

Technology and Television for Babies and Toddlers

Natalie Arthur

One might wonder why ALSC's Children and Technology Committee would write an article advocating for the needs of children under the age of two to avoid screen time. However, by looking at the facts presented by a variety of research, one can learn that television viewing leads to obesity in children and has been linked to Attention Deficit Disorder later in life.¹ In addition, studies have shown that children's food preferences are highly influenced by the commercials they view, which tend to be those marketing sugary cereals and snack foods.²

So what do we, as librarians, do when these parents request movies and computer games for their infants and toddlers? One idea is to offer alternative entertainment sources, such as age-appropriate toys, finger plays, and board books. The Johnson County (Ind.) Public Library system offers early literacy kits that are geared by age group to children from birth through age 5. The kits include books, CDs, toys, puzzles, and activity ideas, as well as information on how each kit can be linked to one of the six early literacy skills as recognized by ALA and ALSC.

In addition, having a list of baby-appropriate technology—such as toys that jingle, light up, and interact with babies on the basis of movement or pushing a button—may offer parents a way to

introduce their baby to technology without overstimulating the baby's brain. Offering storytimes for babies and toddlers will help parents see how reading can be a fun activity to share with their little ones. Librarians can model age-appropriate ways to share books with babies, and parents can interact with one another and see other children the same age as their own to find out how they interact similarly to and differently from their own child.

As children's librarians, we've all spoken with a patron requesting DVDs or books to help a baby learn to read. After all, turn on your television these days and you are likely to see a commercial advertising *Your Baby Can Read*, a "remarkable learning system" claiming that it can teach your infant to read even before their first birthday.³ Many libraries carry "educational" DVDs such as the Baby Bumble Bee series and Baby Einstein series, though refunds have been offered by Disney, this series' manufacturer, to dissatisfied parents, after removing wording from the packaging claiming that DVDs were, in fact, educational.⁴

In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a statement in 1999 urging parents to eliminate all screen time for children under the age of two.⁵ This includes television,



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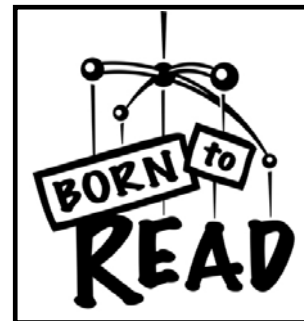
computers, and the all-too-common iPhone applications specifically marketed towards babies and toddlers. But with the wide availability of television programming specifically for the toddler crowd, not to mention the *Your Baby Can Read* phenomenon, parents are likely receiving mixed messages. Combine these with the ease of allowing one's child to watch television while a parent or caregiver completes a quick chore, and it seems likely that most babies are going to be getting some screen time—certainly more than that advocated by the AAP.

One important step librarians can take is to share with parents the AAP recommendations. As children's librarians, it is our job to advocate for the needs of children, and clearly watching television or a computer screen is in no child's best

interest. And, for those parents who feel that this is a current hot topic and not one that is likely to last, direct them to a 1979 article by Sydney Burton, James Calonico, and Dennis McSeveney, which many still find valid today. The authors state, "The more TV preschoolers watch, the less well they do academically in the first grade; also, the more TV preschoolers watch, the less well-socialized they are in the first grade."⁶ ↵

References

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2. Dimitri A. Christakis et al., "Early Television Exposure and Subsequent Attentional Problems in Children," *Pediatrics* 113, no. 4 (Apr. 2004): 708–13.
3. Your Baby Can Read website, www.yourbabycanread.com (accessed Mar. 25, 2010).
4. David Kerley, "Baby Einstein Refunds," *Good Morning America*, ABC (Oct. 25, 2009).
5. American Academy of Pediatrics, "Policy Statement," *Pediatrics* 104, no. 2 (Aug. 1999): 341–43.
6. Sydney Burton, James Calonico, and Dennis McSeveney, "Effects of Preschool Television Watching on First-Grade Children," *Journal of Communication* 29, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 164–70.



Born to Read It's Never Too Early to Start!

Organize a Born to Read program at your library by working with parents and babies to read, share, talk and play. ALSC's Born to Read brochure and website (www.ala.org/btr) feature recommended book lists for parents and babies.

The Born to Read brochure and merchandise are available on the ALA Store website at: www.alastore.ala.org

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