

Media and Young Children ACTION GUIDE

Eighth Edition



Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment

TV, DVDs, computers, video games and other electronic media are a powerful force in children's lives. Many children spend more time in front of a screen than in school. Shows, advertisements, toys and other products linked to the media deeply influence children's development, learning and behavior from an early age.

This TRUCE Action Guide will help you:

- Promote informed and responsible use of media.
- Take action to reduce the harmful impact of media.

What Do We Know About Children & Electronic Media?

Excessive screen time...

UNDERMINES CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Social, emotional, and intellectual development is affected by too much screen time. Research shows that time spent in front of a screen leads to a smaller vocabulary and shorter attention spans. It increases the risk of attention deficit disorder, aggressive behavior, and childhood obesity. It also affects sleep.

MAKES IT HARDER TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE AND NATURE

Children who spend time in a virtual world have less time to spend in the real world with their own ideas, family, friends, and nature. They can become more attached to screens and objects than to people and the world around them.

HAS A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON PLAY

Children play less when they spend too much time watching TV or playing video games. When they do play, they often imitate what they see on the screen with toys linked to TV shows and other media. This undermines creative play, which helps lay the foundation for later academic learning. (See the "TRUCE Toy and Play Action Guide".)

CONTRIBUTES TO BOREDOM

The more children watch, the harder time they have coming up with their own ideas about what to do on their own. The excitement of what is seen on the screen can make everything else seem boring. This can contribute to wanting to spend more and more time glued to a screen.

LEADS TO NAGGING

Young children are easy targets for advertisers because they believe what they see and hear. Marketers know how to get children to nag for products (toys, clothes, food, lunch boxes, etc.) linked to favorite shows. Children see an average of 40,000 advertisements every year. Many countries do not allow advertising directed at children during children's television programming.

PROMOTES VIOLENT, SEXUALIZED, AND STEREOTYPED BEHAVIOR

Many children's movies and TV shows promote gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes. For boys, violence is portrayed as entertainment and an acceptable way to act and to solve problems. For girls, sexualized appearance teaches them that how they look and what they wear determines their value.

What You Can Do with Your Children

Help children develop thoughtful and responsible media viewing habits.

- Limit screen time. Decide on rules and routines for screen time and discuss these as a family. For example, no screens on school days, no more than one hour of screen time a day, or only adults can turn on the TV.
- Decide with your children what programs are and are not acceptable.
- Keep TVs, video game systems, and computers in a shared family space, NOT in children's bedrooms.
- Watch TV and movies with your children and talk together about what you see. Aim for a give-and-take discussion (rather than a lecture). [See "Talking with Children" box on next page.]
- Protect children from exposure to inappropriate media that you may watch. Be aware when your child is able to hear or see it too.
- Do not use electronic media to entertain your children when they are outside of the home (in the car, restaurants, doctors' offices, grocery stores). Use this time to sing, to have conversations, or to observe and explore the world together.

Choose toys carefully.

[See the "TRUCE Toy and Play Action Guide."]

- Select open-ended toys and play materials (e.g., art and recycled materials, blocks, dolls) that children can use in their own creative ways.
- Resist use of toys that are linked to TV, movies, and other electronic media. When scripted toys are used, help children combine their use with more open-ended toys.

Encourage and support children's interests and skills beyond electronic media.

- Promote creative and imaginative play that children control, instead of play where children imitate what they see on the screen. Encourage play that helps children work out their own ideas and develop a sense of mastery.
- Use media to spark imagination and creativity. Ask questions that help children get beyond the TV script, such as: If you told the story, how could you change the ending? What new characters can you add? How do they look? How do they act?
- Promote age-appropriate alternative activities to screen

time, such as board games, puzzles, art activities, and books. Encourage children to play outside all year. Make sure your children have opportunities for free, unscheduled time.

Address racial, gender, and other stereotypes promoted in media.

Children's media often reflects and promotes stereotypes that limit children's ideas of whom they can be and how they understand and treat others.

- Respond when children use media stereotypes in their play. Asking questions about their ideas and actions often works better than correcting or judging.
- Look for opportunities to expand children's thinking. When a girl plays with a Thomas the Tank Engine toy and a boy tells her the toy is for boys, you might say, "Some people think that. What do you think? I think it's fine for girls and boys to try lots of things." Validate for children that they can choose who they want to be and what they want to do.
- Present children with non-stereotyped behavior and diverse cultures through books, music, community events, and other programs.



Talk to children about media programs and characters (especially characters like Disney princesses, Hannah Montana, and Spiderman).

- Use open-ended questions and comments that invite children to share their thinking.
- Show children that you won't get upset or angry by what they say.
- Share your ideas and clear up misconceptions, (but try not to tell children how they should think- asking questions works better than judging.)

