

# Children/Parents: Television in the Home

*A National Survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.  
Conducted for the Annenberg Public Policy Center  
of the University of Pennsylvania under the Direction of  
Kathleen Hall Jamieson*

*Publications in the  
Annenberg Public Policy Center's  
Survey Series*

- No. 1      **Children/Parents: Television in the Home**  
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The first annual Annenberg Parents, Children and Television Survey was conducted for the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania from May 5-9 and 13-14, 1996 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. The national random sample of 1,205 parents of two to seventeen year old children provides a comprehensive profile of the attitudes and viewing patterns of both parents and children.

When answering questions about a specific child, parents were asked to focus on the child who had the most recent birthday. Preschoolers were defined as those between 2 and 5 years old, elementary schoolers as those 6 to 11, and adolescents as those 12 to 17. The margin of error for the survey of Parents is  $\pm 2.8\%$ ; the margin or error for the survey of 10 to 17 year olds is  $\pm 5.6$

The sample of young people age 10 to 17 includes:

- As many as possible of the 10 to 17 year old children who were the focus of the interview with the parent.

- Substitution of a sibling age 10 to 17 if the child who was the focus of the interview with the parent could not be interviewed.

- Any sibling age 10 to 17 of a child age 2 to 9 who was the focus of the interview with the parent.

Of the 1,205 interviewed parents, a total of 694 (58%) have at least one child age 10 to 17. In 308 of these households (44% of them), the 10 to 17 year old was able to be interviewed. Of these, 242 (79%) were the focus of the interview with the parent.

The differences between the 308 parents whose children were interviewed and the survey parent population as a whole are not significant:

Parents whose child was interviewed	Population of survey parents
mostly Democratic . . . . .	29% . . . . . 25%
leaning Democratic . . . . .	9% . . . . . 8%
completely Independent . . . . .	24% . . . . . 25%
leaning Republican . . . . .	10% . . . . . 9%
mostly Republican . . . . .	21% . . . . . 21%
income above \$75,000 . . . . .	16% . . . . . 14%
\$40,000 - \$75,000 . . . . .	37% . . . . . 34%
\$20,000 - \$40,000 . . . . .	33% . . . . . 31%
below \$20,000 . . . . .	10% . . . . . 12%
Hispanic . . . . .	10% . . . . . 12%
White . . . . .	71% . . . . . 67%
Black . . . . .	15% . . . . . 15%
Asian . . . . .	1% . . . . . 1%
Other . . . . .	3% . . . . . 2%

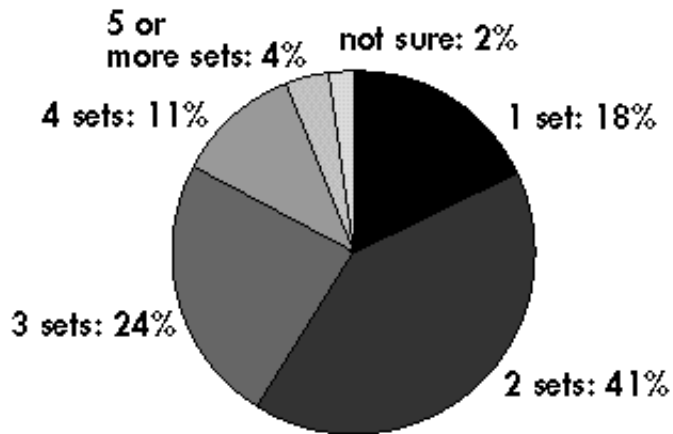
A comparison of demographics of the parents of the 308 adolescents who were interviewed with the 386 parents of 10 to 17 year olds who were unable to be interviewed indicates the two groups are quite similar but not totally comparable. [See Appendix] As a result, when comparing the answers of children and parents we have reported the responses of parents of the children who were interviewed rather than the entire sample of parents.

—Kathleen Hall Jamieson  
Director  
17 June 1996

## Responses of Parents

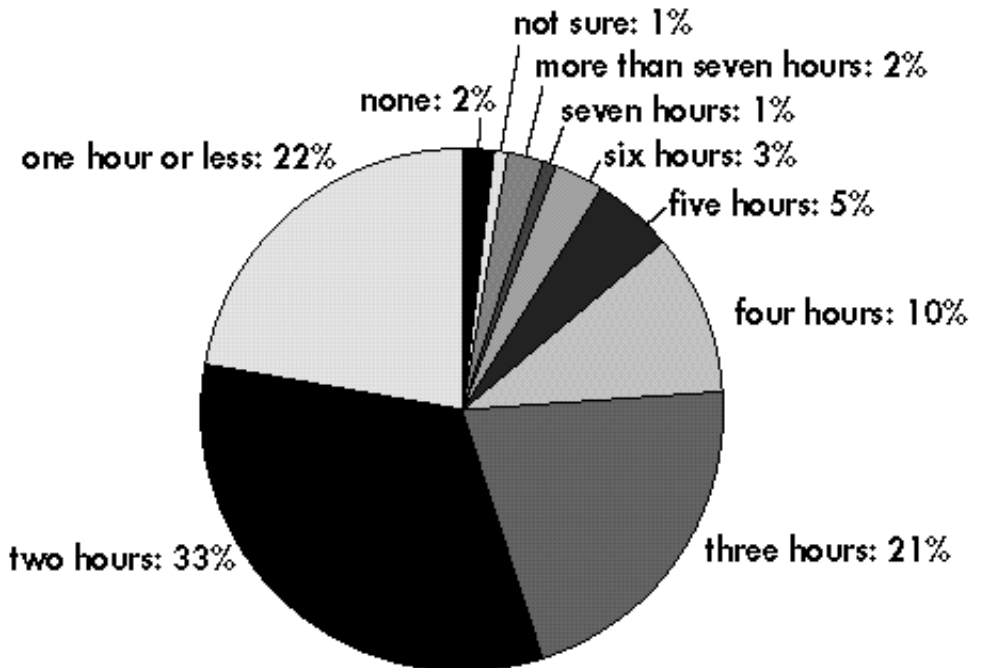
The typical household surveyed has two working television sets in the home.

### NUMBER OF SETS IN HOUSE



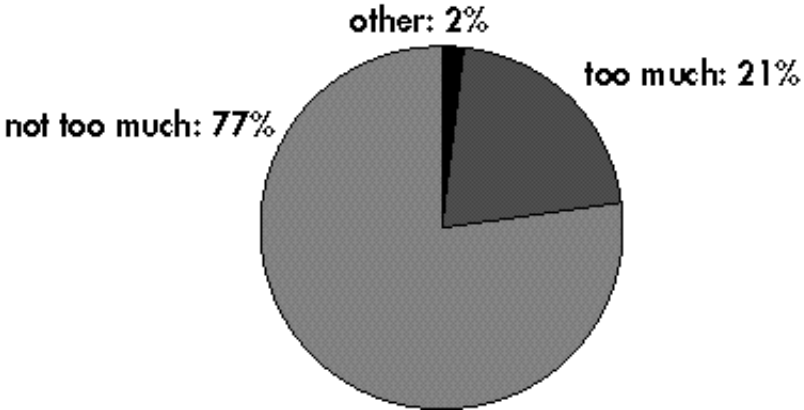
The survey found that while most parents report that on a typical day their child watches two or more hours of television,

### HOW MANY WATCH FOR HOW MANY HOURS



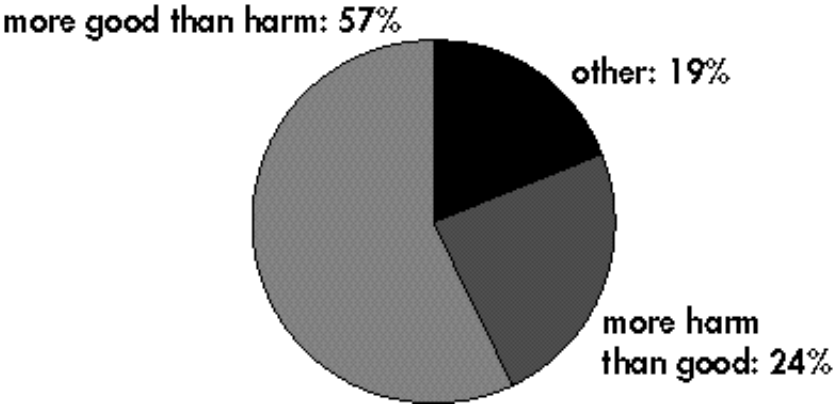
more than three quarters do not believe that the child is spending too much time watching tv,

