

## Using Television Wisely

Network and local programs as well as videos and DVD's give families convenient and affordable ways to share sporting events, concerts, literature, science, geography, current events, and hobbies. However, in times of stress, television can become a problem. We tend to watch too much television during a national crisis and during the holidays. Routinely children and adults come home from a stressful day at school or work and try to relax in front of the television. In times of stress we tend to turn to television, but television can increase our stress.

Everyone in the family should limit television viewing to one or two hours per day, maximum. Watching three hours of football or a couple of movie videos on one day is balanced by one day of no television at all. Be sure to include in the daily total the hour or more your child may spend watching videos at school and child care.



Television watching is a sedentary activity. We need to exercise, especially during times of stress. Also, television watching tends to reduce sleep. Most Americans, children included, are sleep deprived. Television viewing close to bed time can interfere with the quantity and quality of sleep, especially for children. During times of stress we need more sleep.

Time spent watching television reduces the time spent in social interactions. It is critical that infants and toddlers hear language and experience physical activity with real objects and loving humans. The Academy of Pediatrics advises no television, no children's videos, for children less than two years of age.

Experts advise that children under five not watch news programs. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, parents saw the wisdom of this advice. Situation comedies, are inappropriate for children under twelve. Unable to comprehend the double meaning of satire, they take the story lines at face value and repeat them, making teasing the number one stressor for children.

Carefully select what children two and older view and do not view, on networks, videos, and DVD's. Be there to share your values, to answer their questions, and to stop the viewing of inappropriate programs. After watching baseball, go outside and play catch. After news reports, look for articles in the newspaper or on the internet. Reduce stress with music, conversation, arts and crafts, nature walks, finishing projects, and practicing your faith and beliefs.

### SIX TELEVISION RULES

- 1) One or two hours per day, maximum
- 2) No television for children under 2
- 3) No news for children under 5
- 4) No satire for children under 12
- 5) Watch with your children
- 6) Enjoy other activities together.

# Managing Stress in Families

There are many times that add to the feeling that our schedules are out of control and we are overburdened. Back to school time, sports or other extra activities, birthdays and holidays are just a few examples. These times can bring much joy and fun but often they are a major source of stress. Here are a few tips to help make those times a little easier and more enjoyable:

- v Don't start activities too soon. Young children have trouble waiting and want things right away. If you hold off special activities until the event is near, you will avoid "burnout".
- v Keep schedules regular. Children find great comfort in routines, especially during times of stress. By keeping your routine constant, you will help children cope more easily.
- v Take care of basic needs. Getting enough sleep, having some quiet or "down" time, and eating nutritious foods are extremely important. Being rested and healthy help children and adults to better handle stress, have more energy, reduce illness, and maintain positive attitudes.
- v Don't wait to have fun! Children love special activities all year round. Rather than pack every-

thing into a certain period, save some of those special activities for the rest of the year. Children will be just as excited about making cookies or having a party with friends.

- v Set realistic expectations for yourself. Doing a few things you have time for and truly enjoying them is much better than racing through many more stressful activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do or control. First, make a list of all the things you would like to do. Then, decide how important each thing is to you and your family. Weigh their costs and benefits. Together, choose the most important activities and make time for only those. You do not have to do everything and it is alright to say "no" without feeling guilty.
- v Develop traditions. Develop family activities and rituals that repeat every week, month or year. Traditions help build memories, reinforce values, and strengthen relationships. Make dinner hour a time of sharing and support. Schedule "family nights." Volunteer together with a community project. Nurture family spirituality. Learn to weigh and organize family activities with an eye toward more time together.

---

## Basic Parenting Test

In the rush and stress of their busy lives, parents sometimes forget some of the basics of good parenting. Once forgotten, good practices can turn into bad habits. Take this quick test to see how your family is doing with healthy routines.

Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	
_____	_____	_____	1. We eat 2-3 meals a day together as a family.
_____	_____	_____	2. We sleep 8-12 hours per night.
_____	_____	_____	3. We read a story, newspaper or magazine together everyday.
_____	_____	_____	4. All of us exercise or play actively at least one hour per day.
_____	_____	_____	5. We watch television 2 hours a day or less.
_____	_____	_____	6. I talk with my child about one hour a day.
_____	_____	_____	7. I know my children's friends and their parents.
_____	_____	_____	8. I talk with my child's teacher(s) twice a month.
_____	_____	_____	9. We do volunteer work together.
_____	_____	_____	10. We share our faith experiences.

# Helping Your Family in a Crisis

A violent disaster, whether natural or man-made, or a loss or tragedy within a family can shake our sense of safety and well-being. Children are especially vulnerable because they have less life experience, coping skills or understanding than adults. The following strategies may help children and families cope in times of crisis.

