

Kids and TV watching wisely

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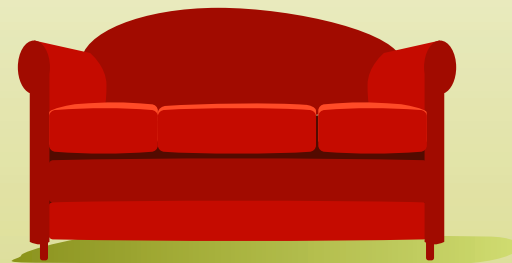
Design & Illustration

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Television: Yes or No

Turn off the TV, my dad said.
Go outside and live your life.
So I did and at night I came back
With a bee on my knee
A mouse in my blouse
Glue on my shoe
Chalk on my chin
Grasshoppers in my ragged pockets
Flees in my sleeves
Ants in my pants
A lion in my hands
And behind me
A bear pulling my hair
Don't go outside anymore, my dad said,
Turn on the TV.

Luísa Ducla Soares



(Re)Acting

Television broadcasting is regulated by a set of norms of public interest. Here are some references to the European context:

- European Convention on Cross Border Television, approved on May 11, 2001.
- Directive on Social and Audiovisual Communication Services—Directive 2207/65/CS of the European Parliament and the Council of December 11, 2007.
- Recommendation of the European Council on the development of competitiveness of the European audio-visual and information services industry through the promotion of national frameworks that protect minors and human dignity, 98/560/CE, formally adopted on September 24, 1998..

Citizens have the right and duty to respond to situations that generate either disagreement or approval. In each country there are several organizations that citizens can address to make themselves heard, for instance, the media regulatory authorities, the viewers' associations, the television ombudsmen.



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Presentation

Despite many changes in the media panorama, television continues to assume a significant presence in children's daily lives.

TV is a means of communication that plays an important role in children's socialization processes. It represents a privileged source of learning and contact with the world. The amount of time young people devote to TV and other forms of communication frequently gives rise to concern among parents, teachers, and educators, who don't always hold the necessary tools to analyze and understand this reality and act upon it. It is often feared that TV may have an ominous influence on children due to the inappropriate nature and poor quality of many of its programmes. This booklet aims to briefly approach some essential issues

concerning the relationship children have with television and point out some hints for action.

It was created as part of a project of Media Education and presented to the Evens Foundation in Belgium by researchers of the Communication and Society Research Centre. The project was awarded in 2009 by the Evens Foundation with the sixth prize for Intercultural Education in the field of Media Education.

This publication integrates a collection which that intends to provide proactive information to parents to help them promote a more active and critical use of the media by young people.

