



## FOOD & FUN AFTERSCHOOL, SECOND EDITION PARENT COMMUNICATIONS

# UNIT 8: TUNE OUT THE TV

### ABOUT PARENT ENGAGEMENT

At the Y, we understand that making a difference in children’s health means involving families. Engaging with families in afterschool time is associated with increased family involvement in children’s education and school, improved relationships between parents and children, and improved implementation and outcomes for afterschool programs\*.

This tool contains parent engagement activities, a newsletter article, and an email message for you to use with Food & Fun unit 8. These tools are intended to help you connect with and educate parents and caregivers on the key messages in Food & Fun. (You can find all the Food & Fun resources on [Exchange](#).)

It is important to engage parents and caregivers on a regular basis in a variety of ways. Here are some ways that programs have engaged families at afterschool:

- Have a conversation with parents and caregivers at pickup
- Create a bulletin board with the key messages from each Food & Fun unit
- Involve parents and caregivers in daily physical activities and snack time
- Hold regularly scheduled events each month, like a family night

*\*Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School. A joint publication of United Way of Massachusetts Bay, Harvard Family Research Project, and Build the Out-Of-School Time Network.*

### PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Experiment and be creative—come up with your own ideas or modify the activities below to engage parents and caregivers at your afterschool program!

- **Brainstorm TV-free activities.** Put up a poster board or tack a large piece of paper onto the wall by the sign-out book. Ask adults and kids to write down their favorite TV-free activity on the board. Keep the poster up for a week and encourage families to write something down every day. At the end of the week record all of the favorite activities and distribute to parents and caregivers.

- **Encourage Commercial Mania.** Encourage parents to do the Commercial Mania activity from Food & Fun at home with their kids. Print out copies of the instructions and hand out to parents and caregivers at pickup. Follow up with families to see what they discovered, and ask how they liked the activity!

## NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

*Use this article in your organization's publications. Be sure to include the credit "Provided by Harvard School of Public Health Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity and YMCA of the USA."*

# TUNE OUT YOUR TV FOR BETTER HEALTH

American children watch about 3 hours of TV a day. Many watch more than that. Sound like a lot? Think about your average day. In the morning, the kids might watch an hour while eating breakfast and getting ready for school. After school, kids might watch another hour before dinner, and then another hour before bed. Three hours comes and goes pretty easily.

**This month children at our program will be encouraged to turn off the TV.**

### **The key messages for adults are:**

- Limit children's overall screen time (TV, videogames, internet surfing, etc.) to less than 2 hours per day.
- Do not allow television sets in children's bedrooms.
- Help children find other things to do besides watching TV, such as playing games, doing crafts, or being active.
- Be a good role model and limit your own TV viewing and computer time at home.

### **The key messages for kids are:**

- Moving your body keeps you fit!
- Do something active instead of watching TV, playing videogames, or spending time on the computer.

Our goal is to make children aware of how much TV they watch and encourage them to trade some of that time for activities that are more positive for their bodies and minds. Setting limits on TV and other screen time (like computer and video games) can benefit your children's health.

How is TV a problem for health? Watching several hours of TV each day can lead to less physical activity, over eating, and higher risk for becoming overweight. TV watching also may influence children to make unhealthy food choices because they see a lot of advertisements for foods that are high in sugars and calories.

### **A few quick facts...**

- Each day, children receive about 58 commercial messages from television alone. About half of these are for food.
- Close to 98% of food commercials on weekend morning network TV are for unhealthy foods high in calories, sodium, or sugar.
- Food and drink marketing aimed at kids has more than doubled during the last 10 years from \$7 billion to \$15 billion a year.

What's a parent to do? Set limits! Children over the age of 2 should watch TV, play video games, or use the computer less than 2 hours each day.

### **TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

- **No TV during meal times.** Turn off the TV and talk to your children during meal times.
- **No TV sets in any bedrooms.** Keep TVs in common areas and out of kids' bedrooms.
- **No Surfing.** Only watch favorite shows instead of finding something to watch.
- **Use technology.** Screening devices can remove commercials and limit the time kids spend watching TV. TiVo or TV Allowance are helpful tools
- **Be a positive role model.** Limit your own TV viewing. Kids will learn from you!
- **Endure kids' complaints.** This may be a parent's biggest challenge. Although it may be hard at first, limits on TV can actually help you spend more time as a family. You can free up time to do other things like play games, read, or just be together. Stick with it!
- **Help kids deal with boredom.** Be prepared to suggest other activities. Over time, kids will start to enjoy other pastimes even more!

For ideas on how to reduce screen time, visit

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time). You can also find helpful ideas for activities to substitute for TV time (including playing outside!) by visiting [www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home](http://www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home), [www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign](http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign), and [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov).

### **[OPTIONAL SIDE BAR]**

#### **SUGGESTED RULES TO LIVE BY**

- Less than 2 hours of total screen time each day (including TV, nonschool-related computer, and video games).
- No TV during meal times.
- No TV during homework.

- No TV in any bedrooms.
- No eating while watching TV.
- No channel surfing—watch favorite shows only.
- Limit viewing to set days and times.

## Email Message

Use this sample message to communicate with parents and caregivers by email.

SUBJECT: **Healthy Habits Power Tips: Tune Out the TV**

Dear (*insert program name*) Parents and Caregivers:

This month children at the (*insert program name*) will be encouraged to turn off the TV.

### The key messages for adults are:

- Limit children’s overall screen time (TV, videogames, internet surfing, etc.) to less than 2 hours per day.
- Do not allow television sets in children’s bedrooms.
- Help children find other things to do besides watching TV, such as playing games, doing crafts, or being active.
- Be a good role model and limit your own TV viewing and computer time at home.

### The key messages for kids are:

- Moving your body keeps you fit!
- Do something active instead of watching TV playing videogames, or spending time on the computer.

Our goal is to make children aware of how much TV they watch and encourage them to trade some of that time for activities that are more positive for their bodies and minds. Setting limits on TV and other screen time (like computer and video games) can benefit your children’s health.

## HEALTHY HABITS POWER TIPS

- **Be a good role model.** Limit your own TV viewing. Your children will learn from you!
- **Limit TV and other screen time (like computers or video games) to less than 2 hours per day.** This can be done by keeping television sets out of everyone’s bedrooms, limiting viewing to specific days or times, watching only favorite shows, and not allowing TV during meals or homework times.

- **Have screen-free days!** Plan family activities that do not include TV or movies. Check into local sports and recreation programs that are offered after school and on weekends. Some programs are free, and many offer scholarships.
- **Suggest other activities.** Help kids deal with boredom by suggesting other activities. For example, plan a family game night or suggest that kids trade 30 minutes of TV for 30 minutes of reading.
- **Use technology.** Screening devices can remove commercials and limit the time kids spend on the computer or watching TV. TiVo, TV Allowance, and parental controls on Windows Vista are all helpful tools.

Want to learn more? Click [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time) for ways to promote TV free family time.

Visit [www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home](http://www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home), [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov), and [www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/marketing/adult/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/marketing/adult/index.htm) for ideas on keeping kids busy and having fun without TV.