Create opportunities for discussion about violent, scary, or highly sexualized events.

- What children hear is often on their minds. They may worry and need to be reassured that adults are working to keep them safe.

Why Unplug Your Babies?

The American Association of Pediatrics recommends NO screen time for children under the age of two. Thanks to a complaint filed by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, the Federal Communication Commission issued a report stating there is no research to support the educational claims (that intelligence and speaking skills are improved) of baby media products such as Baby Einstein.

[For the full Baby Einstein story, see: www.commercialfreechildhood.org.]

For more information about babies, see the: TRUCE Infant-Toddler Play, Toys & Media Action Guide.



Exposure to Violence Leads to Violence

By the time children are 18 years old, they will have witnessed an average of 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 40,000 murders. Violent toys, often tied to violent media, are commonly marketed to young children. Movies with ratings for older children are often marketed with toys rated for younger children. Children exposed to violent programming at a young age are more likely to use aggression to solve problems. They are also more likely to be desensitized to the effects of violence, to see the world as a more dangerous place, and to crave more violence than children who are not exposed.



Did You Know?

A 2009 Nielsen company* poll found that kids ages 2-5 averaged more than 32 hours a week in front of TV screens, not counting time spent with other kinds of media.

*http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/media_entertainment/tv-viewing-among-kids-at-an-eight-year-high/



TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT TV & OTHER MEDIA

ONE WAY TO HAVE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON WHAT CHILDREN LEARN FROM THE MEDIA IS TO TALK TO THEM ABOUT WHAT THEY SEE. HAVE A GIVE-AND-TAKE DISCUSSION INSTEAD OF A LECTURE WHERE YOU GIVE THE ANSWERS.

By listening and asking questions, you can learn children's perceptions, fears, and misconceptions. Then you can offer ideas on how to deal with their concerns and expand their thinking. Here are some suggestions for how to talk with children about what they see on TV and in other media.



TALK ABOUT YOUR REACTIONS TO WHAT YOU SAW.

- What did you think about that show/game?
- Did you like it when _____ happened? Why do you think it happened?
- I didn't like it when _____. I wish they didn't have to hurt each other.

HELP SORT OUT FANTASY FROM REALITY.

- What was pretend and what was real? How could you tell?
- Help clarify confusion by saying things such as, "In real life things don't work that way."
- I wonder how they made _____ happen on that show.
- How can we tell the difference between these advertisements and the show?
- I wonder why they made the ad like that?
- Can you remember a time when we bought something and it wasn't like the ad?

COMPARE WHAT YOUR CHILD SAW TO THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

- Could anything like _____ happen to you? When? How could it be the same/different?
- What would you do if you were in that situation?

DISCUSS ANY VIOLENCE OR OTHER MEAN-SPIRITED BEHAVIOR.

- What do you think about how _____ solved their problem?
- If you had a problem like that what could you do or say?
- Can you think of a way to solve that problem where no one gets hurt?

ASK QUESTIONS THAT FOCUS ON STEREOTYPED IMAGES AND BEHAVIORS.

- I wonder why it's always men with big muscles who go to fight. Did you notice that? What do you think about it?
- It seems like the women always need to get rescued by the men. Have you noticed that?
- I wonder why the "bad guys" have foreign accents, always wear dark colors, and have darker skin.

(Adapted from Remote Control Childhood (Levin, 1998))

What You Can Do Beyond the Home

Parents talk about media with other parents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BABIES, SEE THE: [TRUCE INFANT-TODDLER PLAY, TOYS & MEDIA ACTION GUIDE](#).

- Find out what your children are watching at other homes. Talk with neighbors, grandparents, teachers, childcare providers, and babysitters about how you like to handle media with your child.
- Work out with other families about how you'll deal with TV and other media when your children are at each other's houses for play dates, birthday parties, etc.



Work with schools to develop curriculum that incorporates healthy play, media literacy, and conflict resolution and violence prevention programs.

- Ask your schools to develop policies and educate parents about the problems created by media and how to respond to these problems. Ask the PTA to organize workshops and guest speaker events on this topic for parents.



- Promote school-wide activities that help create a community of aware parents and teachers.
- Sponsor school events such as an after-school club, TV Turn-off Week, Math Games Night, or a Violent Toy Trade-in.
- Create a media resource library of books and other resources that will help parents use media wisely. To get started, use the Resources listed at the end of this guide.

Raise community awareness about the effects of media on young children.

