What to Think About When Choosing TV Shows for Your Child

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under 2 years old should not watch any television and that children over 2 years old limit TV viewing to 1-2 hours of quality television per day. The problem is that it's often hard to figure out what is high quality television and what is not. Consider the following tips as you make your own decisions about your child's television viewing.

Content matters. choose programs that are age appropriate and interactive (blues clues and dora are good examples, as is sesame street). It's better to watch a program that provides learning experiences through a TV shows that simply tell kids information. In other words, forget those TV shows that teach the ABC's and 123's by having children memorize. Instead, choose programs where the ABC's and 123's are in the story.

Co-viewing. With the exception of those moments when you just need a break, TV viewing is better when it's done with a parent or caregiver. You can feel good about watching tv together in the morning as you cuddle in bed! In fact, you can enrich your child's experience by answering questions, expanding on observations they make and tying what they see on TV with something that has occurred in their daily life. This makes a high quality show even more enhanced.

It is important to limit the total TV exposure time (including background television). You have likely noticed that when your child watches TV for longer than 30-60 minutes, they suffer tantrums and meltdowns. Try to get a sense of how long your child can handle TV viewing so you know when it's best to shut it off.

Finally, try to listen to the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics and wait to introduce television until your child is 2 years old. Of course, on busy days, if you can't think of alternatives or you are stuck, don't beat yourself up over it. Just make certain you remember that even high quality TV does not have an educational or developmental benefit.