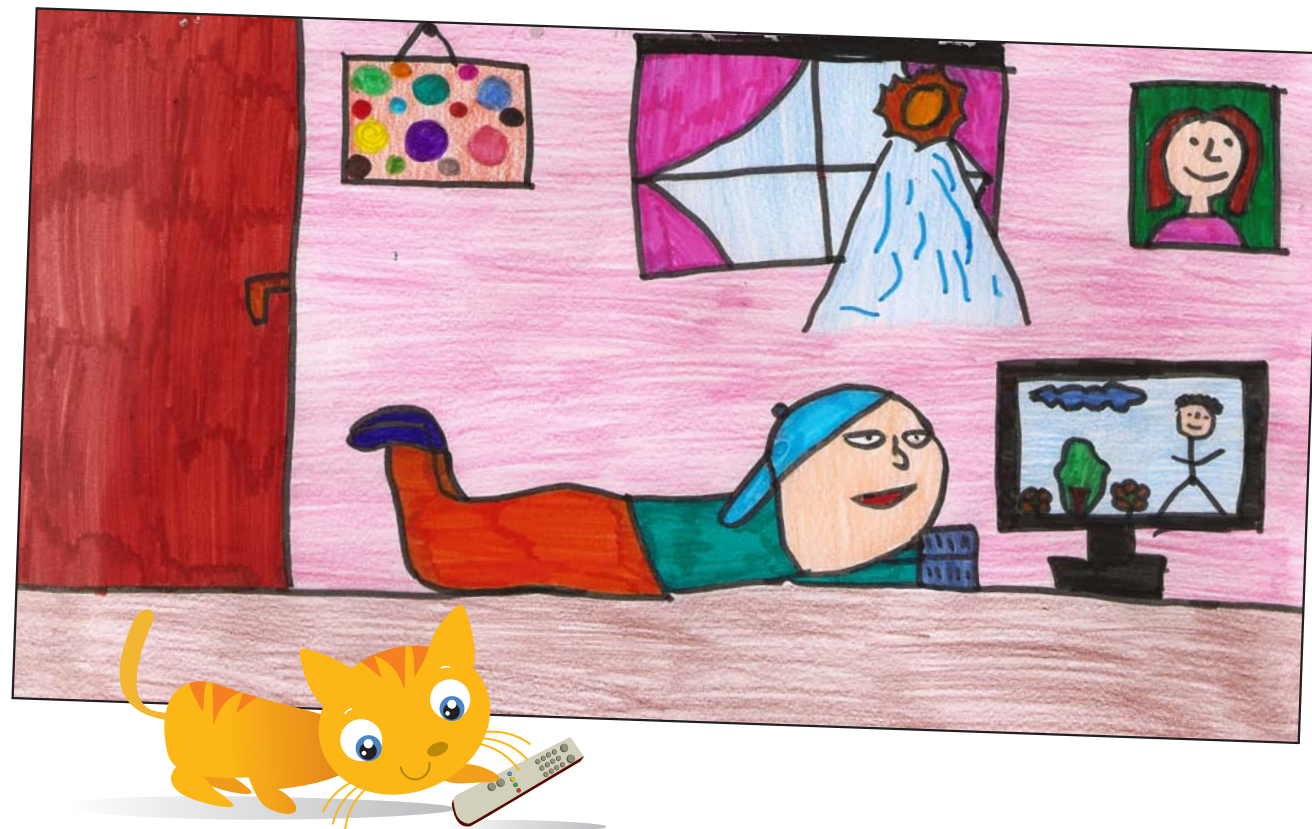
TV Consumption

According to audience ratings, Portuguese children watch an average of three hours of television a day. Considering the time they also spend online, playing video games, or using mobile phones, we can easily conclude that a considerable amount of children's time is spent using these means of communication.

Faced with such data, many parents ask themselves what they should do—whether they should interfere, regulate, or even forbid the use of such media by their children.

Prohibition may not be the best solution. It is far better to accept the presence of media in children's lives and prepare them to use them critically.

Hindering the contact of young people with the media or shutting off that world to them would also mean deprivation of a considerable amount of information relevant to children's individual and social development. There are certainly risks, but they can be attenuated and even controlled. If that is done, the risks will be less than those caused by prohibition.



Using TV Critically

– Or How to Make the Most of Children's Relationship with TV

1. Parents should talk to children about what they watch, listening to their doubts and worries. Programmes should be explained to children in a way they can actually understand. The presence of an adult is crucial because it can positively influence children's TV experiences. Nevertheless, that might not be possible at all times. On the other hand, a nice chat can happen at any time. Here are some hints on what parents should talk about:

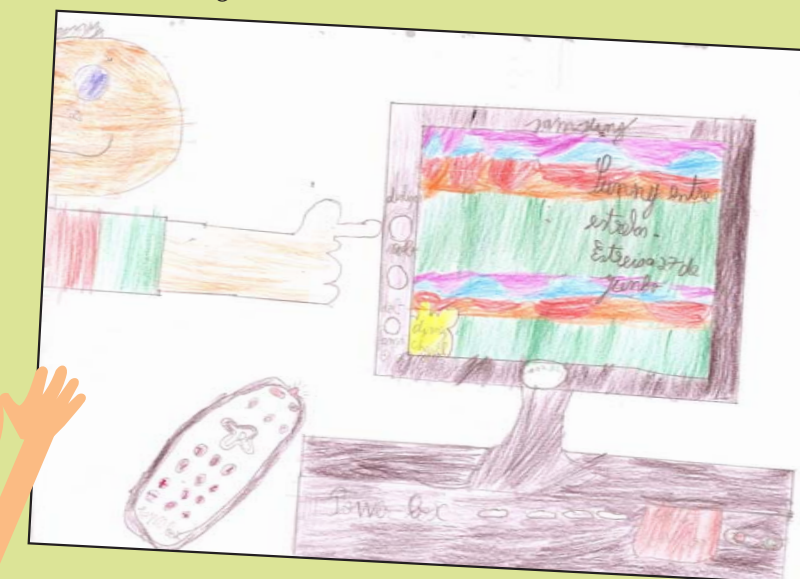
- the difference between reality and fiction, factual and fictional contents;
- the behaviour and attitudes of the characters, how they interact and solve their problems;
- advertising, its purpose, and the way it presents products: compare some products such as toys with the features that are advertised in their commercials;
- children's favourite programmes: understand the types of programmes they enjoy most and whether they are suitable for young viewers or adult audiences;
- TV heroes, their physical and psychological profiles, and the way children identify with them.