- Ask pediatricians and other health care professionals to become informed and advocate for this issue. Ask if they would like to have TRUCE Guides in their waiting rooms.
- Bring TRUCE Guides and other information to family and friends, libraries, schools, clinics, and events.
- Use facts about children and the media to spark conversation and advocacy with other adults. The "Fact Sheets" prepared by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood will help you. [See "Resources" below.]
- Work for change. Voice your concerns to TV stations, movie companies, toy manufacturers, store managers, and local newspapers.

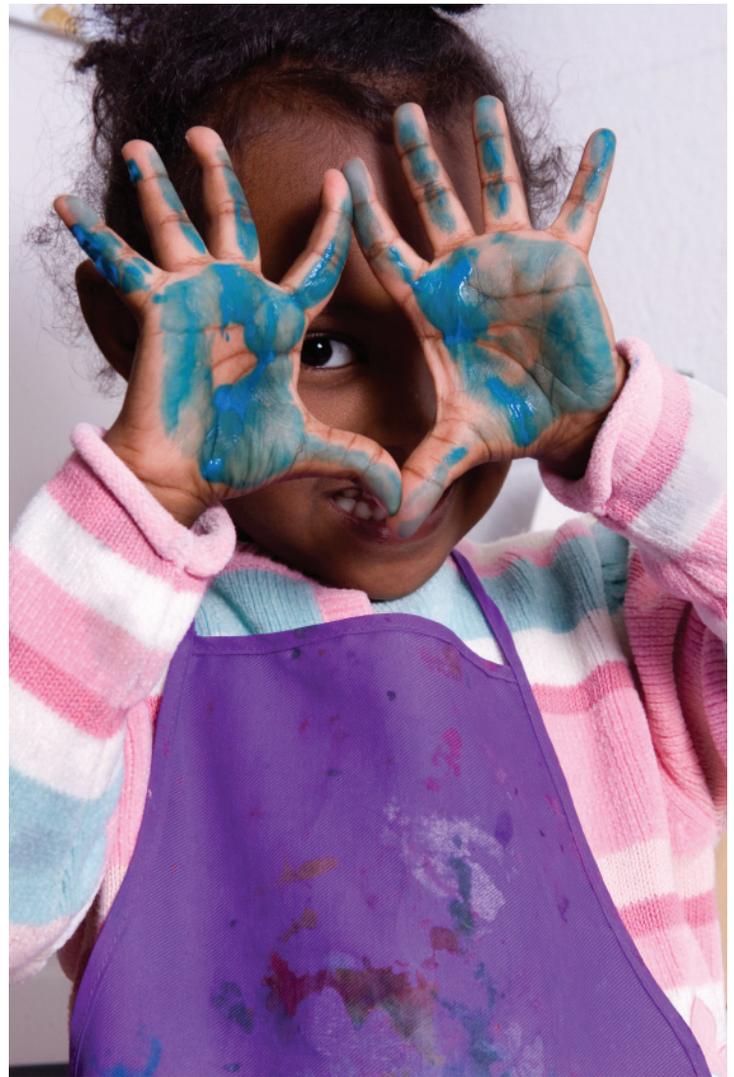
Go to the [TRUCE website](#) for additional information and resources.

A Note to Teachers

Electronic media reaches into early childhood and primary classrooms. As an early childhood expert, you can play a vital role in helping children and families deal with the media in children's lives.

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT COUNTERACTS THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF MEDIA.

- Help children and parents understand and implement the suggestions listed in this Guide.
- Find time every day to provide playtime. There is more and more pressure to eliminate imaginative play in favor of testing and standardized curriculum. As media undermines play, it is more important than ever for children to have time and support for creative play in school.
- Use discretion about when and how you use media in your classroom. Do not use videos for indoor recess or as a reward for good behavior.
- Keep your school commercial-free. Do not let corporations (such as Disney, Petco, Papa Ginos) and their educational materials enter your classroom or curriculum. Remember that their free videos, posters, CDs, and other materials are usually a form of advertising.



TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CREATING A PEACEFUL, COOPERATIVE CLASSROOM COMMUNITY THAT COUNTERACTS MANY OF THE ANTI-SOCIAL LESSONS TAUGHT ON THE SCREEN.

- Help children be contributing members of the classroom with regular jobs and opportunities to help each other and solve problems together, and to voice their opinions and concerns. [Teaching Young Children in Violent Times—see Resources below—will help you with this.]
- Work with families to help them create peaceful learning environments at home. For example, create kits with books and activities for families to borrow and use as alternatives to screen time. At parent/teacher meetings, discuss the effects of media on learning and how you can work together on media issues.
- Teach children how to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Help children understand and appreciate diversity.
- Promote cooperative games.

