have either no computer (22%) or a computer with no Internet access (9%).

Among all children ages 6 months to 6 years old, 18% have gone online to look at Internet websites designed for kids. When parents of those kids were asked what their children's favorite websites are, 90% gave an answer (almost all of which were sites sponsored by children's television shows or networks): 28% said Nickelodeon, Nick Jr., or Noggin; 24% said Disney; 10% said PBS Kids; 5% said Sesame Street; and 4% said Cartoon Network.

The majority of parents (69%) say using computers mostly helps children's learning (8% say it mostly hurts, while 15% say it doesn't make much difference one way or the other). Three-quarters (74%) of those whose children use computers say they have rules about what their kids can or can't do on the computer, while 49% say they have rules about how much time their children can spend on the computer. In focus groups, most parents seemed more concerned about the damage their children could do to their computers than the other way around.

"My son knows how to use the 'www' stuff. He can go to e-Bay now. My husband taught him how to go to iTunes. The other day we caught him using Excel to add up his Yu-Gi-Oh! cards."

[Mother of a 6-year-old, Irvine, California]

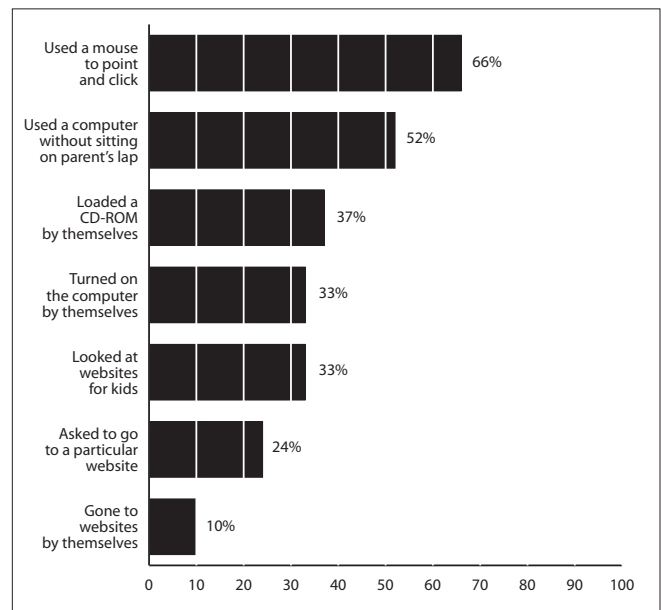
Older kids and computers

Not surprisingly, there is a big difference between computer use among the youngest children in the survey and those ages 4-6 years old. Among 4-6 year-olds, in a typical day 26% will use the computer (for an average of 50 minutes). One in eight (13%) use the computer every day, and 43% use it several times a week or more. Seven percent have a computer in their bedroom.

Among the 26% of 4-6 year-olds who use the computer in a typical day, 35% did so with their parent there helping them the whole time, 27% did so without their parent in the room helping them at all, and in the rest of the cases the parent was in the room at least part of the time.

CHART 15:

Percent of 4-6 year-olds who have ever done the following on the computer:



CHILDREN UNDER AGE TWO

Many experts consider the first two years of life especially critical for children's development and are particularly interested in monitoring media use patterns during this period. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended no screen media use at all for children under two.

In fact, this study indicates that children under age 2 have quite different media habits than children 2 years and older, although it also indicates that they live media-rich lives. Almost all babies 6-23 months old have listened to music (98%), or been read to (94%). Nearly eight in ten (79%) have watched TV, and two-thirds (65%) have watched videos or DVDs. Only a very few have ever used a computer (5%) or played any kind of video game (3%).

More than four in ten (43%) children this age watch TV every day, while another 17% watch several times a week. Nearly one in five (18%) watch videos or DVDs every day, while another 26% watch at least several times a week. In a typical day, 61% of children this age watch TV, a video, or a DVD, for an average of one hour and nineteen minutes. Most parents say they are in the same room with their child while they're watching TV either all or most of the time (88% of those whose children this age watch TV in a typical day).