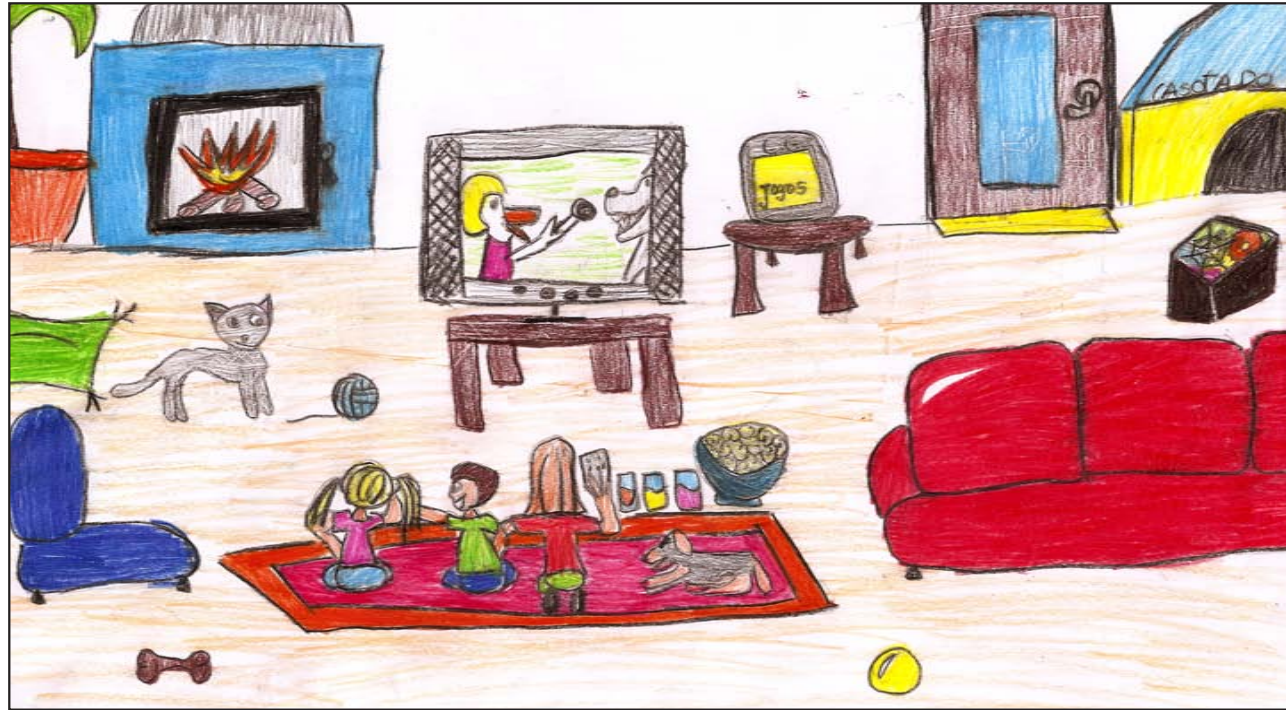
2. Parents should plan the programmes that children are going to watch, creating a weekly timetable for the family together with the children. This will help to create healthy habits in terms of TV viewing. It allows the family members to become aware of the amount of time they are going to spend with this activity. It may also be an effective means of establishing boundaries in terms of the quantity and quality of time spent watching TV. On weekdays and during school time, it is especially important to teach children to go to bed early.

3. Parents should encourage children to watch quality television. TV programmes can and should stimulate curiosity, critical thinking, open-mindedness, and knowledge about different cultures and realities. It

should encourage children to expand their horizons.

4. Parents should tackle controversial issues, seizing the opportunity to learn more about young people's (especially teenagers') opinions and personal points of view on topics like sex and drugs.





TV in the Family

Family context strongly influences what young people watch and the way they watch it. Children share their family's TV style. Don't parents worry about their children's health and diet? Don't they want to know if they cross the street carefully? Shouldn't they also worry about the amount of time their kids spend staring at the small screen?

Talking about TV programmes with children, discussing the situations these programmes depict, and helping children distinguish reality from fantasy are more important than

simply issuing restrictions. Parents have the responsibility to mediate the relationship between young audiences and the TV world.