**Talk about the event.** Encourage family members to describe what they saw, heard, thought and felt. Although you may want to protect children from emotional pain by “not talking about it”, this will only make the recovery more difficult.

**Be honest, open and clear.** Give children the facts in words they can understand. Without facts, a child's imagination will fill in the details, which may be more horrifying than the reality. Telling what will happen next, or is being done, will provide a sense of security.

**Listen...**Children and adults need you to listen more than they need you to make them feel better. Be prepared to hear or discuss the same details again and again. This is an attempt to regain some control by understanding the event.

**Stay together as a family as much as possible.** If you need to be away, reassure children you will return, and tell them when.

**Include children in recovery activities.** Chores and responsibility appropriate to their age and abilities will help them feel less helpless and that they are contributing.

**Give yourself and family members time to grieve and heal.** Understand that performance at home, work or school may be temporarily affected. Break large, overwhelming jobs into smaller manageable tasks. Allow others to help.

**Let your children know others love and care about them.** Connect with family, friends and neighbors.

**Limit exposure to additional trauma,** including news reports. Watching sensational reports can

cause people to re-live the traumatic experience. Reports of other “bad news” can also cause more distress. Reassure children that it was not their fault. Children and adults often wonder if there was something they did or didn't do to cause a crisis or tragedy. Ask for help. Child Guidance Programs in County Health Departments as well as Community Mental Health Centers provide family support, parenting education and counseling services. Talking to a minister, rabbi or other spiritual leader may also provide assistance.

*Source: Child Guidance Program, Family Health Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. 405-271-4477, [www.health.state.ok.us](http://www.health.state.ok.us)*

## Having a Bad Day

What's the problem? Well, it can vary by age. Daily stressors change according to your stage of development. Researchers at Westminster College in Salt Lake city asked 270 people, ages 3-75 what hassles they associated with having a bad day. These were the top rated hassles by age group:

- For young children, the daily stressor is getting teased.
- For children ages 6-10 years, it is getting bad grades.
- For older children, stress comes from the pressure to do drugs.
- For those aged 16-22 years, it is trouble at work or school.
- For adults, it is fighting among family members.
- For the elderly, it is inadequate funds.

## Hand-in-Hand: Family Time Ideas

- Have a fancy dinner together with candlelight and soft music.
- Fly kites on a windy day.
- Save all your family pennies for a month, then talk about what to do with them – roll them, play games with them, donate them, save for a vacation, etc.
- Work on a charity project together – a walkathon, canned food drive, etc.
- Massage each other's backs or feet.
- Play with balloons by hitting up in the air.
- Make a family list of kind words and notice when someone uses one.



# One In Four Kids Obese

Twenty-seven percent of children between the ages of 6 and 19 in the United States today are overweight, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control. Children who become obese may have an altered body image, and also may suffer from depression and poor self-esteem. Worse, obesity in childhood often leads to obesity in adulthood. Adult obesity is known to increase the risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and certain types of cancer.

A lack of regular exercise is a major contributor to childhood obesity. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children watch an average of three to five hours of television every day. That equals 21 to 35 hours each week. Sedentary activities such as watching television and playing video games reduce children's physical activity. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting children's television time to one to two hours per day. Regular physical activity is the best way to reduce a child's risk for becoming obese. Involving children in sports and outdoor adventures such as baseball, soccer, swimming, and hiking are all ways to help a child increase physical activity. Remember, exercise should be fun, not a chore.

It is also important to encourage a healthy diet. Healthy eating habits formed in childhood become lifelong healthy habits for adults. Parents whose children

are obese should ask their pediatrician to recommend a physical activity plan that will be healthy for their child. Parents also should ask for a referral to a dietitian who can help improve the child's diet.

More information about overweight and obesity in children is available through OSU Cooperative Extension county offices, and through the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension web site at <http://www.fcs.okstate.edu>.



*Elaine Wilson Debbie Richardson*  
 Prepared by Dr. Elaine Wilson, Parenting Specialist and Debbie Richardson, Assistant Child Development Specialist. Please contact us if you need larger print or other accommodations. Dr. Elaine Wilson, 405-744-7186, emwilso@okstate.edu; Debbie Richardson, 405-744-6231, dlricha@okstate.edu

Oklahoma State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, State and Local Governments cooperating. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, or status as a veteran, and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Sam E. Curl, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$12.40 for 125 copies.



Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
 139 Ag Hall  
 Oklahoma State University  
 Stillwater, OK 74078

PRSR STD  
 US Postage  
 Paid  
 Stillwater OK  
 Permit No 191