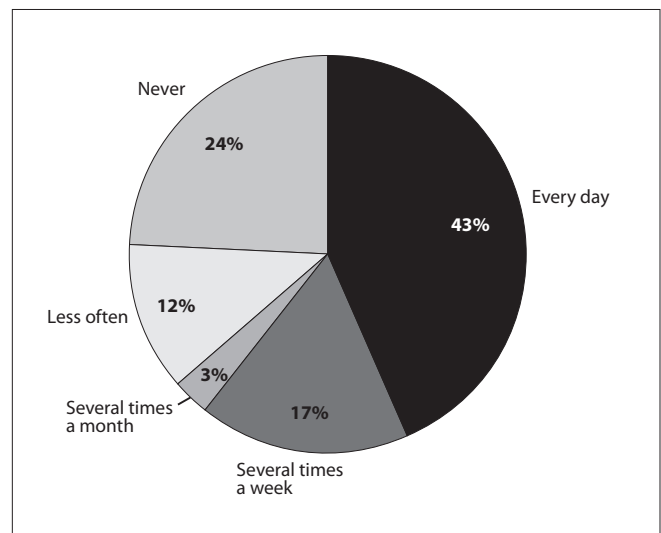
Around four in ten children under two can turn on the TV by themselves (38%) and change channels with the remote (40%). Almost one in five (19%) have a TV in their bedroom. A quarter (26%) of parents report that their children this age have already imitated a positive behavior from a TV show, like sharing or helping. Among the 63% of children this age who watch at least several times a month or more, 35% watch mostly kids' educational shows, 40% watch a mix of kids' educational and entertainment shows, and 19% watch a mix of programming for both children and adults.

In addition to watching their own shows, babies this age are also exposed to "background" television. A third (33%) live in homes where the TV is on most or all of the time, whether anyone is watching or not. Seventy percent of parents with children under two say they watch their own TV shows in a typical day, for an average of an hour and forty-three minutes, including 32% who say their child was in the room with them all or most of the time, 17% who say half or less of the time, and 20% who say none of the time.

More than half (58%) of children under two are read to every day, with another 25% being read to several times a week. In any given day, 77% are read to, for an average of 44 minutes.

CHART 16:

Percent of children under age two who watch TV...



GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MEDIA USE AND ENVIRONMENT

Overall, there are only modest differences between boys and girls in the amount or type of media used when they are ages 6 years or under. The main differences are that boys are much more involved than girls with video games, even at this young age, and that girls are more likely to read. This in turn contributes to a tendency for boys to spend about 12 minutes more in a typical day using screen media than girls (1:42 vs. 1:30 among all kids).

Boys are three times as likely as girls to play console video games in a typical day (12% vs. 4% among all, and 21% vs. 7% among 4-6 year-olds). Nearly twice as many boys as girls play video games several times a week or more (17% vs. 9% for console games, and 10% vs. 5% for handheld games). This pattern holds true for 4-6 year-olds (31% vs. 17% for console games, and 17% vs. 10% for handheld games). Boys are also somewhat more likely than girls to play computer games in a typical day (14% vs. 10%). They are also more likely than girls to have a TV (36% vs. 30%) and a video game player (13% vs. 8%) in their bedroom.

Girls are more likely than boys to read or be read to daily (74% vs. 65%), especially for ages 4-6 years (81% vs. 71%). Girls' early reading skills also seem to be somewhat better: among 2-6 year-olds, parents report that girls are more likely than boys to recognize all letters of the alphabet (51% vs. 42%), and less likely to recognize none of them (14% vs. 8%).

One other difference has to do with how children respond to the TV shows they watch. Boys are more likely than girls to imitate aggressive behavior from TV (31% vs. 15%), especially among 4-6 year-olds (45% vs. 21%). There were no significant differences in the types of shows boys and girls watch.