**IS YOUR CHILD WATCHING TOO MUCH?**



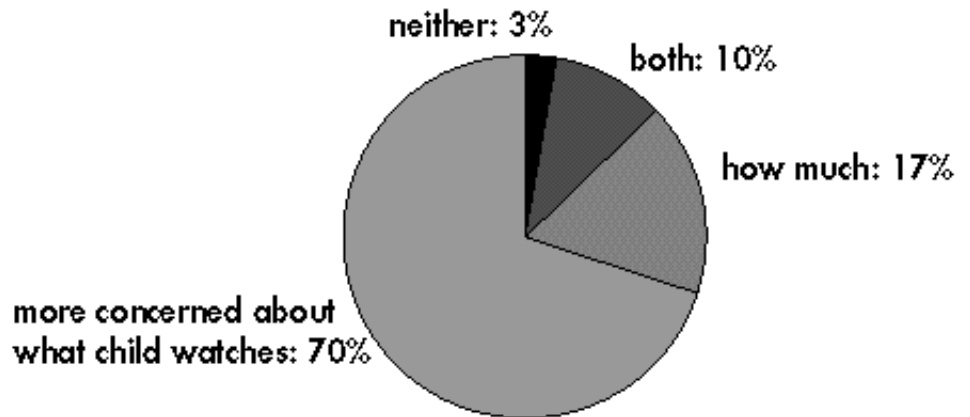
and a majority think that television has done their child more good than harm.

**EFFECT OF TELEVISION ON CHILD**



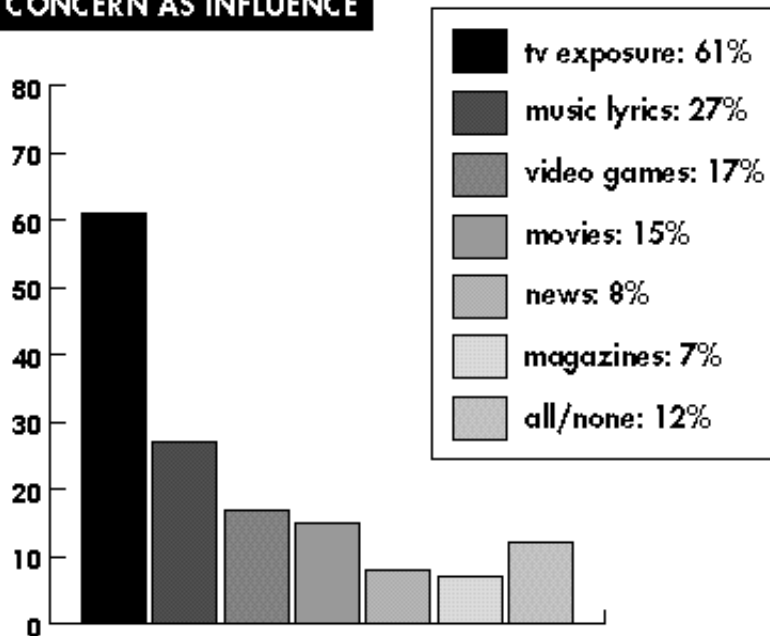
Parents provide consistent evidence that their concern is not how much their children watch but what sorts of programming they are watching. Sixty-six percent of the parents report rules about watching television. Of those, 40% don't want their children to watch certain programs, 36% permit viewing only after completion of homework or chores, 20% only permit watching at certain times of the day, and 17% limit the number of hours.

### WHAT CONCERNS PARENTS MOST ABOUT TELEVISION



Of the possible influences on children, 61% of the parents surveyed said they were most concerned about what their children are exposed to on television.

### TELEVISION GREATEST CONCERN AS INFLUENCE



A majority of parents respond that responsibility for making sure that kids are not exposed to inappropriate programming is totally or mainly theirs, not the networks'.

**WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT KIDS WATCH?**

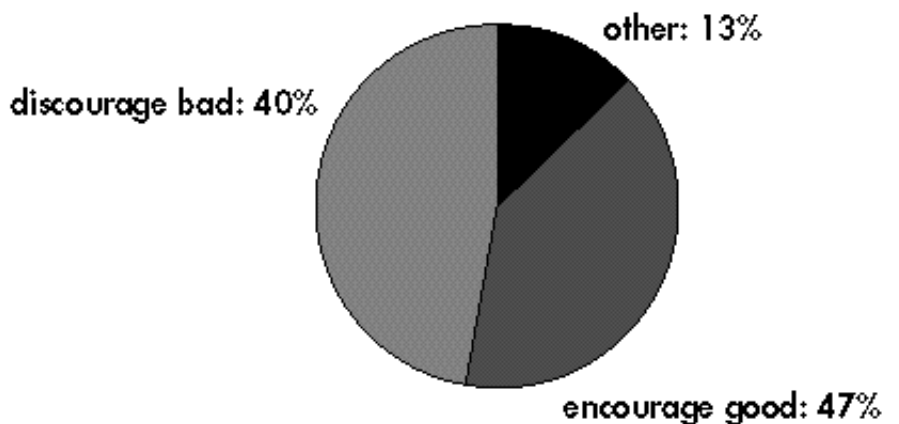
	<u>totally or mainly parents</u>	<u>totally or mainly networks</u>	<u>equally divided</u>
all parents	54%	4%	40%
of preschoolers	56%	3%	40%
of elementary	58%	3%	37%
of adolescents	50%	6%	42%

Public discussion has focused on the utility of a v-chip able to block programs of which parents disapprove. Here, as in other surveys, a substantial majority (81%) indicates that it strongly or somewhat favors the v-chip.

Parents see the v-chip as a tool to encourage the viewership of quality programming as well as a means of discouraging children from watching unacceptable fare.

“If you had a “v-chip” in your television, how would you mostly use it—more to encourage your child to watch good and appropriate programs, or more to discourage your child from watching bad and inappropriate programs?”

**PURPOSE OF “V-CHIP”**



The desire of parents to use the v-chip to encourage quality viewing raises the question — is there an adequate amount of good programming for preschoolers and those of elementary school age?

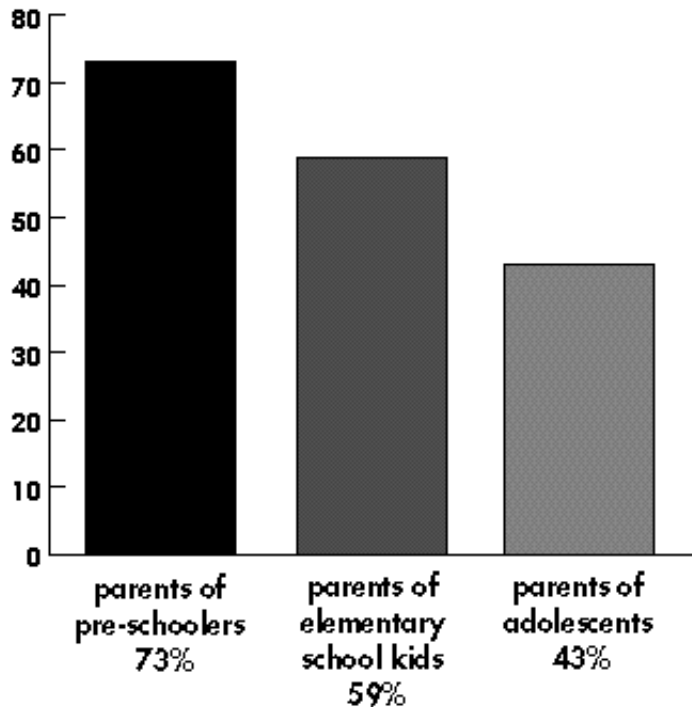
In general, parents are happy with the amount and quality of programming for their younger children but not for those at the elementary school level.

