

## Television and Attention Problems<sup>1</sup>

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*Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.*



Credits: Ryan McVay

Many parents at one time or another have put a young child in front of a television for a few minutes of household peace. Making a routine of this, however, may create long-term problems. Previous research has linked children's television watching to obesity and lower academic achievement, yet recent studies reveal that the number of very young children exposed to television is quite high. What makes this alarming is that a child's brain is developing very rapidly during the first few years of life.

The ability to mentally focus, attend, and sustain concentration over a period of time is also developed in early childhood. Extensive television viewing may hinder early brain development.

The Child Health Institute Study found that the number of television hours watched each day by children at the ages of 1 and 3 years old is associated with attention deficiencies at age 7. Further disturbing findings also revealed that each hour of television watched per day increases the risk of attention problems, such as ADHD at age 7 by almost 10%. The problems exhibited included "difficulty concentrating, restlessness, impulsiveness and being confused easily."

The study does not show television viewing actually causes attention deficits, but that an association between television and attention problems does exist. There may also be certain characteristics of parents whose children watch excessive amounts of TV that might have an influence on the connection between early television viewing and inattention.

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Parents are advised to limit their young child's television viewing. We need to remember that the viewing habits of toddlers and preschoolers will likely become their viewing habits as adults, so researchers recommend the temptation to fill leisure moments with TV should be avoided. Instead, provide physical play along with mental challenges -- perhaps a puzzle instead of a video game. A leisurely stroll around the block will open up a more exciting world for a toddler than any television set ever could!

Listening, learning and living together, it's the science of life. "Family Album" is a co-production of the University of Florida IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and of WUFT-FM. If you'd like to learn more, please visit our website at <http://familyalbumradio.com>.

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## References

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