

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Going Behind the Screens

***CDC's VERB Campaign Offers Tips for Parents
To Reduce Youths' TV, Video Game, and Internet Time***

Chances are, if your children are like most, they spend too much time glued to the screen watching television, surfing the internet and playing video games. So, how can you break this habit without wrecking havoc in the home?

The answer, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, is to find fun, positive activities that children enjoy and to smartly manage their screen time.

“Experts suggest parents limit children’s total screen time to no more than one to two hours of quality programming per day,” said Dr. Jim Marks, M.D., M.P.H., director of the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at the Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC). “By contrast, most children are spending more than six hours in front of a screen.”¹

Reducing Screen Time

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ CDC developed the **VERB.™ It’s what you do.** campaign to increase positive physical and prosocial activities among tweens, between the ages of 9 and 13, and displace unhealthy, risky behaviors. Following are 10 tips for parents to help their children make a painless transition from couch potato to a physically and prosocially active child.

- Remove television sets from children’s bedrooms.
- View television programs with children and discuss the content.
- Use the VCR to show or record high-quality, educational programming for children.
- Suggest several options for positive physical and prosocial activities that are available through local park districts, schools, and community programs.
- Recommend prosocial activities, such as volunteering at Humane Society of the United States (visit www.hsus.org).
- Encourage alternative activities for children, including hobbies, athletics, and creative play.
- Support efforts to establish comprehensive programs in schools that include quality, daily physical education; classroom education; daily recess periods; and extracurricular physical activity programs.
- Form coalitions including libraries, faith-based organizations, and neighborhood groups to help provide physical and social environments that encourage and enable safe and enjoyable physical activity, including new sidewalks, safe parks and keeping close-to-home physical activity facilities open at night.
- Ensure that appropriate activity options are available for disabled children.
- Serve as a good role model; be active when viewing television and surfing the Internet in the home.²

Statistics Tell the Story

“Children who watch a lot of television are less likely to engage in positive physical and prosocial activities,” Dr. Marks says. “According to the National Association for Sports and Physical Education, children should participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day, such as walking or playing basketball.”

Following are additional statistics related to screen time and the sedentary lifestyle that VERB aims to displace with healthy activities for tweens.

- Twenty-six percent of U.S. children watch four or more hours of television per day.
- Sixty-seven percent of U.S. children watch two or more hours of television per day.
- Almost half (48 percent) of all families with tweens have all four of the latest media staples: TV, VCR, video game equipment and a computer.
- More homes have an Internet subscription (52 percent) than a newspaper subscription (42 percent).
- The bedroom of the 21st century child is a multimedia environment. Of children 9 to 13 years old, more than half (57 percent) have a TV in the

bedroom, 39 percent have video game equipment, 30 percent have a VCR, 20 percent a computer and 11 percent Internet access.¹

How to Learn More

The integrated **VERB.™ It's what you do.** campaign uses advertising, marketing, events, and partnership activities to ensure that campaign messages reach children whenever they are looking for something positive to do. Through multicultural media partnerships, the campaign is designed to reach children in all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds — including specific outreach for African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Hispanic/Latinos. The VERB Web site, www.VERBparents.com, is a resource for busy parents looking for ways to encourage positive prosocial and physical activities among tweens and discourage unhealthy, risky behaviors. For more information about the campaign see www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign or visit the tween Web site at www.VERBnow.com.

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¹ Woodward, Emory H., *Media in the Home 2000: The Fifth Annual Survey of Parents and Children*, 2000.

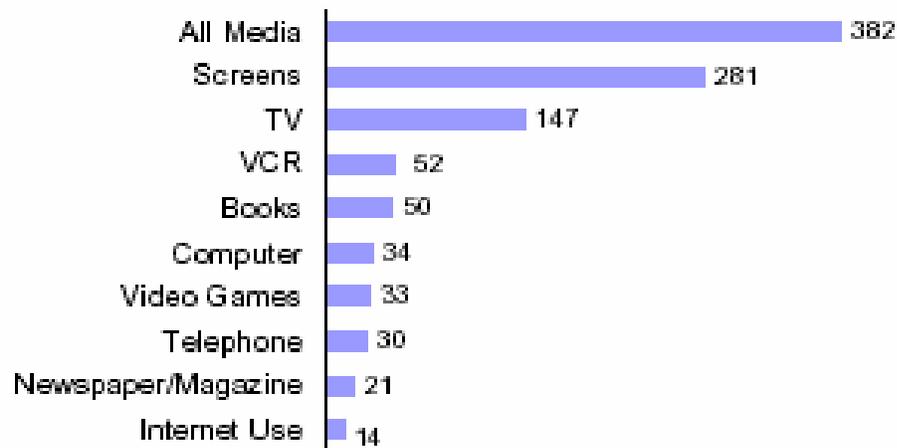
² The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, *Children, Adolescents and Television*, *Pediatrics*, Vol. 107, No. 2, February 2001.

Sidebar:

Where Does the Time Go? Increased Screen Time Contributes to Unhealthy Lifestyles

The following bar graph illustrates the number of minutes children spend each day on “screen time,” an average of nearly 6.5 hours per day per child. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children spend a maximum of two hours per day on screen time, and the National Association for Sports and Physical Education suggests that children participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day.

Figure 2.1: Average Daily Minutes Spent with Media by All Children 2-17 (Parental Report)



Woodard, IV, Emory H. and Gridina, Natalia (2000). *Media in the Home 2000*, The Fifth Annual Survey of Parents and Children. The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.