

THE FAMILY AND TV

Television may be a source of education and information but obsession with it leaves an adverse impact. Then it results not only in loss of time but also of the warmth of interpersonal relationships. But there are ways to prevent these. By Meera Ravi

While reading a book, I came across a title, "Happy, Healthy Families Don't Just Happen." How true. One must have time to build family relationships. It will not happen on its own. Some of us wonder where we can find that time.

I feel that, if we can control the television time in a family, we can find time for many other things. The mesmerising effect of sitting through one show after another can make valuable time pass too quickly. Adults, as well as children, need the warmth of interpersonal relationships.

No doubt television can be a window to the world, but we are closing many a door of human relations in the bargain. Television can be a source of education and information, but, at the same time, it is eating away into the strong bonding of today's families.

Research shows that television viewing accounts for more of a child's time than any other activity, except sleeping. Although it is hard to control the influence of television, it is mandatory for the development of healthy families.

LET'S FIRST LOOK AT THE EFFECTS OF TV VIEWING ON CHILDREN

Sight and hearing: While viewing the eyes are practically motionless and defocused in order to take in the whole screen. Constant movement is required for healthy eye development. Excessive TV viewing, one of the most passive visual activities, can seriously impair children's observational skills. Viewing affects not only eye mechanics, but also the ability to focus and pay attention.

Also, since TV is more visual than auditory, children's sense of hearing is not fully exercised. Active listening is a skill that needs to be developed. Moreover, when TV is constantly on, the sense of hearing may be dulled by the persistent background noise.

Social development: TV is not a substitute for meeting and interacting with real people and real situations. A child cannot develop a sense of self in the absence of contact with others. While viewing TV, a child is not gaining practice in relating to others. It is a serious hazard, as TV is instrumental in reducing the social interaction significantly.

Obesity: Elevated cholesterol and obesity are 2 prevalent nutritional diseases among children today. Consumption of junk food goes hand hand with TV viewing, coupled with the fact that exercise time is snatched away by TV viewing, resulting in obesity.

Sleep deprivation: Sleep is a physical necessity, required to build up the growing organism — but children stay up late watching TV, which affects their alertness during daytime. They may also get irritable. Sleep, being a prerequisite for dreaming, is a psychological necessity too. But after TV viewing, dreams may be disturbed with TV images resurfacing and causing nightmares.

Emotional behaviour: The amount of violence on TV is increasing. Viewing violent programmes can make children afraid, worried or suspicious and may increase tendencies toward aggressive behaviour.

Also, TV often portrays sexual behaviour and the use of alcohol or drugs in inviting terms, which is not healthy for emotional development.