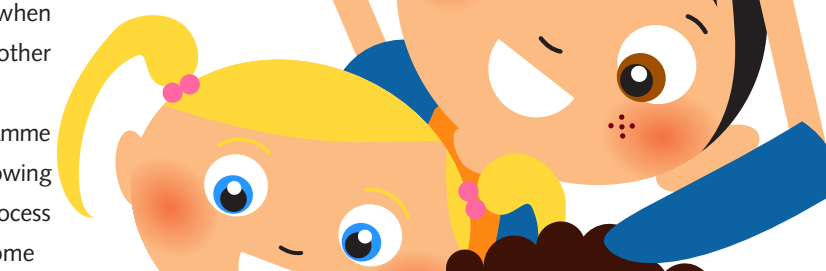
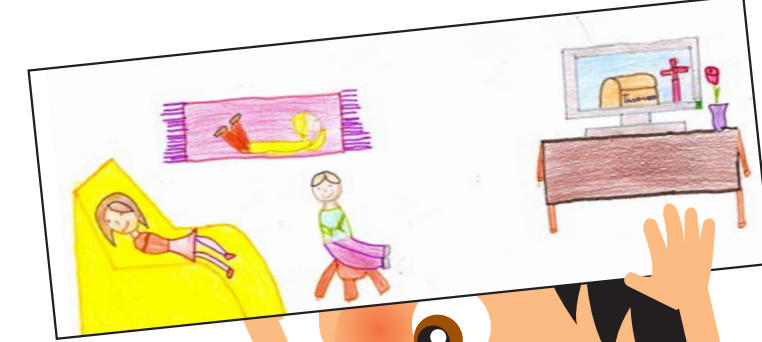


Avoid Non-selective Viewing

The most important factor is to teach children about appropriate consumption. In other words, it is crucial to avoid non-selective viewing. Parents and caregivers should encourage children to watch the programmes that are age appropriate and that they really enjoy. Children should be taught to turn off the TV when it is not truly capturing their attention or when there are other things to be done.

Keeping the TV set on may create addiction. Even if a programme does not interest them, children may become used to following it. Parental intervention is imperative at this stage. The process of disconnecting from what is being broadcast may become more difficult afterwards.

It is important for parents to be aware of children's TV habits and schedules, including the time they spend watching and the programmes they actually watch.



📺 Learning How to Watch TV

Watching TV can be an interesting and amusing activity from which children can learn a lot, but it is essential that they are taught how to manage their time effectively and to dedicate themselves to other activities as well. For example, instead of spending three hours watching TV, they can use that time to interact with others, play games, ride their bicycles, go for a walk, or read a book.

It is also possible to diversify TV consumption in terms of choice of programming. Simply changing the channel is sometimes all it takes. It is in adults' hands to help children choose diversity by seeking other activities or different types of programmes.

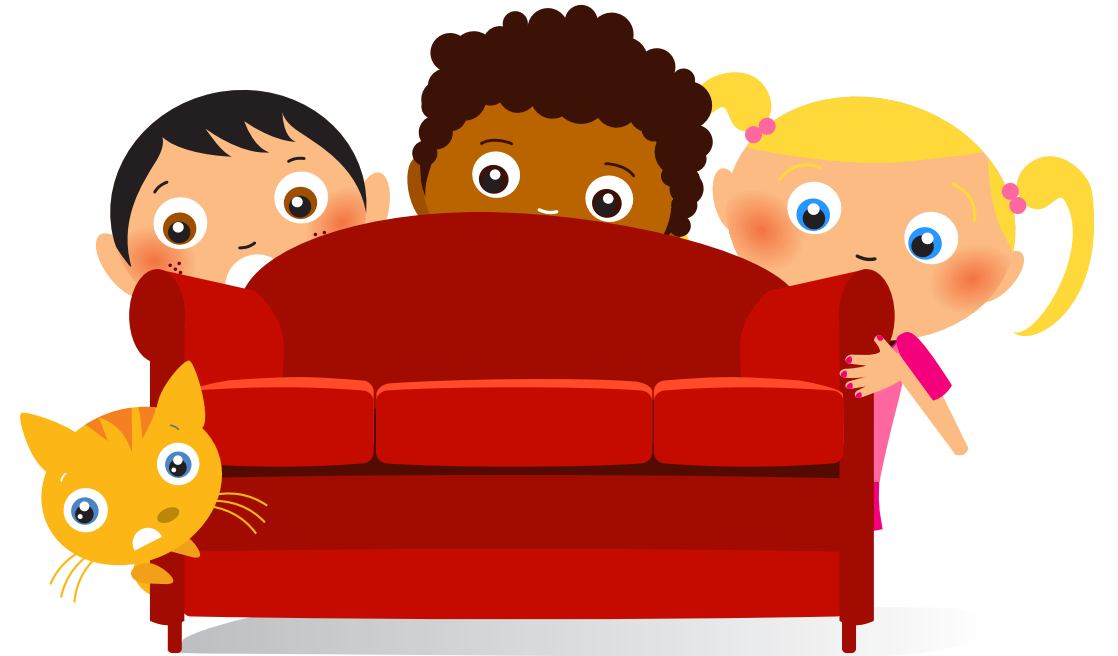
How often do parents give their children real alternatives to television? How often do they challenge young people to do other activities such as jogging, going out for a picnic, telling a story, doing a puzzle, or simply playing? Children frequently choose to watch TV not because it is extremely interesting to them, but rather because of its easy access. All it takes is to press a button and the whole world comes to them.