Where only 15% think that there are a lot or many good programs for elementary aged children, 48% find a lot or many for preschoolers.

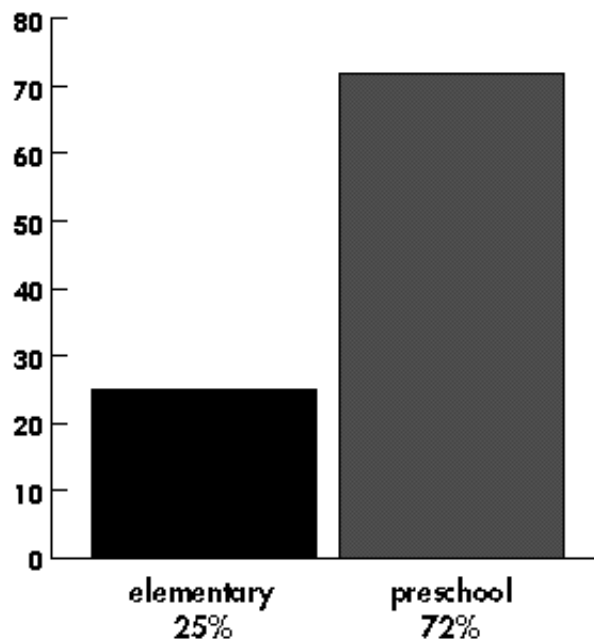
So it is unsurprising that parents of pre-schoolers are far more likely than those of adolescents to see good rather than harm in the effects of television on their children

At the same time, parents are more positive about programming for preschoolers than elementary schoolers.

### TELEVISION HAS HAD MORE GOOD EFFECTS THAN HARMFUL ONES



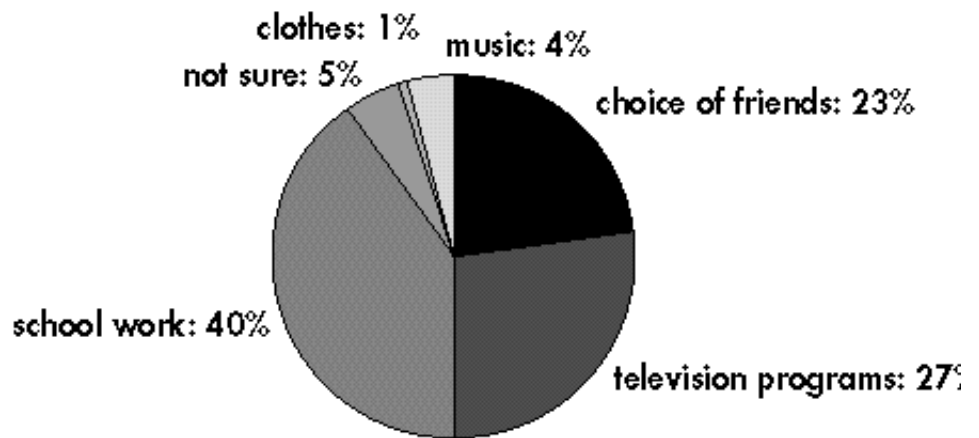
### POSITIVE FEELINGS ABOUT PROGRAMMING AIMED AT DIFFERENT AGES





Most parents (82%) believe that it is somewhat or a lot harder to raise children these days compared to when they were growing up. A substantial majority (79%) provides quite a bit or a great deal of supervision over their children's activities. More than half report providing a great deal or quite a bit of supervision over the television programs their child watches (66%), their child's school work (62%), the clothes their child wears (58%), their child's choice of friends (53%), and the music their child listens to (50%).

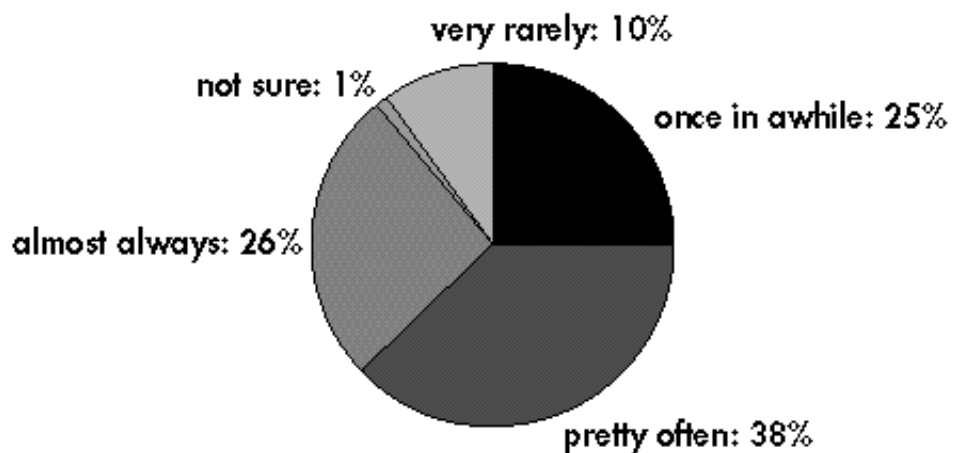
**WHAT PARENTS SUPERVISE MOST**



School work is most often cited as the thing that needs the most supervision, followed by television and choice of friends.

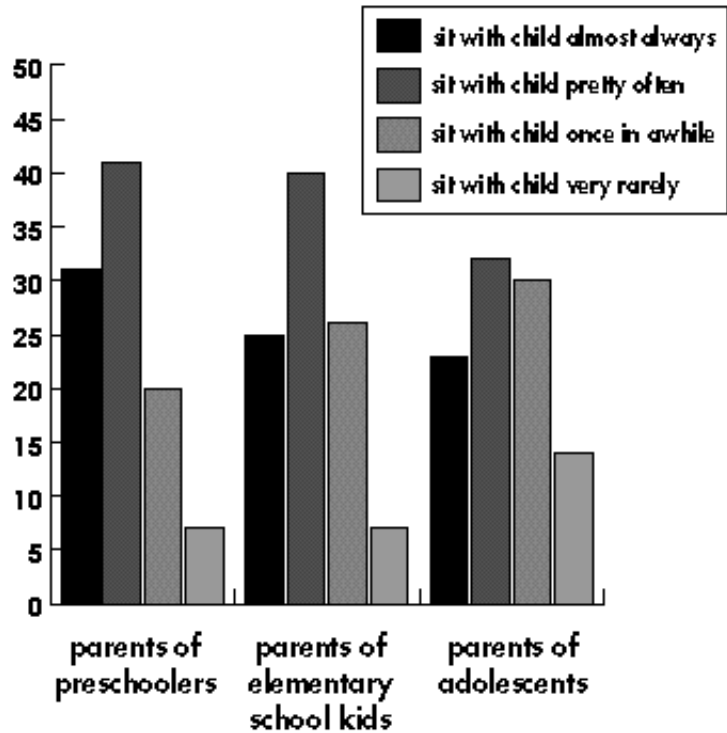
**PARENTS WATCH TV WITH CHILDREN**

Parental involvement in children's television viewing is reflected in the parents' report of the frequency with which they watch television with one of their children.



