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# What Do Babies Learn From TV?

*A young mother finds that when she puts her baby in front of the TV, he seems content and the mother is able to get much more housework done. Is this a good way to occupy a baby?*

## BABIES AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

When a child imitates a behavior, it means he or she has learned something new. Researchers have found that babies at 6 months can retain information from TV, but older infants need repetition. This means that the content of what is watched does matter, especially for younger babies, because infants who are only 6 months old can retain information from TV easier than older babies. Keeping the TV on in the background while your child plays can actually be worse than letting your child watch 30 minutes of a TV show because the distraction makes it harder for them to focus and they have a harder time picking up conversations, which in turn makes it harder to learn words and language skills. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says that these early years are crucial in a child's development. The AAP is concerned about the impact of television programming intended for children younger than age two and how it could affect children's development. They say children under 2 should not watch any TV. Pediatricians strongly oppose programming targeted at toddlers, especially when it's used to market toys, games, dolls, unhealthy food and other products. Any positive effect of television on infants and toddlers is still open to question, but the benefits of parent-child interactions are proven. Watching TV can take away from face-to-face interactions that are crucial to building brain connections.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

1. Content really matters, so be sure to monitor the television shows your baby is watching. If you are going to allow your baby to watch TV, try to choose programming that is age appropriate, educational, and interactional. Examples of this include Blue's Clues and Dora the Explorer, because these programs elicit participation and facilitate language development.
2. Watch TV with your baby. It adds depth and value to the show because it's a way to spend time together and if you interact with the TV, they may learn to as well.
3. It is also important to monitor the amount of TV your baby watches. Remember that moderation is the key. The AAP doesn't recommend any TV for children under 2 years, and no more than 1-2 hours a day for children older than 2.
4. Background noise can be damaging to a baby, so make sure you turn the TV off when your baby is playing alone or interacting with others.
5. Think about what the TV shows are replacing. Face-to-face interactions are so important to babies this age. Don't let TV time take away from time they could be using to develop their most basic and important skills, such as problem solving, using and understanding language, and learning how to interact with others.

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