TABLE 11:

Media use by gender and age

	Ages 0-3 years		Ages 4-6 years		All ages	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Video Games						
Percent who ever play video games	15%	10%	64%*	48%	38%*	27%
Percent who play video games several times a week or more	5%	3%	31%*	17%	17%*	9%
Time spent playing console video games in a typical day (among all kids)	0:02	0:01	0:15*	0:03	0:09*	0:02
Reading						
Percent who read a book alone or with someone else every day	60%	67%	71%	81%*	65%	74%*
Time spent reading in a typical day (among all kids)	0:37	0:40	0:45	0:45	0:38	0:42
Television						
Percent who watch TV every day	58%	60%	73%	74%	65%	66%
Time spent watching TV in a typical day (among all kids)	0:58	0:53	1:00	1:06	0:59	0:59
Computers						
Percent who use a computer in a typical day	10%*	5%	28%	23%	19%*	13%
Time spent using a computer in a typical day (among all kids)	0:14	0:10	0:05	0:03	0:10*	0:06
Screen Media						
Total screen media time in a typical day (among all kids)+	1:32	1:16	1:54	1:45	1:42*	1:30

* Significant difference between boys and girls; + Screen media includes TV, videos/DVDs, video games, or computers.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN MEDIA USE AND ENVIRONMENT

There are a number of significant differences in children's media use patterns — and in their home media environments — based on their parents' income and education, and on their race and ethnicity.

In general, children whose parents have a lower income or less formal education tend to watch more television and play more video games; they are more likely to have TVs and video game players in their bedrooms, to have parents who watch more TV, and to live in homes where the TV is left on much of the time. Conversely, children with wealthier parents or those with a higher level of education tend to read more and are more likely to have used a computer.

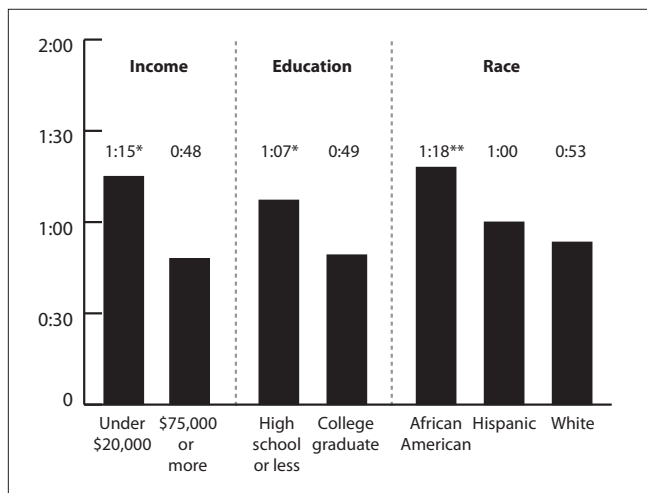
For example, children from families with incomes under \$20,000 a year spend an average of almost a half-hour more (27 minutes) watching TV each day than do children from families earning \$75,000 a year and up. And in any given day, 92% of children from those upper-income families spend some time reading or being read to, compared to 71% of children from the lower-income group.

These same differential patterns occur between children whose parents have a high school education or less, as compared to children with a parent who is a college graduate. Here the differences are even more pronounced for time spent reading and for the likelihood of playing video games in a typical day, and slightly *less* pronounced than income differences for time spent watching TV or using a computer. And while a family's income doesn't predict whether there will be differences in rules about media use, parents' education does: parents with a higher level of education are more likely to have rules about both TV content and time spent watching.

There are also similar patterns with regard to children's racial or ethnic backgrounds. (See Appendix C for detailed tables on media use and household media environment by race, income, and parent education.) For example, children of African American parents spend significantly more time watching TV than do children of White parents (an average of 25 minutes more a day) as well as significantly more time playing video games (12 minutes a day versus 4 minutes a day, on average).