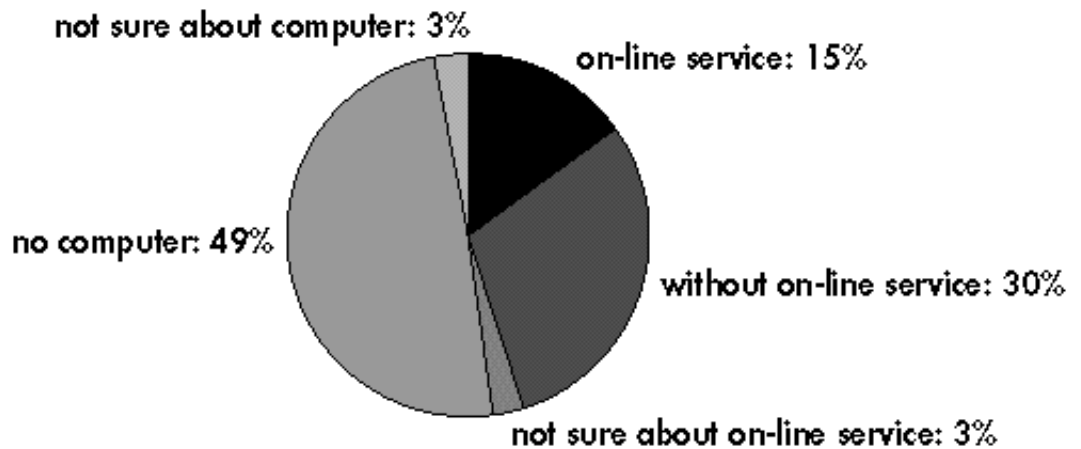
As children age, parents report that they are less likely to view television with them. Parents of preschoolers are more likely to sit down with their child while the child is watching television than are parents of children of elementary school age. Parents of those in elementary school are more likely to watch with them than parents of adolescents.

### WATCHING TELEVISION WITH CHILDREN



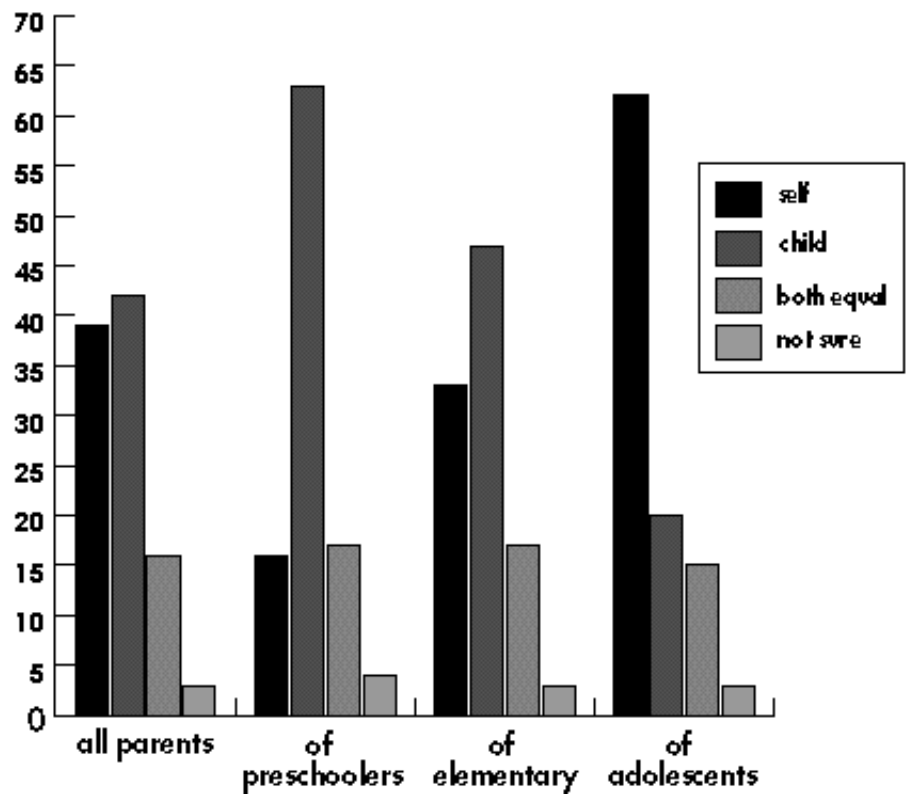
48% report having a computer in the home. Of these, only 15% report having on-line service.

### ON-LINE SERVICE IN THE HOME



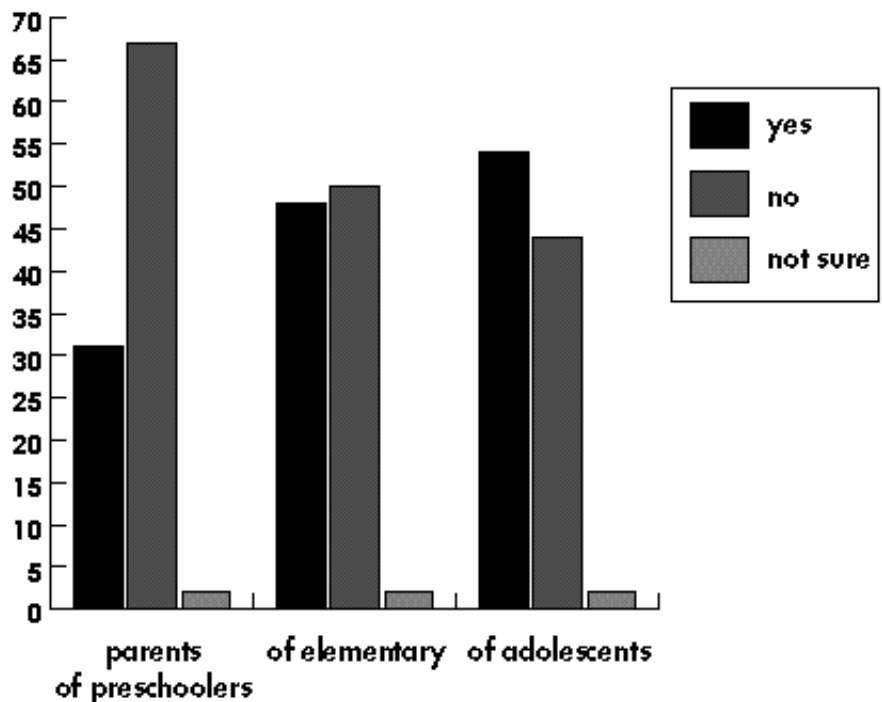
Of the parents who report that their children watch television, 39% think they watch higher quality programs than their children, 42% believe that the children watch higher quality.

**WHO DO YOU FEEL WATCHES BETTER QUALITY PROGRAMS?**



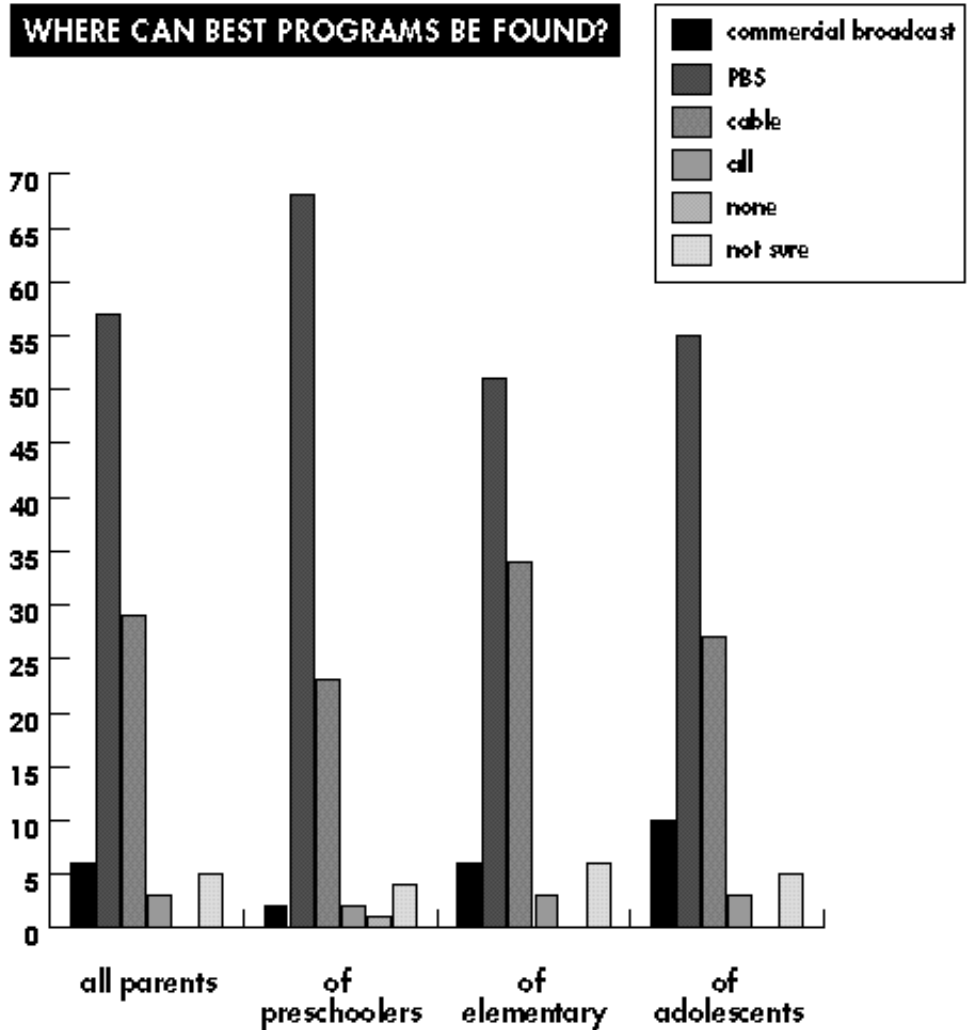
**ARE THERE PROGRAMS THAT YOUR CHILD WATCHES THAT YOU THINK ARE INAPPROPRIATE?**

