

Competing for Their Hearts & Minds

It is my intent to take every opportunity to commend you who choose Christian schooling for your children. I know well the costs and the significant sacrifice that many of you make to pick this alternative to a free government school. You have chosen a place where people give great care to providing the very best academic program that will be intellectually stimulating while spiritually nurturing.

Even though you have made a strategic decision regarding the educational and spiritual development of your children, there is a fierce competition for their hearts and minds. I urge you to pause and consider how you will deal with one of the fiercest of those competitors—television. How powerful is this competitor in your home?

According to the 2005 Kaiser Family Foundation study titled *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8–18 Year-olds*, 99 percent of young people between the ages of 8 and 18 live in a house with a television, and 68 percent of them have a television in their own bedroom. Further, the study found that on average these young people spend 3 hours and 4 minutes per day watching television and only 1 hour and 25 minutes per day in physical activity (www.kff.org/entmedia/7250.cfm).

It is evident from the above statistics that we need to view television as a major competitor for the hearts and minds of children. Its presence and prominence, as well as its command of time in the lives of young men and women, give it a potent opportunity to make an impact on their lives—and, unfortunately, too often in negative ways. The list would be nearly endless were I to begin describing the ways the entertainment media influence our culture through their depiction of the darker side of humanity and our culture.

The Media Awareness Network, Canada's award-winning online source of media and Internet education, offers you some crucial tips for managing television in your home. These suggestions include

setting limits on the amount of time you allow your children to watch television, particularly on school nights; being aware that young children are at higher risk of becoming aggressive after they have watched violence on TV—especially cartoons—and thus reducing the amount of violence they watch; noting that children model their parents' television-viewing habits; turning the TV on for a program and then turning it off when the program is over to establish the notion that watching television is a special experience; insisting on some no-TV time when friends come to visit your children and restricting the viewing of certain shows even if their

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friends are permitted to watch those shows; making sure your babysitter knows what is off-limits; and even trying to go without television for a few days to help reevaluate what role it plays in the life of your family (www.media-awareness.ca).

One family I know watches TV together and makes it an interactive experience. The family members talk back to the commercials and even the actors in shows—challenging the outrageous claims, comments, and events. This activity is an interesting and fun way to control TV viewing rather than allow it to control your family. You can even use TV time as an opportunity to engage in appropriate conversations about difficult-to-talk-about matters.



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