CHART 17:

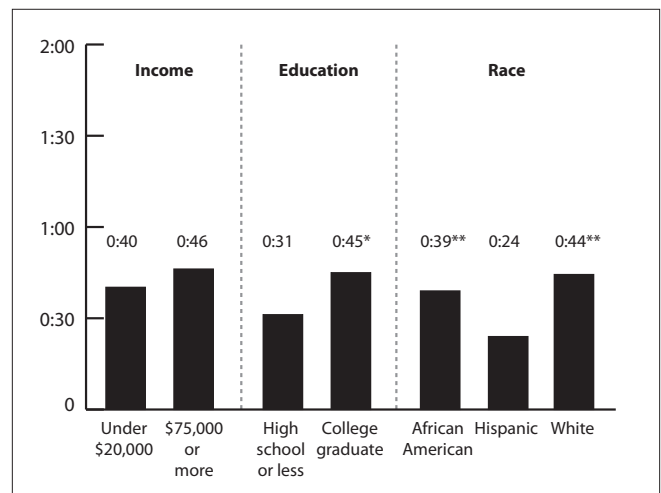
In a typical day, average amount of time children age 6 and under spend watching TV, by parents' income, education, and race:



*Statistically significant difference; **Significantly different from Whites and Hispanics.

CHART 18:

In a typical day, average amount of time children age 6 and under spend reading or being read to, by parents' income, education, and race:



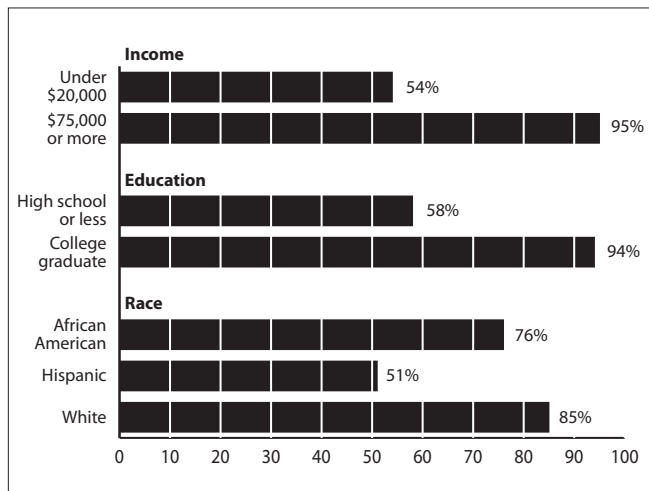
*Statistically significant difference; **Significantly different from Hispanics.

Children of Hispanic parents spend less time reading than do those of Whites or African Americans (20 minutes less per day than Whites) and also less time using a computer (for example, an average of 6% of Hispanic children use a computer in a typical day, compared to 19% of both White and African American kids). Similarly, African American parents are far more likely than White or Hispanic parents to report that their children have played console video games (39% of African Americans vs. 28% of Whites vs. 25% of Hispanics). White parents are far more likely than Hispanic parents to report that their children have used a computer (50% vs. 23%), and are more likely than both African American and Hispanic parents to report that their children read or are read to every day (75% for Whites vs. 66% for African American vs. 50% for Hispanics).

Regression analyses were conducted to determine whether these patterns hold independently for each of the demographic factors — income, education, and ethnicity — or if one or the other factor were dominant. In addition, the regression analyses were designed to ensure that the age of the child was not a factor influencing the differences found by income, education, and ethnicity. The regression analyses were conducted on a subset of measures, including: hours spent watching TV in a typical day; whether the child has ever used a computer or video game; whether they are daily readers; how much time they spend reading in a typical day; whether they have a TV in their bedroom; and how often the TV is left on in the home, whether anyone is watching or not.

CHART 19:

Percent of children age 6 and under with a computer in the home, by parents' income, education, and race:



Note: All differences are statistically significant.

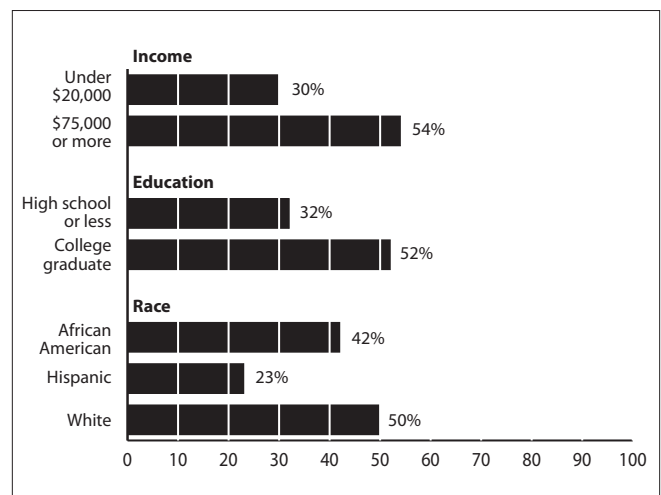
The results indicate that each of these demographic characteristics — income, parental education, and race — has an independent relationship with the media behaviors in question. Thus, even when controlling for a child's age and for the family's income and education, the parent's race remained a significant predictor of how much time the child spent reading, watching TV, and so on.