Despite their best efforts, 46% of the parents report that their children watch inappropriate programs.



Parents believe that the best programming for children and young people can be found on the Public Broadcasting Network.

Where do you think the best programs for children and young people can be found on television—on the commercial broadcast networks such as ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX, or on the public broadcasting network PBS or on cable-only channels such as Nickelodeon, the Cartoon Network, and ESPN?



When asked to define a good program for children age two to five, parents respond:

educational tone/learn as they watch	47%
music, singing, entertainment	14%
manners, social skills	12%
fun, entertaining	12%
family oriented, teach values	9%
imaginative, attention grabbing	9%
Sesame Street	8%
alphabet, reading/writing/vocab	7%
no crime, violence	7%
numbers, how to count	6%

Parents list the following as good programs for preschool children:

Sesame Street	64%
Barney	35%
Mr Rogers'	14%
Lambchop	11%
Reading Rainbow	6%
Rugrats	5%
Gullah Islands	4%
Puzzle Place	3%
Shining Time Station	2%
Nickelodeon	2%
Cartoons	2%
Disney Channel	2%
PBS programs	2%
Wishbone	2%
Bananas and Pajamas	2%

For children six through eleven, parents think that quality programs should:

be family oriented/teach family values	29%
be educational	24%
not contain violence	15%
teach numbers/math	9%
teach right from wrong	5%
teach social skills	5%
keep them interested	5%
no vulgarity	5%

There is less parental agreement about which programs are good for elementary schoolers. Where parents list programs for preschoolers when asked for examples of good programs, when asked for good programs for elementary schoolers, parents' first responses are not programs but networks. This may reflect parents' belief that there is less quality programming for elementary schoolers.

Parents' examples of "good programs" for 6 - 11 year olds:

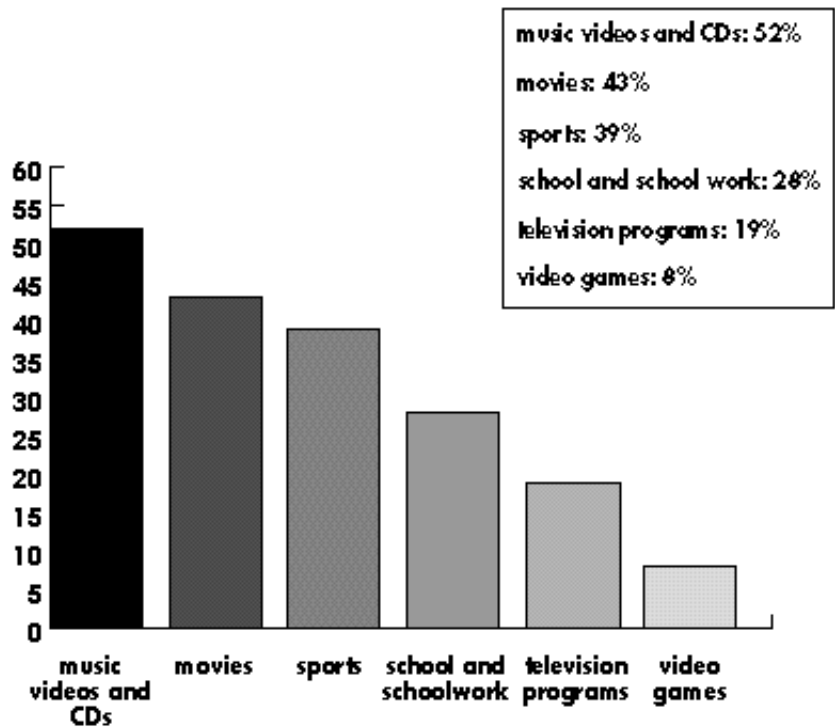
Nickelodeon	10%
Discovery Channel	9%
Step by Step/ Family Matters/Fresh Prince/ Full House/Home Improvement/sitcoms with families	8%
Where in the World is Carmen San Diego	6%
Bill Nye, The Science Guy	5%
Nature Shows	4%
Shows on PBS	3%
Clarissa Explains It All	3%
Saved by the Bell	3%
Sesame Street	3%
Cartoons	3%
After School Specials	2%
Reading Rainbow	2%
America's Funniest Videos	2%
Barney	2%
Reruns of family oriented shows (e.g., Waltons)	2%
Old shows (e.g., I Love Lucy)	2%
Other Science Programs (Newton's apple, Mr. Wizard, Beakman's World)	2%
Sports programming	2%
Wishbone	2%

## Responses of 10-17 year olds

Television may not be as central to the lives of children as some have supposed.

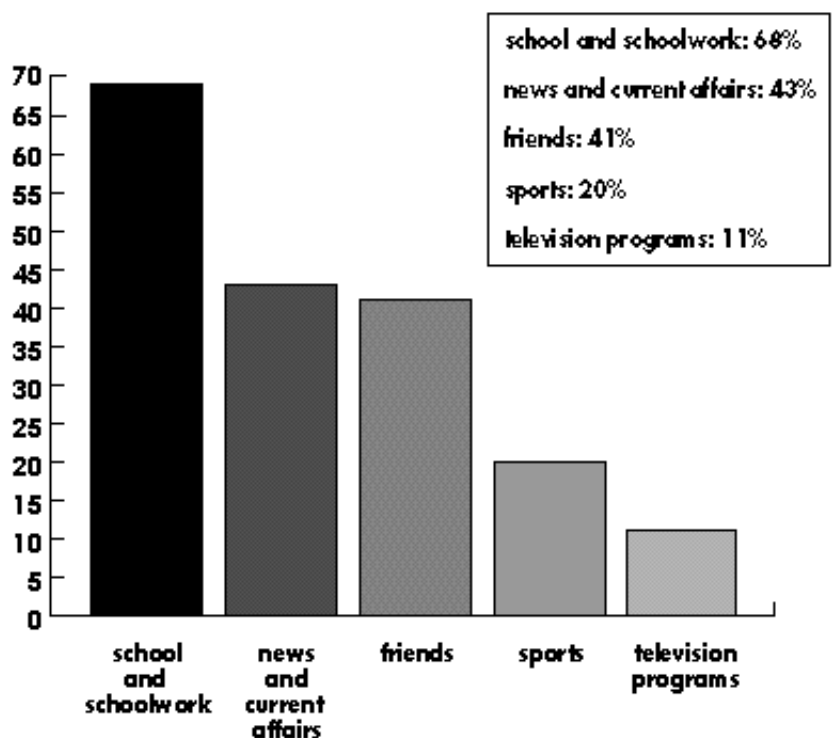
When asked what they and their friends talk about most, the answers (with the first and second 'most' combined) were:

### WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TALK ABOUT MOST?



During dinner or other times with family, the most talked about subjects are:

### WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR PARENTS TALK ABOUT MOST?

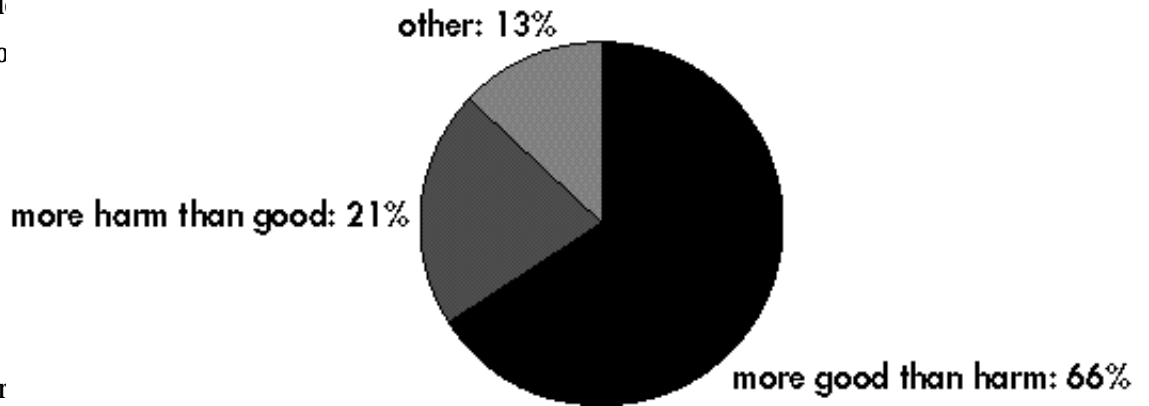


When asked which would be the most difficult to give up for a week, playing sports, talking on the phone, watching television, listening to music, reading books or magazines, or using a computer —

- more 10-11 year olds responded “television”,
- more 12-14 year olds “talking on the telephone”,
- more 15-17 year olds “playing sports”.

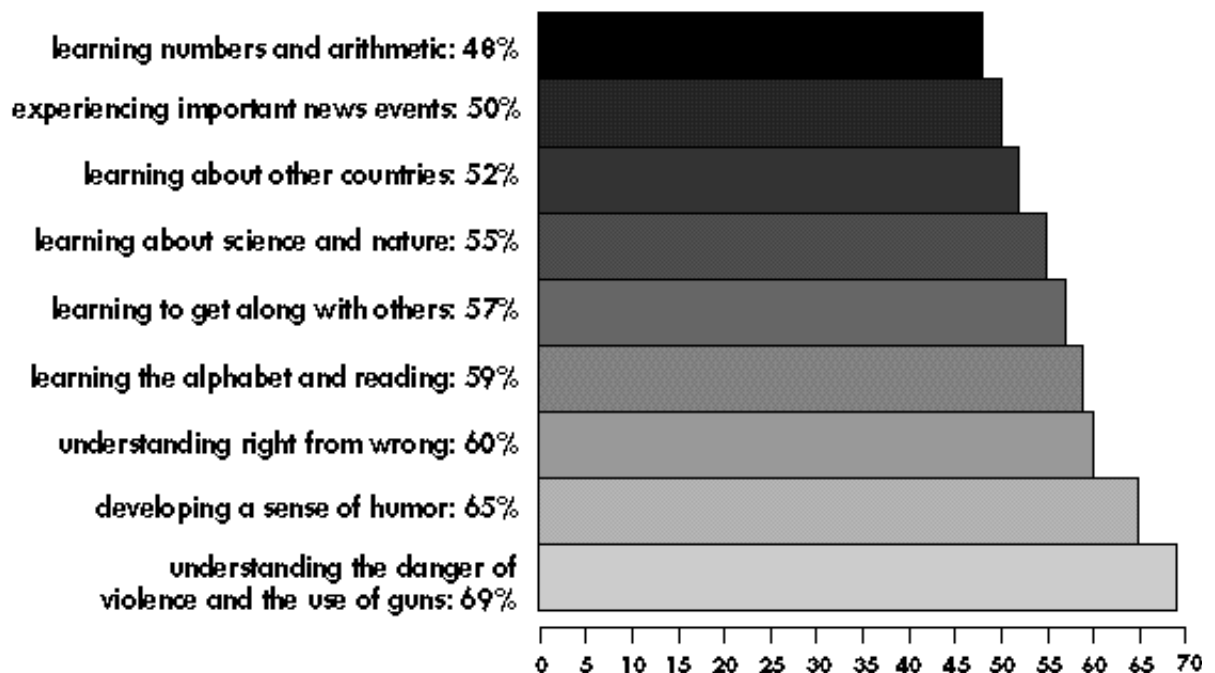
Like their parents, the young people surveyed believe that television done them more good than harm (21%).

### EFFECT OF TELEVISION



The 10-17 year respondents indicate that they gained either a lot or quite a bit from television viewing including:

### WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM TELEVISION



For the young people in our survey, **watching television is rarely a solitary activity.** Of those (32%) who report watching television in the morning, 16% watch with a friend, parent, brother or sister, 18% watch alone. But 67% do not usually watch television at all in the morning.

Of those (76%) who watch in the afternoon, 52% watch with someone else, 33% watch alone, 20% do not usually watch television during this time.

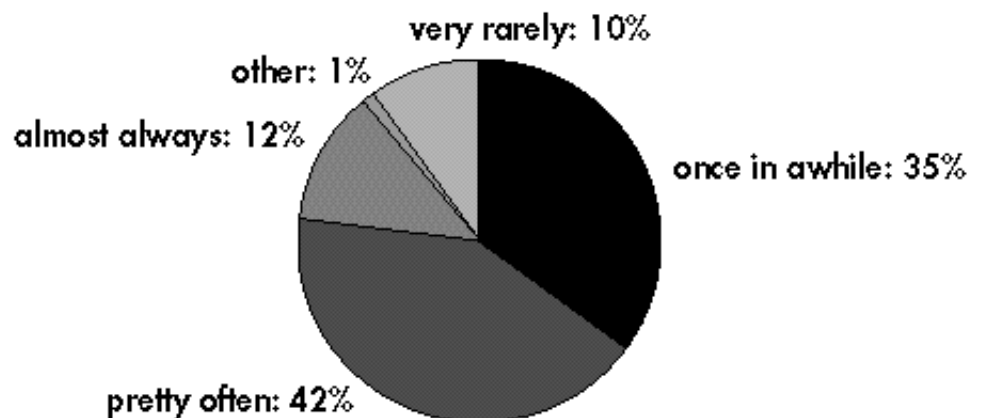
In the evening when the highest percent (82%) report viewing, 86% watch with

someone else, 17% watch alone, 15% report not usually watching in the evening.

Children are more likely to report that a parent views television with them in the evening (50%), than in the afternoon (12%) or morning (4%)

How often do parents sit down with their children to watch television? Our 10 - 17 year old respondents report:

#### CHILDREN SAY PARENTS WATCH WITH THEM



As children age, they report that parents are less likely to forbid certain programs, only permit watching after homework or chores are complete, only watch at certain times of the day, and limit hours.

Most of the respondents report that their number of viewing hours is not restricted.

Nor are they limited to watching television at certain times of the day. **Most are barred from some programs and only allowed to watch television after doing homework or chores. The majority subject to these restrictions regard them as fair.**



When asked to recall the rules in place when they were younger, those surveyed are more likely to recall restrictions on the number of hours viewed.

