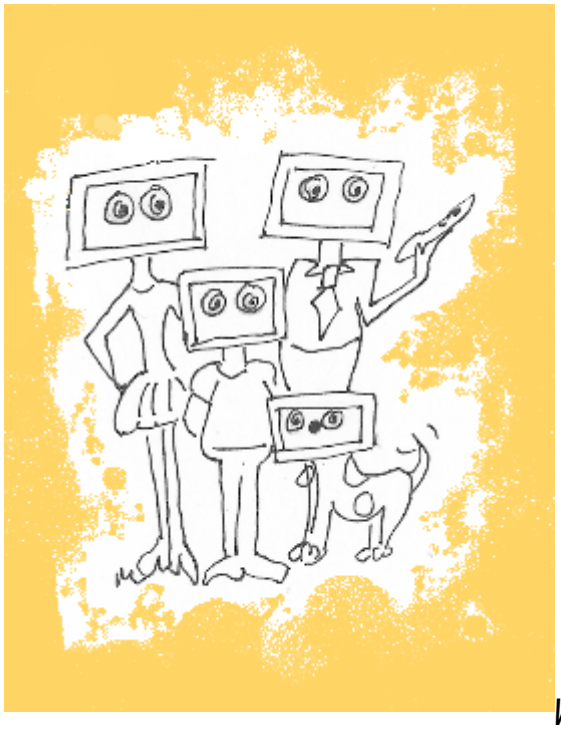
# Avoid TV Heads: how to place limits on your kids' screen time



*Wondering how to place limits on your kids' screen time? We know that winter break often finds kids spending more time in front of screens: watching TV, playing video games, or surfing the internet. Today we post our suggestions to help limit screen time in your home.*
*Drs. Kardos and Lai*

"Mom, can we do screen?"

My kids ask me this question when they are bored. Never mind the basement full of toys and games, the outdoor sports equipment, or the numerous books on our shelves. They'd watch any screen whether television, hand-held video game, or computer for hours if I let them. But I notice that on days I give in, my children bicker more and engage in less creative play than on days that I don't allow some screen time.

Babies who watch television develop language slower than their

screen-free counterparts (despite what the makers of "educational videos" claim) and children who log in more screen time are prone to obesity, insomnia, and behavior difficulties. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours of television watching a day for kids over the age of two years, and NO television for those younger than two.

Over the years, parents have given me tips on how they limit screen time in their homes. Here are some ideas for cutting back:

- Have children who play a musical instrument earn screen time by practicing music. Have children who play a sport earn screen time by practicing their sport.
- Set a predetermined time limit on screen time, such as 30 minutes or one hour per day. If your child chooses, she can skip a day to accumulate and "save" for a longer movie or longer video game.
- Take the TV, personal computer, and video games out of your children's bedrooms. Be a good role model by taking them out of your own bedroom as well.
- Turn off the TV as background noise. Turn on music instead.
- Have books available to read in relaxing places in the house (near couches, beds, etc.). When kids flop on the couch they will pick up a book to relax instead of reaching for the remote control.
- Give kids a weekly "TV/screen allowance" with parameters such as no screen before homework is done, no screen right before bed, etc. Let the kids decide how to "spend" their allowance.

Not that I am averse to "family movie night," and I understand the value of plunking an ill child in front of a video in

order to take his mind off his ailment. In fact, Dr. Lai lives in a house with three iPod Touches, two iPhones, a Nintendo DS and three computers. But I do find it frightening to watch my otherwise very animated children lose all facial expression as they tune in to a video.

For more information about how screen time affects children, see the American Academy of Pediatrics web site (www.aap.org) and put in “television” in the search box.

Let us know how you dissuade your children from the allure of the screen.

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