In other words, independent of a family's income and a parent's level of education, the general patterns for these media behaviors continue to hold, based on the family's race and ethnicity. Likewise, those from different income and educational levels have different media behaviors, whether they are from the same racial or ethnic group or not.

On the other hand, although there originally appeared to be differences in media behaviors among children from single- vs. two-parent families, those differences disappeared when controlling for parent education and family income. In other words, children from low-income homes or families with less formal education had similar behaviors whether they were from single- or two-parent families.

CHART 20:

Percent of children age 6 and under who have ever used a computer, by parents' income, education, and race:



Note: All differences are statistically significant.

CHANGES OVER TIME

In 2003 the Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a similar survey of parents of young children. Some of the issues addressed in the current survey are new, but others are identical to the original survey and can be used to track changes in media use over time. These measures indicate several important trends in young children's media use: a decrease in time spent with television and DVDs among those who watched them, and modest decreases in the likelihood of parents leaving the TV on in the home, or believing that TV mostly helps children's learning. These changes may indicate a slight shift in parents' attitudes toward TV, especially as it concerns the very youngest babies (under 2 years old). On the other hand, there was no statistically significant change in the percent of children 6 years and under who watch TV on a daily basis or are allowed to have TVs in their room, and there was a slight *decrease* in the percent of parents who say they have rules about their children's TV-watching.

Changes in time spent on activities

Although there was no significant change in the percent of children who used each medium in a typical day, there was a statistically significant decrease in the amount of time children spent on various media activities between 2003 and 2005.⁴ For example, among children who did each activity in a typical day, parents report children spending an average of 17 minutes less per day listening to music, ten minutes less per day watching TV, and 7 minutes less per day watching videos or DVDs. Time spent reading, using a computer, or playing video games did not decrease appreciably. It is possible that this reflects a seasonal change (and, in the case of DVDs, a slight change in question wording from one survey to the other): the 2003 survey was conducted from April 11 to June 9, while the 2005 survey was conducted from September 12 to November 21. Replicating this data in future surveys will help us understand whether or not this is truly a trend.

Changes in household media environment

There was a small but statistically significant decrease in the percent of children living in households where the television is kept on always or most of the time, from 37% in 2003 to 32% in 2005. Similarly, there was a small but statistically significant decrease in the percent of children living in households where the television is on during meals always or most of the time, from 35% in 2003 to 30% in 2005. While these changes occurred among children of all ages, the decrease in leaving the TV on all day was more pronounced in families with children under 2 years old (a 12 percentage point drop, compared to 1 percentage point for the other age groups).

There was a significant increase in the share of children in households with at least one computer, from 73% to 78%. There was also an increase in the share of children in households with Internet access, from 63% to 69%, and a large increase in the share with high-speed Internet access, from 20% to 42%.

Changes in media rules and parents' attitudes

The share of parents who say they have rules for their children's media use declined somewhat between 2003 and 2005, particularly for rules about time spent with TV, computer, and video games.

For example, 69% of parents said they had rules about how much time their child could spend watching TV in 2003, compared to 60% in 2005. Similarly, 61% of parents whose children use computers said they had time-related computer rules in 2003, compared to 49% in 2005.

Parents' attitudes towards TV and video games also showed a modest change between 2003 and 2005. Parents in 2005 were slightly more likely than in 2003 to say that watching TV mostly hurts learning (31% vs. 27%) and that playing video games mostly hurts learning (49% vs. 40%). Attitudes towards computers and learning were roughly the same in 2003 and 2005.