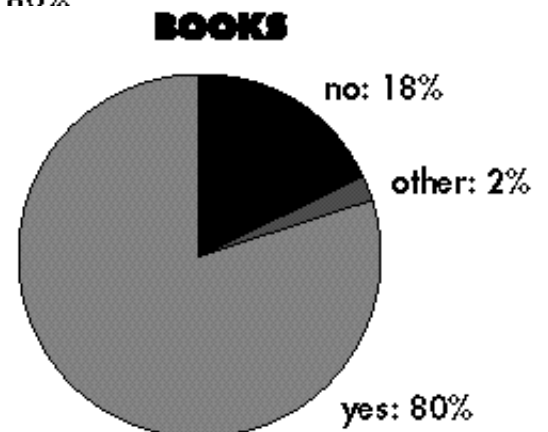
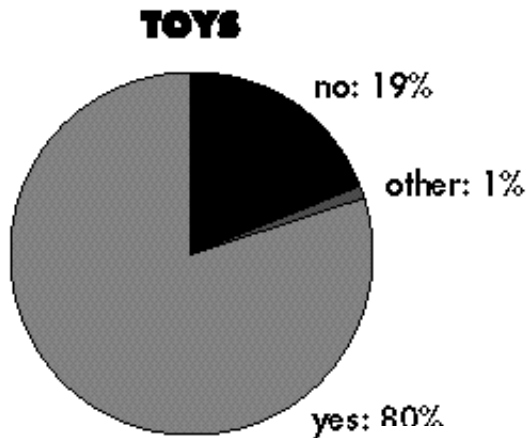
**36% report watching programs their parents wouldn't approve of.**

**64% report that when they were younger, they played games with their friends in which they pretended to be characters from a television program. The majority of characters are male and include:**

Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, and cartoon characters	11%
Batman	11%
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	9%
He-Man	7%
Superman	6%
Big Bird	6%
G I Joe	5%
Disney characters, Cinderella	5%
Spiderman	3%
She-Ra	2%
Ghostbusters	2%
Steve from Family Matters	2%

The 10-17 year olds surveyed are as likely to have had toys that are characters from a television program as to have had books based on a television program or characters on TV.

**BUYING PROGRAM TIE-INS**

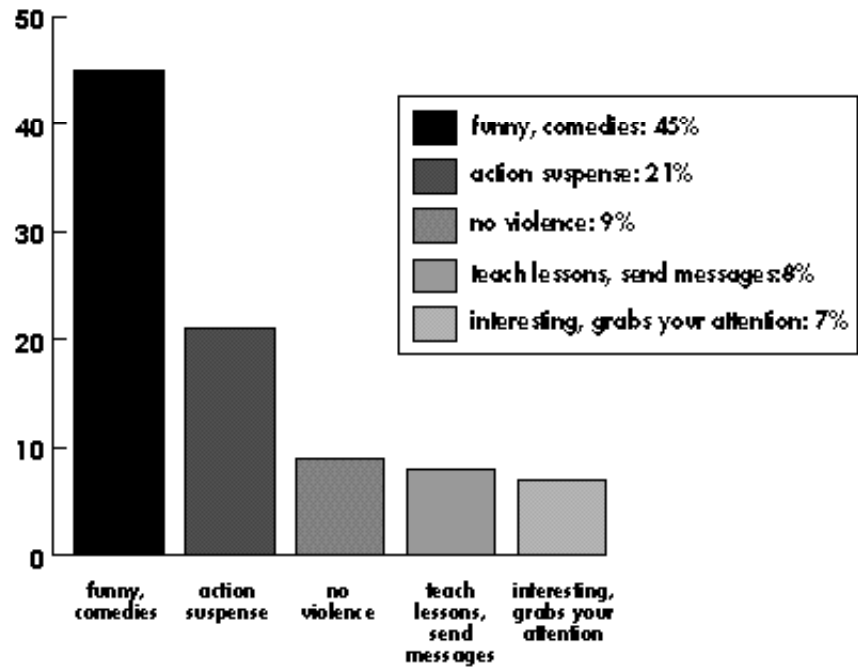


Parents and their children differ somewhat in assessing the quality of programming for children, with parents less approving.

	parents	children
very or mainly positive	11%	24%
positive and negative	54%	56%
mainly or very negative	33%	18%
not sure	2%	2%

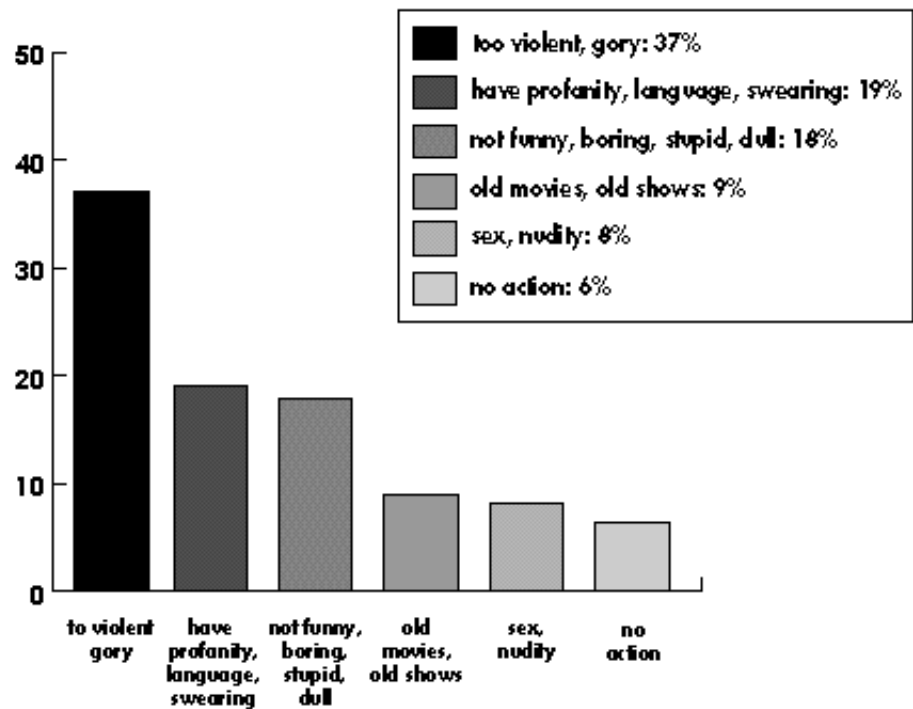
The 10-17 year olds surveyed reported that good shows are:

### GOOD SHOWS



and bad shows (something you don't want to watch) are:

### BAD SHOWS



As children age they report that:

**they are less likely to watch**

- programs on PBS
- cartoons

**they are as likely to watch**

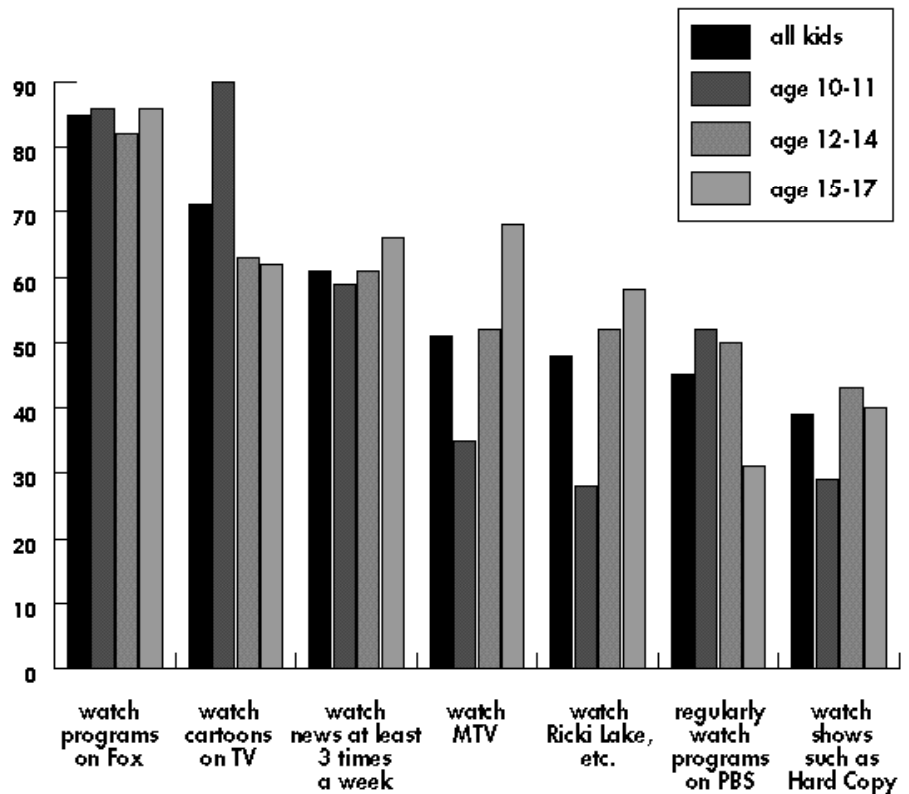
- programs on Fox

**they are more likely to watch**

- news at least three times a week
- MTV
- shows such as Ricki Lake, Jenny Jones, Montel Williams, or Geraldo

