

# Children under 3 can't learn action words from TV -- unless an adult helps

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American infants and toddlers watch TV an average of two hours a day, and much of the programming is billed as educational. A new study finds that children under age 3 learn less from these videos that we might think -- unless there's an adult present to interact with them and support their learning.

The study, by researchers at Temple University and the University of Delaware, can be found in the September/October 2009 issue of the journal [Child Development](#).

The researchers studied children who ranged in age from 30 to 42 months to explore whether they could learn the names of actions (verbs) from videos. The names of verbs are generally harder for children to learn than names of objects. Yet verb learning is critical because verbs are the centerpiece of sentences, the glue that holds the words together. Using modified clips from the program Sesame Beginnings, the researchers showed children a video of characters performing unfamiliar actions that were labeled with new words (for example, "Look, she's daxing"). In some instances, the children watched without adult support, while in others, they watched with an adult who demonstrated the action that later appeared on the screen. The researchers then measured the children's ability to learn a new verb and apply that word to a new scene.

Without adult support, children under age 3 could not learn the words directly from the program, nor could they understand them when they appeared in a different context within the video. When they watched

with an adult who reinforced what they were viewing, they could learn the words. In contrast, children over age 3 were able to learn the verbs from the video program and understand them later, even without an adult interacting with them.

"Learning verbs is difficult," suggests Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Lefkowitz Professor of Psychology at Temple University and one of the study's authors. "Young children need social support from adults to help them learn verbs from [television](#). Watching on their own is not as 'educational' as watching with an engaged adult."

The study's take-home message, according to Hirsh-Pasek: "Amid the plethora of videos in the marketplace aimed at children under 3, our findings caution against using videos to teach language to very young children."

More information: *Child Development*, Vol. 80, Issue 5, Live Action: Can Young [Children](#) Learn Verbs From Video? by Roseberry, S, Hirsh-Pasek, K, and Parish-Morris, J (Temple University), and Golinkoff, RM (University of Delaware).

Source: Society for Research in Child Development ([news](#) : [web](#))

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