TABLE 12:

Time spent with media on a typical day, changes over time

	Watch TV	Watch Video/ DVD	Listen to music	Play video games (console or hand-held)	Use a computer (for games or other purpose)
<i>Percent of kids who did each activity</i>					
2005	75%	32%	82%	11%	16%
2003	73%	46%	79%	9%	18%
Difference (percentage points)		-14*+			
<i>Mean hours among kids who did each activity</i>					
2005	1:19	1:18	0:58	0:55	0:50
2003	1:29	1:25	1:15	1:01	0:59
Difference (minutes)	-10*	-7*+	-17*		
<i>Mean hours for all kids</i>					
2005	0:59	0:24	0:48	0:06	0:07
2003	1:04	0:38	0:59	0:04	0:09
Difference (minutes)		-14*+	-11*		

* Indicates statistically significant change; +Slight modification in question wording may account for changes in watching videos and DVDs. See endnote #1.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The role of parents

In the public debate about children and media, people on all sides of the issue often end up pointing to the role of parents in monitoring their children's media use, encouraging them to push the "off" button. This study provides important documentation of just how powerful a role parents have in shaping their children's media habits. A third of children live in homes where parents simply leave the TV on most of the day, whether anyone is watching or not — and, not surprisingly, those children end up watching significantly more than other kids do. Many parents spend a fair amount of time watching TV or on the computer themselves, and again, children of those parents also spend more time watching a screen each day. And a third of children 6 years and under have been allowed to have a TV in their bedroom — mostly to avoid conflicts with parents' or other family members' viewing — and again, those children spend more time watching TV.

Why parents are drawn to media

Many parents find media a tremendous benefit in parenting and can't imagine how they'd get through the day without it (especially TV, videos, and DVDs). Media allow parents a chance to get their chores done, quiet their kids down, or just have some "me" time, knowing that their kids are "safe" — not playing outside, and less likely to be making trouble around the house. Multiple TV sets, DVD players, and computers help solve sibling quarrels and also let parents get their own screen time uninterrupted. While fewer than four in ten (38%) parents say they think TV mostly helps children's learning, parents are relieved that they can make use of media in these ways with less guilt, because of what they see as real advances in the educational quality of media content.

The educational value of children's television

While parents in the survey seem pretty evenly split on whether TV in general is mostly helpful (38%) or harmful (31%) to children's learning, in the focus groups almost all parents pointed to "learning" as one of the big positives of TV for their kids, and many made comments about observing their children learning things from TV shows. In general, parents in the focus groups seemed well satisfied with the quality of programming available to their kids. Most felt their children would learn just as well *without* TV, but didn't want the extra burden that that would place on them as parents. The reigning sentiment

seemed to be that there is simply no way they can live their lives and get everything done without TV and videos, and that the educational content and positive lessons in much of the programming lessens their guilt at not spending more time with their kids. And while parents in the survey indicate that they think the computer is more educational than is TV, the focus groups revealed that many parents greatly prefer TV or videos because they require less supervision (and because they're worried about their kids hurting the computer).

A big role for media

Media, especially television, are clearly playing a key role in children's lives, starting at an early age. In a typical day, more than eight in ten (83%) children ages 6 months to 6 years old use screen media, averaging about two hours each (1:57). As mentioned above, a third live in homes where the TV is left on most or all of the time, whether anyone is watching or not, and a similar proportion (30%) have the TV on during most or all of their meals. Homes with multiple TV sets and portable media allow kids to watch in the privacy of their rooms, or when they're on the go — a third (33%) have a portable DVD player, and a third (33%) have a TV in their bedroom. About one in eight (12%) are put to bed with the TV on at least half the time.