"TV takes our kids across the globe before parents give them permission to cross the street," said Joshua Meyrowitz, a North American researcher.



📺 Hiding Violence or Explaining It?

The effects of violent scenes on young audiences are not automatic. They depend on a wide set of factors. Many fictional programmes with violent content are not advisable for younger ages. Therefore, this can be a key reason to forbid viewing. On the other hand, informative programmes often show scenes of real-life violence. Preventing children from getting to know the world they live in is not the most logical approach. Parents should focus on discussing and explaining the content of the news, filtering some of the information and protecting children from watching images that might provoke fear, apprehension, or anxiety.



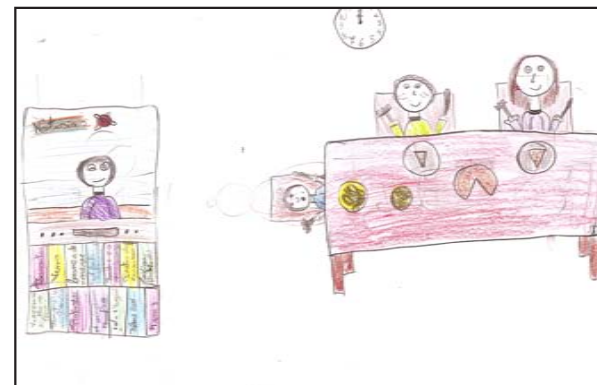


The Importance of Life Contexts

Various studies, aiming to isolate specific effects of TV, indicate that there is no direct relation between violent scenes and children's behaviour. Moreover, watching violent scenes on TV does not have the same impact on everybody. Nevertheless, being systematically exposed to violence on the screen may trivialize and legitimize everyday violence.

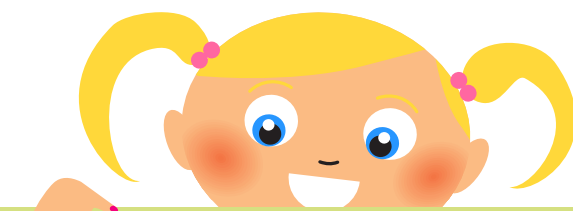
Children who live in violent environments, who are treated aggressively or who are used to solving their personal and family problems using violence, may get used to the idea that both people around them and TV heroes manage their problems through violence. Because they have not learned

otherwise, these children may have a greater tendency to exhibit violent behaviour than children who also watch violent TV programmes but who live in households where problems are solved through dialogue.

