

Are You in Control of Your TV or Are Your Children?

Are you constantly worried about what kind of trash your son or daughter might be watching on television?

Is television the dominant social presence in your home? Are you afraid to limit your kids' usage because you've tried to go down that road before, and it was nothing but whining and complaining and breaking the rules?

If you answered, "YES!" or have any other TV issues constantly in the back of your mind, it's time to step up and establish manageable standards and limits in your home. There's nothing to be afraid of and a whole lot to look forward to, once you get over the hump and introduce protocols that are fair and consistent.

A majority of kids—53 percent—in a Kaiser Family Foundation survey said their families had no rules for TV viewing. The remaining kids said they had rules, but just 20 percent said those guidelines were enforced most of the time. As if that's not bad enough, the proportion of children with cable or satellite television in their own room grew from 29 percent to 37 percent in the past five years. What does all this mean? Big trouble. Television is raising many children. And most of television is not sending our children the right message.

So if you want to remain in control of your children as the parent, you must have these 10 TV rules.

1. Television is a privilege, not an inalienable right. Supervision and usage of every television in the house must fall 100 percent under the dictatorial authority of the parents. This is a foundational and non-negotiable principle.

2. Television's natural posture is "off." This idea is

apparently novel! However, television as a constant background noise and a background visual is not only distracting, but it is antisocial. In the absence of a well-considered decision to watch a specific program, there is no good reason to have the television on.

3. Parental modeling must be consistent with household standards. It simply doesn't work to have one set of guidelines for children and a *blanket waiver* for mom and dad. Obviously acceptable content shifts with age, but if standards such as decency and overusage are good enough for the children, then they're good enough for the grown-ups too.

4. Turn the television off when company enters the house. Have you ever noticed how good conversation is stilted at sports restaurants with multiple screens? Television catches your eye, your ear and your attention. But people and conversation are much more important. Keep the television off, unless the purpose of the invitation is "The Game," or "Movie Night" or "Let's Watch the Debate."

5. Television has no place in the bedroom. "How can I stop my 10-year-old watching *South Park* late at night?" Well, it's not going to be such an issue when there's no television in his room! Television is easier to monitor in family spaces. Remember, it's not a right.

6. Television is always off during family mealtimes. Mealtimes are for conversation, checking in, sharing family stories, and the teaching of manners and social skills. Television sucks community right out of the room.

7. Only parents may program access and restrictions. This is another version of the *who's in charge?* question. Take this bull by the horns, and make sure it's clear that your home is parent-run.

8. Stupid and mind-numbing can be as harmful as immoral and violent. Make sure that your standards are not only clear but

also consistent. It's important to make decisions about programming based on content, not just rating.

9. Television is more fun when it is not overused. Moderation turns out to be the opposite of killjoy. Rather than taking the fun out of family entertainment, moderation eliminates the inflationary *I'm tired of this* or *I'm bored* reaction. Carefully vetted and well-supervised family viewing ramps enjoyment up a notch.

10. Television must take its place among a broad spectrum of family activities. Think of television as one more piece in the entertainment puzzle. Family games, outings, reading time, projects, homework, television, computer games and sports—these and other activities are all valid but also in need of balance. When television finds its proper balance, then the abuse of the privilege will likely all but disappear.

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