

***BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR
LUTHERAN SCHOOL
PRESENTS:
PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC***
Special Thoughts on Raising Kids

TV and “Mush Brain”

Every new media study seems to bring on increased parental anxiety. The headlines are alarming: “Average child watches five hours of TV a day.” “Experts claim television is the dominant influence on American kids.”

We read the reports, cast a wary eye toward the family room where our kids are imitating potted plants in front of the tube, and we shake our heads in dismay. “Those kids,” we say, “watch too much TV. They are going to suffer from Mush Brain.”

We are forever devising strategies to curtail our kids’ TV habits. But with television watching, as with many other issues, our modeling is the key. It’s pretty hard for a major league couch potato to come down hard on his or her child’s TV habits.

To influence our kids’ TV habits, we must emphasize the alternatives - playing up the good things about friends, family, hobbies, sports, etc. Consider the following discussion between a dad and his TV-watching son.

Dad: “I’ve noticed you’re watching a lot of TV lately. You like it don’t you?”

Bill: “Yeah. I like it a lot.”

Dad: “The good thing about TV is that you can learn a lot. You can find out what’s happening in the world. It helps your vocabulary and you can learn about grown-ups. But one thing I’m wondering about is how much you think you learn about being a good friend. Are you a good friend to your TV set?”

Bill: “I don’t know what you mean.”

Dad: “The TV doesn’t listen much to you, does it? It just talks at you. It doesn’t care about what you say, right?”

Bill: “Uh . . .right.”

Dad: “So, one thing about a TV set is it doesn’t help you be a good friend to anyone. Does it ever pay attention to what you say? Does it ever listen to you?”

Bill: “No.”

Dad: “What I think about TV is, it doesn’t give a darn about you. That’s the problem with the TV. However, your friends and I listen to you. But the TV doesn’t really care what you think. I think if you watch a lot of TV you can be really smart about many things. But I don’t know if you’ll ever be able to prove it because you don’t learn how to talk by watching TV. You might be happier, in the long run, if you watch less. But whose decision is it?”

Bill: “Mine.”

Dad: “Yes, it really is. Hey, let me feel your brain. It doesn’t feel too soft. I guess Mush Brain hasn’t set in-yet!”

It’s best not to set ourselves up for a control battle over TV watching with commands and threats. Harping at our kids constantly, or imposing severe cuts in their viewing habits, often leads to rebellion.

What we can do, however, is influence our kids. And a generous dose of humor does wonders. It is also helpful to remember that very few youngsters would rather watch TV than do something fun with their parents. Many experts advise us to either watch TV with our children so we can have some control, interpret for children what they see, or invite our children to do something with us instead.

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