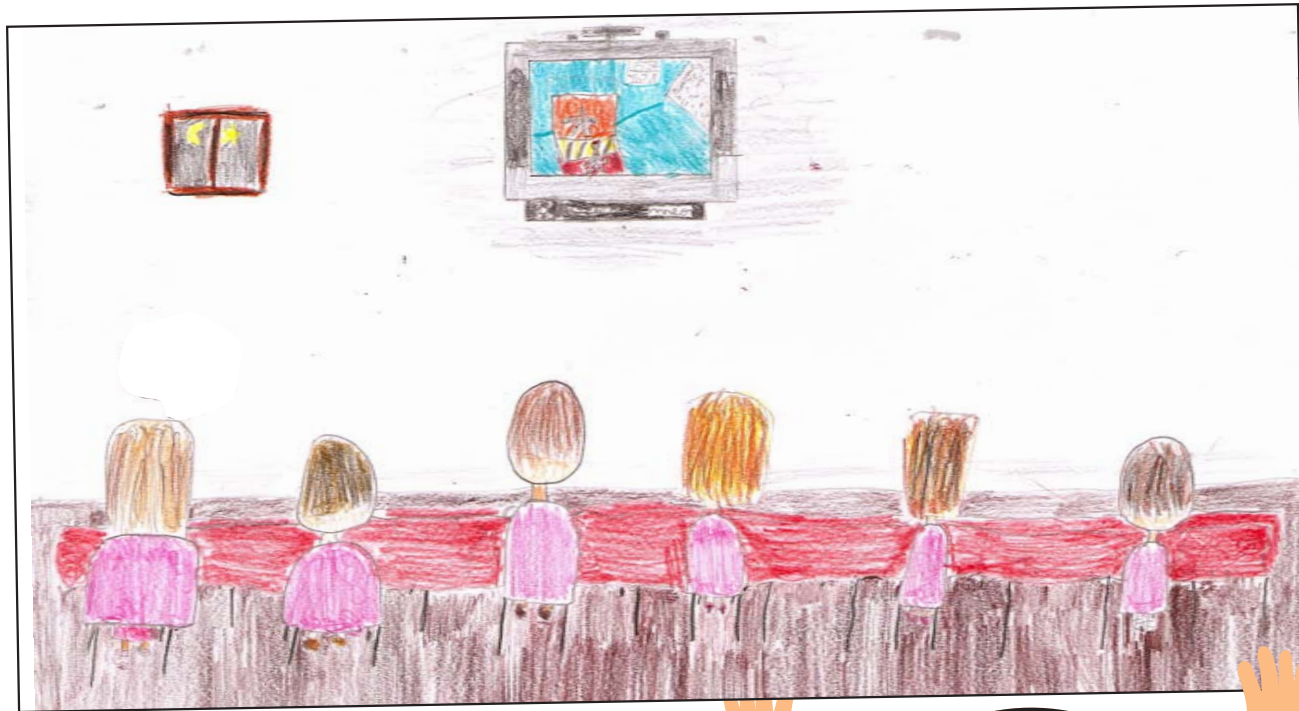


It is important to teach children that some activities deserve specific attention. As they are doing their homework or studying, for example, they ought to be focused, so the TV set should be off. When the homework is done, watching TV will certainly be a lot more pleasurable.

In some households, TV at mealtime is sometimes a cause of arguments, conflicts, and silence. Mealtime can be a good opportunity to talk about what has happened during the day, so that each family member realizes what is going on in their loved ones' lives. TV is not always good company, as it usually hinders dialogue. If the TV set is loud and inconvenient, if it speaks more or louder than any other member, it is up to the family to decide whether it should be turned off or not.



Yes or no to TV sets in children's bedrooms? There are more disadvantages than advantages. It generally causes more isolation from the rest of the family. Moreover, children will tend to watch TV alone, without someone to talk to or exchange opinions with about what is on. They will also watch what they want, when they want to, and it will become more difficult for parents to make sure that their children actually turn off the TV to get a good night's sleep.



📺 Children's Well-Being

Children may resent the fact that their parents do not allow them to watch the programmes that their classmates watch. It is up to the parents to assess the situation and stick to their decision if the time the programme is on is not suitable for young audiences, if the contents are not age appropriate (if they might cause fear), or if they convey values that do not go with those of the family.

If this is the case, it is crucial to explain the reasons for the decision, so that children understand that it was taken in their best interest.



TV should not be used as a value in itself, which means that it should be used neither as a reward nor as punishment. This avoids making it into a protagonist in the household. TV is not a good babysitter. Therefore, it should not be used as such.

📺 Violence on the Screen

Of all the negative effects attributed to TV, violence is the most controversial and the one that gives rise to the most concerns among parents, educators, and citizens in general. Violence is a complex issue. Despite the amount of research on the subject, there are multiple variables at stake, so it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions.

Physical actions are not the only factor to be taken into account. Verbal, psychological, and ethnic violence are just as relevant in terms of their effect on the viewers. Programmes with violent content do not affect every child

in the same way. There are several factors that interfere with the way that children receive and integrate television contents, such as age, the developmental stage of the child, cognitive maturity, life contexts, and the possibility to comment on or talk about what they see or what frightens or upsets them.

Therefore, keeping the well-being of children in mind and using good sense are especially advisable. It is impossible and even harmful to hide all types of violence from children, but everything has its limits.

