

TV noise associated with fewer verbal interactions between infants and parents

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For every hour they spend in the presence of an audible television, parents speak fewer words and infants are less likely to make vocalizations in response, according to a report in the June issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

An increasing number of children are exposed to [television](#) during their early years, according to background information in the article. The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages television or video viewing before the age of 2, suggesting that [parents](#) focus on interactive play to foster child development. Critical developmental tasks occurring during this time period include language acquisition, which is promoted by interacting with adults.

To test the hypothesis that hearing a television is associated with decreased parent and child interactions, Dimitri A. Christakis, M.D., M.P.H., studied 329 two- to 48-month-old children. The infants wore digital devices on random days for up to 24 months that recorded everything they heard or said. The recordings were then analyzed by a program featuring speech-recognition technology, which categorized the sounds and counted adult words, vocalizations by the children and conversational turns, or interactions between adults and children.

Each additional hour of television exposure was associated with a decrease of 770 words (7 percent) the child heard from an adult during the recording session. Hours of television were also associated with a decrease in the number and length of child vocalizations and in the

number of conversational turns.

"Some of these reductions are likely due to children being left alone in front of the television screen, but others likely reflect situations in which adults, though present, are distracted by the screen and not interacting with their infant in a discernible manner. At first blush, these findings may seem entirely intuitive," the authors write. "However, these findings must be interpreted in light of the fact that purveyors of infant DVDs claim that their products are designed to give parents and children a chance to interact with one another, an assertion that lacks empirical evidence."

The results may help explain previously identified associations between television viewing and delayed language acquisition, the authors note. "Furthermore, our results highlight the need to conceptualize media exposure with consideration of more than just amount of exposure," they conclude. "Given the critical role that adult caregivers play in children's linguistic development, whether they talk to their child while the screen is on may be critical and explain the effects that are attributed to content or even amount of television watched. That is, whether parents talk less (or not at all) during some types of programs or at some times of the day may be as important in this age group as what is being watched."

More information: Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2009;163[6]:554-558.

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