

Frequently Asked Questions TV-Turnoff Week April 24-30, 2006

Why turn off the television completely? Can we do it for just one day?"

Turning off the television for seven full days helps participants realize that life without television is not torture and may actually be more fun. A week-long TV-Turnoff allows sufficient time to develop habits likely to be more productive and rewarding. A one-day turnoff provides too little challenge.

"Is all TV bad? What about the Discovery Channel or PBS?"

All TV is passive, sedentary and non-experiential. Most viewers tend to watch show after show -- not individual programs. Instead of watching a documentary about birds, go out (with binoculars if you have them) and see how many live birds you can identify in your neighborhood. The purpose of National TV-Turnoff Week is to leave behind judgments about the quality of television and focus instead on creating, discovering, building, participating and doing. Turn off the Discovery Channel and make your own discoveries.

"What about media literacy and teaching critical viewing skills?"

By going without television for a week, people will learn a great deal about their television habits and will likely be more critical viewers if and when they decide to return to the tube. Television looks and sounds different after a Turnoff. The canned laughter and camera tricks often seem contrived after a week without the tube. A TV-Turnoff is a step along the path to media literacy.

"I can't give up my programs! Don't interfere in my home!"

Participation in National TV-Turnoff Week is voluntary and meant to be fun. It is intended to build family and community spirit. Coordinate your Turnoff in a way that does not alienate or offend parents -- they already have their hands full. Send a letter to parents that ask for the family's participation in the Turnoff. Indicate the support of the principal, the teachers, PTA or other groups that you have. Parents are more likely to sign on if they know that school professionals support the project.

"Do we have to plan an activity every night?"

Some organizers feel providing an activity every night doesn't mimic real life and allows for a big letdown after the Turnoff, so they plan just a few. Plan activities you might consider doing the following week. In-school activities are a possibility also, and most organizers agree it is good to have at least one family activity during the Turnoff.

"What about the former name of the Network, TV-Free America? Are you advocating the complete eradication of television?"

TV-Free America encourages Americans to reduce, voluntarily and dramatically, the amount of television they watch in order to promote richer, healthier and more connected lives, families and communities. A TV-Turnoff is an effective way to help break the television habit. While it may be unrealistic to think participants will never watch television again (although a few won't), many will regard the medium in a much different way henceforward.

Make the Turnoff fun and provocative. Copy and distribute articles and essays about the environmental and social issues surrounding television and have students debate the opposing views. Some teachers have awarded extra credits to participating students who keep a journal and write an essay about their week without television. Past TV-Turnoff organizers have asked local businesses (theaters, skating rinks, miniature golf courses, bowling alleys, etc.) to offer discounts to students, families, and individuals who show a signed TV-Turnoff "Pledge Card."

"I need some peace and quiet when I come home. The television occupies the kids while I fix dinner."

Invite the children to help with simple tasks or have them talk with you while you prepare dinner. Developing a few special (and regular) pre-dinner activities and habits for children is a very worthwhile investment. Some parents also find playing with kids for just a few minutes helps relax the kids as well as themselves.

"Our neighborhood is unsafe. Better that my kids sit in front of the television at home than risk harm outside."

There are many indoor activities that are fun, productive and TV-free. Ask neighbors to help develop alternative indoor and outdoor activities for participating families. Point out that neighborhood improvement will never occur as long as residents merely retreat to the fictional, vicarious world of television. Getting to know your neighbors is the first step in making a neighborhood safer.

"I can't afford the cost of these 'substitute' activities!"

There are many free and simple activities (lists) sponsored by libraries, environmental groups, museums and universities. Local newspapers will have listings of free, public events. Outdoor recreation is an activity that is generally free and healthy!