

Using television in child care

by Angela Owens

While some current research and opinions suggest that watching TV may not be beneficial for them, for many children it is an inevitable part of their daily lives. There are many ways that child care professionals can consider using TV to enhance children's learning and experiences in the child care program. This may also be helpful in supporting children to develop positive and responsible TV watching habits. However, it is crucial that any use of TV in child care be thoroughly researched and planned to eliminate potential risks to children's health and wellbeing. Services must also ensure that their policies and procedures for the use of TV are developed in consultation with families, and are communicated effectively to all families using the service.

The benefits of TV

Viewing age appropriate TV programs and videos can extend children's experiences and increase their understanding of the world. An advantage of viewing TV is that there is a huge range of programs available that have been produced specifically to educate and inform children. The appropriate use of TV in child care can promote positive outcomes for children by:

- supporting and extending individual children's interests
- enhancing the development of language, literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills
- providing them with new information or perspectives about the world
- encouraging physical movement and development through activity based programs such as yoga or dance programs
- increasing their attention span and ability to focus
- providing them with time to relax and be entertained.

Using TV effectively in child care relies on the quality of the programs that are chosen for viewing and on the efficiency of the procedures implemented to ensure TV is used in ways that support children's overall health, development and wellbeing.

This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles: 1.2, 1.3, 3.1 - 3.7 and 5.4

OSHCQA Principles: 3.1, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1 - 5.4 and 7.3

QIAS Principles: 2.1, 2.2, 4.1 - 4.6 and 5.5

The negative effects of TV

Where TV viewing is not carefully monitored and planned for, there are a range of issues that can have a harmful impact upon children. One of the biggest concerns related to children watching TV, especially younger children, is how they understand and react to what they see. Viewing inappropriate TV programs can cause children to feel fear, become excessively worried about the world and to act out the negative things they have seen (Sutherland, 2004). Other detrimental issues associated with the improper use of TV include:

- reducing children's participation in active learning and in experiences such as reading, playing and talking with others
- children being sedentary, which can be linked to childhood obesity and poor health outcomes later in life
- increased exposure to advertising
- health issues such as lower back pain and eyesight problems associated with poor ergonomic practices when viewing TV.

Using TV positively

To maximise the benefits of using TV in child care, it is essential that child care professionals carefully investigate and monitor what children are watching. This requires more than just checking the rating of the program being viewed, although this is an important start. It is recommended that child care professionals read reviews of the programs that they are planning to screen for children, and to access any supporting literature or teaching notes that are available for the program. Wherever possible, it is a good idea for child care professionals to view the program prior to it being screened. For TV shows this may be done by viewing the episode prior to screening for children. This will assist child care professionals to assess the appropriateness of the program and will also give them an opportunity to plan how

to link the program content to children's interests and other learning experiences.

Working collaboratively with families

When considering the use of TV in child care it is crucial that child care professionals consult families closely, and that communication is honest and ongoing. Some families may feel that TV is not appropriate for their child to view at child care (or at all), while others may be keen for their child to engage in some TV focused learning activities at the service. To ensure that families' perspectives are taken into account in the development and implementation of TV viewing policies and procedures, services may consider the following strategies:

- talk with new families about the service's TV policy and procedures, and seek their input about how they feel about their child watching TV in the service
- include the service's TV policy and procedure in the family handbook and/or in other written information that is provided to families such as newsletters
- be proactive in informing families about what children are watching at child care, and how this is linked to other learning experiences in the program. This information may be conveyed through the service newsletter or on a noticeboard.
- survey families about their children's TV viewing habits at home
- provide families with tips and ideas for making their child's TV viewing experiences at home positive
- regularly review the service's TV viewing policies and procedures to make sure that these reflect the needs and expectations of families currently using the service.

Child care professionals should be prepared for some families to not want their child to watch TV at child care. In services where the majority of families feel this way, it may be best to avoid the use of TV in the program altogether. When there are some families who prefer that their child not watch TV, the service needs to make sure that

Key strategies for positive outcomes for children:

- develop a policy for the use of TV in the service which includes clear guidelines for implementing the policy. It is essential that all families have opportunities to be involved in the development and review of the service's TV policy. Older children may also be able to participate in developing TV viewing guidelines.
- always ensure that at least one child care professional watches the TV with children to monitor the program content and children's understanding of, and reactions to, what they are viewing
- make sure that there are alternative experiences available for children who choose not to watch TV, or whose families don't want them to watch TV
- research what is best ergonomic practice in relation to viewing television and develop procedures that reflect these recommendations
- talk with the children about what they have seen on TV, and link this to real life activities and experiences
- keep up to date with current thinking and research about children watching TV.

there is an alternative, properly supervised area away from the TV viewing area where children can engage in other activities.

When properly planned and implemented, the use of TV in child care can lead to positive outcomes for children. However, to ensure that individual child and family needs are met, there should be a strong emphasis placed on meaningful collaboration and communication with families about TV viewing policies and procedures. This should also be underpinned by a focus on how TV will be used to complement children's learning and development ■

References and further reading

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