Where 29% of the 10-11 year olds report watching shows such as Hard Copy, Inside Edition, or a Current Affair, 44% of the 12-14 year olds and 40% of the 15-17 year olds do.

**WHAT CHILDREN SAY THEY ARE WATCHING AT WHAT AGE**

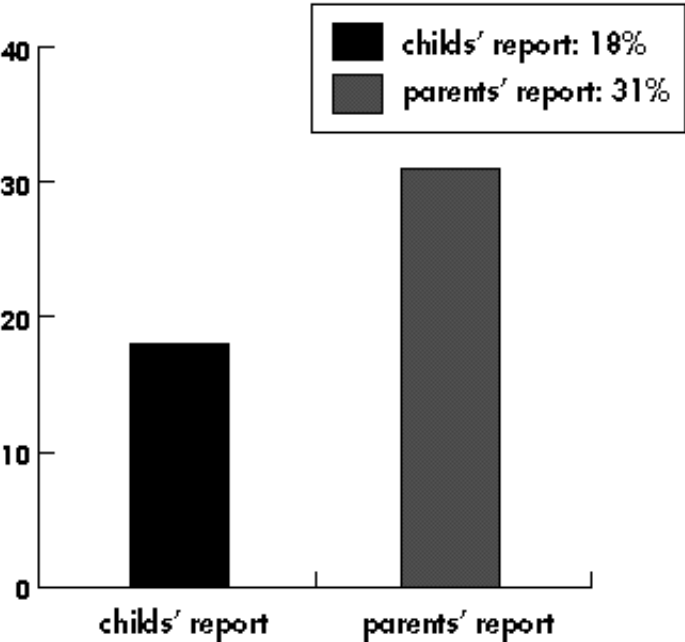


Children are more likely than their parents to report watching shows such as Ricki Lake, Jenny Jones, Montel Williams, or Geraldo.

Parents	10 - 17 year olds	12 - 14 year olds	15 - 17 year olds
39%	47%	52%	57%

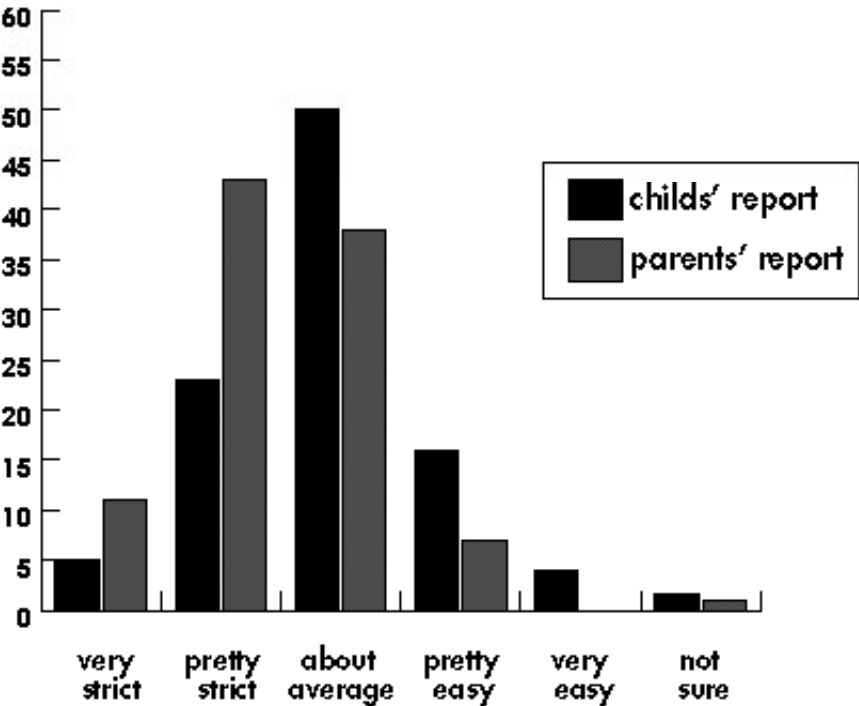
Parents and children have differing perceptions of parental strictness and supervision of children's activities. Where 31% of the parents surveyed said they provided a great deal of supervision of their children's activities, only 18% of their children said that their parents fell in this category.

**GREAT DEAL OF SUPERVISION**



Parents also thought they were stricter than children reported:

**HOW STRICT ARE PARENTS?**



**Complicating the process of parental supervision is the fact that 51% of the 10-17 year olds surveyed report having a television set in their own room.**

- Children who have a television in their own room (51%) have different viewing habits than those who do not. Differences include the following:
  - Those with a TV in their room are more likely to watch MTV (60%) than those who do not have a TV in their room (43.3%). However, those with a TV are no more nor less likely to watch TV talk shows, shows such as Hard Copy, cartoons, or news or PBS.
  - Of the few who said TV would be very hard to give up (21%), 58% had a TV in their room while 42% did not.
  - Those with a TV in their room watched more TV each day averaging about 30 minutes more than those without a TV.

- About 2/3 (68%) of children with TVs were selecting their own programs all or most of the time while fewer without a TV in their room choose all or most of their programs (52.6%)
- Children with TVs reported parents watching with them less frequently than children who had no TV in their room.
- Children with TVs in their rooms said that few TV-related rules applied in their homes (51%) than children with no TVs (37%).

**Overall simple access to a television is associated with less supervision, more watching, more consumption of MTV, and more decisions by the child about what to watch.**

*—17 June 1996*

## Appendix

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Characteristics of the parent	interview %	no interview %
<b>Sex</b>		
Men . . . . .	31 . . . . .	40
Women . . . . .	69 . . . . .	60
<b>Age</b>		
18-34 . . . . .	21 . . . . .	17
35-45 . . . . .	53 . . . . .	55
45 and over . . . . .	26 . . . . .	28
<b>Occupational Status</b>		
Executives/professionals . . . . .	36 . . . . .	32
White collar/sales workers . . . . .	18 . . . . .	19
Blue collar . . . . .	41 . . . . .	41
<b>Education</b>		
High school or less . . . . .	42 . . . . .	37
Some college . . . . .	28 . . . . .	32
Complete college . . . . .	30 . . . . .	29
<b>Type of community</b>		
Large/medium cities . . . . .	43 . . . . .	47
Suburb . . . . .	26 . . . . .	18
Small town/rural area . . . . .	31 . . . . .	32
<b>Ideology</b>		
Liberal . . . . .	27 . . . . .	27
Moderate . . . . .	26 . . . . .	24
Conservative . . . . .	40 . . . . .	39
<b>Religion</b>		
Protestant . . . . .	54 . . . . .	43
Catholic . . . . .	29 . . . . .	34
<b>Income</b>		
Below \$40K . . . . .	42 . . . . .	36
\$40K-\$75K . . . . .	37 . . . . .	35
Above \$75K . . . . .	17 . . . . .	15
<b>Race</b>		
White . . . . .	77 . . . . .	57
Black/Hispanic . . . . .	19 . . . . .	26

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