Less time with TV and DVDs

While there haven't been any major changes in children's daily media habits since a similar survey was conducted in 2003 — they aren't more likely to use computers or video games, or less likely to watch TV — when children *do* watch TV or videos, they are spending less time doing so (10 minutes less watching TV, and 7 minutes less watching videos or DVDs). It's possible that this change follows on the slight — but statistically significant — drop in the proportion of parents nationally who say they leave the TV on all or most of time (from 37% to 32%) or who say they usually eat meals in front of the TV (from 35% to 30%). It is also possible that the shift comes from a greater number of parents thinking TV mostly *hurts* children's learning (up from 27% to 31%). However, it is also possible that it is an artifact of a shift in the time of year the survey was conducted, from April and May to September, October, and November. Slight decreases in time spent with computers and playing video games were not statistically significant. We will continue to track these data over time.

American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations

A substantial number of children are using media in excess of the amounts recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). In a typical day, nearly two-thirds (61%) of babies under two years old use screen media, and 43% of children this age watch TV every day (the AAP recommends no screen time for babies under two). And while the AAP recommends no more than 1-2 hours per day of screen media for children two and older, in a typical day 41% of 2-3 year-olds and 43% of 4-6 year-olds use screen media for 2 hours or more. Few parents report having spoken with their doctor about their child's media use.

Four-to six-year-olds

By the time they hit the 4-6 year-old age group, children are living richly media-centric lives, often with their own media that they can take with them on the go, or use by themselves in their rooms, and with many youngsters eating and going to sleep to TV on a regular basis. In a typical day, 90% of children this age use screen media, for an average of 2 hours (2:03). Forty-three percent have their own TV in their bedroom, a third have a portable DVD player, and a third have a portable handheld video game player. A third of those with a TV in their rooms watch TV in their bedrooms at least half the time or more, and 17% are put to sleep to TV half or more of the time. By this age, "new" media have become a regular part of children's media diets: 43% use a computer several times a week or more, and 24% play video games that often.

Digital divide

A substantial racial and socio-economic divide separates those children who have ever used computers from those who have not, with Hispanic children least likely to have used a computer at these early ages (23%, compared to 42% for African American and 50% for White children). About half (54%) of children from families earning less than \$20,000 a year have a computer at home, compared to 95% of those from families earning more than \$75,000 a year. But there is also a broader "divide" in children's media use habits and household environments. Children from lower income families, children whose parents have less formal education, as well as children of color all spend more time watching TV, and are more likely to live in a home where the TV is left on most of the time; and they also spend *less* time reading or being read to.

Electronic media have clearly become a central focus of many young children's lives, a key component in family routines such as waking up, eating, relaxing, and falling asleep. Not only do children — starting when they are just babies — spend hours a day using media, but they are also learning to use the media by themselves, often watching their own TVs, DVD players or hand-held devices, many times in the privacy of their own rooms. As much as media have become a part of the fabric of family life, they are often consumed separately, used as much or more to keep the peace than to bring family members together.

It is hoped that the data in this report will be used to help families assess their own media habits; to spur the development of media products that are beneficial to children and families; to inform policy debates about public broadcasting, digital media, and children's commercial exposure; and to provide the data to help inform future research about the impact of various media on young children. To date, there has been very little research about the impact of media on the youngest children, especially those 2 years and under. Given how much a part of children's lives these media are, it seems important to explore in greater depth the impact media may be having on their development.

Endnotes

¹ The percent of parents who report that their children watched videos or DVDs may be an underestimate due to the way the question was worded. The question read "Did your child spend any time watching videos or DVDs, including while riding in the car?" In a previous survey, the question was asked without the phrase "including while riding in a car," and a far greater proportion of parents reported that their children had watched videos or DVDs (46%, compared to 32% in the current survey). Many respondents in the current survey may have misunderstood the question and answered "yes" only if their child watched videos or DVDs while riding in the car.

² See previous note. Since the percent who watched videos or DVDs may be an underestimate, the amount of time spent watching videos or DVDs, as well as the total screen media time, may also be underestimates.

³ The surveys were conducted with the parent who had spent the greatest amount of time with the child the previous day. The vast majority (81%) of respondents were mothers. Women are generally much less likely to use video games than men.

⁴ The decrease in the percent who watched videos/DVDs, and the corresponding decrease in amount of time spent watching them, may be at least partially attributable to the change in question wording.



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