Additional Information & Resources

BOOKS

- Cantor, J. (2004). *Teddy's TV Troubles*. Madison, WI: Goblin Farm Press. This children's book addresses children's fears caused by television.
- Carlsson-Paige, N. (2008). *Taking Back Childhood: Helping Your Kids Thrive in a Fast-Paced, Media-Saturated, Violence-Filled World*. New York, NY: Hudson Street Press.
- Clinton, J. (2003). *The Other Parent: The Inside Story of the Media's Effect on Our Children*. New York, NY: Atria.
- De Gaetano, G. (2004). *Parenting Well in the Media Age: Keeping Our Kids Human*. Fawnskin, CA: Personhood Press.
- Hoffman, E. (2002). *Changing Channels: Activities Promoting Media Smarts and Creative Problem Solving for Children*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.
- Levin, D. (1998). *Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Levin, D. (2003). *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times: Building a Peaceable Classroom* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Educators For Social Responsibility and Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Levin, D. & Carlsson-Paige. (2006). *The War Play Dilemma: What Every Parent and Child Needs to Know* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Levin, D. & Kilbourne, J. (2008). *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do To Protect Their Kids*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. www.sosexysosoon.com
- Linn, Susan. (2009). *The Case for Make-Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Linn, Susan. (2004). *Consuming Kids. The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Rogers, J. (2009). *Kids Under Fire: Seven Simple Steps to Combat the Media Attack on Your Child*. Lowell, MA: Adibooks.

FILMS

From the Media Education Foundation [www.mediaed.org]

Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood.

Examines the multi-billion dollar marketing machine and its pervasive influence on children's lives.

Game Over: Gender, Race and Violence in Video Games.

Addresses the fastest growing segment of the media and how video games teach harmful lessons about gender, race and violence.

Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power.

Takes a critical look at Disney's role in shaping childhood and the ideas Disney movies teach about race, gender, and ethnicity.

Remote Control: Children, Media Consumption & the Changing American Family.

Examines the far-reaching effects of high levels of media use on children and families.

TRUCE IS A NATIONAL GROUP OF EDUCATORS

deeply concerned about the impact of entertainment on children's play, learning and behavior. Our goal is to raise public awareness and prepare materials that help parents' and teachers' deal effectively with these issues. We support parents and teachers in a variety of ways in addressing issues regarding media, toys, and play.

Please contact us: TRUCE, PO Box 441261, Somerville, MA 02144,
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Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment

Additional Information & Resources

TRUCE thanks Matt Damon for his ongoing support.

FOR COPYING: Please visit our website: www.truceteachers.org for a black and white version of this guide.

WEBSITES & ORGANIZATIONS

ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

www.allianceforchildhood.org

Advocates for policies and practices that support children's healthy development and play. Published the new report, *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School* [Available at the website].

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

www.aap.org

Prepares position statements and informational pamphlets for pediatricians and the public on media issues.

ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

www.allianceforchildhood.org

Advocates for policies that support children's healthy development and play. The website includes their published report, *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School*.

CAMPAIGN FOR A COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD

www.commercialfreechildhood.org

A coalition of healthcare professionals, educators, parents, and activists whose mission is to reclaim childhood from corporate marketers.

CHILDREN AND NATURE NETWORK

www.childrenandnature.org

Dedicated to building a movement to help children reconnect to nature.

CONSCIOUS AND CREATIVE PARENTING

www.gerzon.com/coaching/parenting

Supports parents who need help setting limits on media and dealing with conflict.

EMPOWERED BY PLAY

www.empoweredbyplay.org

Helps families and teachers protect and promote imaginative play.

HEALTHY MEDIA CHOICES

www.Healthymediachoices.org

Helps parents, caregivers, and teachers develop their own media literacy.

KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

www.kff.org

Provides reports and research on children and families' media use and more.

KIDS HEALTH

www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive

Helpful information on media literacy and health.

MAYO CLINIC

www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness/FL00030

Suggestions about fitness for kids: getting them off the couch.

Media Education Foundation

www.mediaed.org

Produces high quality media literacy films for educational purposes.

MEDIA LITERACY FOR YOU

www.Medialit4U.com

Group of educators presenting workshops on media literacy. Provides helpful information for parents, teachers, and youth.

PBS PARENTS WEBSITE

www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news

www.pbs.org/parents/childrenandmedia/resources.html

Helps parents understand, deal with, and talk to their children about the entertainment and news media they see.

SO SEXY SO SOON

www.sosexysosoon.com/blog

Information on how to deal with the impact of media and marketing on young children through adolescents' gender, social, emotional and sexual development.

POSITIVE GENDER ROLE MODELS

www.Pinkstinks.co.uk

An organization promoting positive gender roles for girls.

