

LIVING WITHOUT TV: NOT SO BAD  
by Anne Wallace Allen

The numbers are staggering. In the average U.S. home, the television is on almost eight hours a day. A one-year-old child watches about six hours a week, and more than half of children eight to sixteen years old have a TV in their bedrooms. Those statistics come from TV-turnoff Network, the Washington-based organization that organizes National TV Turnoff Week each spring. This year it's April 23-29.

But TV Turnoff Week won't make much difference to Carol Begley and her family. A classics scholar married to another Ph.D., Begley wanted to raise her three sons to appreciate a culture more complex than the one presented on the tube. So the family does not own a TV at all. The Begleys are in the minority, to be sure. According to Nielson Media Research, only two percent of U.S. households have no television at all.

Advocates of life without television say its absence is good for children in two distinct ways. First, children who don't watch TV learn to entertain themselves through creative play, says Gregory Albright, a school teacher in Vermont. On a recent snowy day, Albright said of his own three children, "They have their own ideas about what they want to do. They're pretty intensely making igloos in the backyard, making giant snow caves, and sledding." Second, children who don't watch TV focus better at school according to Jessica Kobb, another teacher who has two students in her class with no television at home. "They seem to have a broader knowledge of the world around them because that knowledge comes from more sources, and it's not this boiled-down soundbite. Children in my classroom who don't watch TV seem to know more about a broader range of things. Their parents are out doing things with them; they are out in the world at large more."

Then there is what children see when they do watch television. Parents who grew up watching TV themselves several decades ago say that the content has degenerated in recent years, with more sex, sexism, bad language, off-color jokes, and just plain bad manners. "I'm not a prude, but I really think as a society, we keep stretching what's appropriate and what's okay," says Mary Bryant, who has an eight-year-old daughter at home and no TV.

- \* Do you agree or disagree with the author's ideas?
- \* Consider how much television you watched as a child.
- \* How much television do you watch now?
- \* Do you think that children are limited by what they see on television?
- \* Do you think children become less creative and/or less focused because of television?

Using information from the article above and personal experience, and/or the experience of someone else to support your position, write a paper in which you explain why you agree or disagree with Allen.