

Kids mimic parents' TV viewing habits

15 July 2013, by Randy Dotinga, Healthday Reporter



Study found that the more Mom and Dad watch, the more children turn on the television themselves.

(HealthDay)—If you want your kids to spend less time parked in front of a television, you need to set the example.

That's the message of a new study that links TV viewing habits in [kids](#) to how much time their parents spend in front of the tube.

"The best predictor of children's TV time is their parents' TV time," said study author Amy Bleakley, a policy research scientist at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center in Philadelphia. "If Mom and Dad automatically turn on the TV when they have free time, it's likely that their kids will learn to do the same."

There are some caveats. For one, the study relied on an [online survey](#), so parents who aren't on the Internet couldn't take part. Also, it's not clear what the kids were watching; the programming could have been educational. In addition, TV watching could potentially prevent kids from taking part in more harmful activities.

It's especially hard for researchers to isolate the impact of TV because so many other factors affect the lives of children. Still, "we know that high levels of TV viewing are associated with increased risk of obesity and associated illnesses among children and adults," said Russ Jago, a professor of

pediatric [physical activity](#) and public health at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom.

"However, TV viewing also provides many benefits for children in terms of learning that are different to alternative mediums, and therefore some TV viewing is not a bad thing in itself," Jago noted. "It is about moderation."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV for kids under 2 and a limit of two hours a day of non-[educational programming](#) for older children.

In the new study, researchers examined the results of surveys with 629 adolescents and 1,550 parents with children aged 5 or under, 6 to 11, and 12 to 17. The researchers adjusted the results so they'd better reflect American [parents](#) with kids in each age group.

"In general, we found that across children of all ages, the amount of time a parent spends watching television is strongly associated with their child's television time," Bleakley said.

The research offers a view of the importance of parental viewing time as compared to topics of other research, such as the presence of TVs in bedrooms, she said. "Parents may not realize how their media habits shape their children's habits. They may find that if they curtail their own time with TV, their [children](#) will follow suit."

Jago praised the study as large and well-designed, and said it "provides insights into factors that could be potential targets for interventions to reduce TV viewing."

The study appears online July 15 and in the August print issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.

More information: For more on [TV watching](#), try the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

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