

Parent Perspectives on Their Young Child's Television Viewing

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Background:

Recognizing the risks to children posed by television, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television viewing for children under the age of 2 and recommends limiting television to 1-2 hours of quality educational programming for children older than 2 years of age. Despite ample evidence of the harmful effects of television, few studies have analyzed how parents of young children use television in their daily lives, what they believe about it and what would be challenging for them about reducing television.

Purpose:

This thesis is part of a pilot study conducted in preparation for an experimental study which will attempt to reduce television viewing by 50% in a sample of children and will compare them with age matched controls. The purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding of parent's use of and beliefs about children's television viewing and challenges to reducing their child's television viewing.

Methods:

This analysis is part of a larger randomized control trial in which 90 participants were assigned to one of two intervention groups or the control group. This thesis utilized descriptive qualitative methods to analyze thirty in-depth baseline interviews and eighty brief telephone exit interviews, both of which were conducted using a guided questionnaire with open-ended questions. Interview responses were coded for significant themes and response frequencies were also computed.

Results:

Over 90 % of parents interviewed felt that television had negative implications for their children, yet 86% of parents expressed a need for television to occupy their child either to accomplish a task or to ease the child through daily transitions. Parents cited lack of energy, conflict with the child and not knowing good alternatives to TV as the major challenges to television reduction.

Conclusions:

Parents' beliefs about television may be less important in determining the amount of television a child watches than the amount of stress a parent feels and their perceived need to use the television as a tool to help them cope with the challenges of raising young children.

Thesis Committee:

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