Commercialization of Children's Television and Its Effect on Imaginative Play

Toy-based television programs, commonly known as program-length commercials, and television-activated toys exploit children as consumers. Of more urgent concern is their potential to promote violent and aggressive behavior, increase the intellectual passivity with which children view television, and inhibit imaginative play.1

Almost all of the 20 best selling toys on the market today are based on television programs. More than half of these toys have violent themes. Many glorify war. Clearly, the commercialization of children's television promotes violence as well as sales. It does little to entertain or educate our children.

Television-activated toys take the exploitation of program-length commercials one step further. These toys are activated by inaudible signals broadcast during a program. They are referred to as "interactive," but no descriptor could be more misleading. Although the television affects the toy and the child, no reciprocal interaction occurs.

Television-activated toys represent the third, and potentially most hazardous, phase in the commercialization of children's television. Initially, the promotion of toys on television was limited to commercials. After the toy was purchased, the child decided when and how to play with it. In the next phase, program-length commercials were developed to market toys and to show children how to play with them.

The development of television-activated toys almost completely eliminates the creative role of the child. Children need only to buy the toy; the television will play with it for them.

Parents should consider a child's playtime as an active, creative process that requires imagination. Television-activated toys interfere with this process. Such toys increase the already considerable passivity with which children view television. In the rare cases in which interaction is provided—such as those that simulate gunfights with televised characters—violent and aggressive behavior often results.

Some parents erroneously assume that children must be constantly engaged in some activity and encourage television viewing as an alternative to unstructured time. This time, far from being a negative state, can generate creativity and self-reliance. Prolonged television viewing is a major source of inactivity and can cause a variety of adverse health and behavioral disorders.2,3 These observations suggest that children may be healthier doing nothing, rather than watching television.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following:

1. Parents should be educated concerning the hazards of prolonged television viewing and should, therefore, limit the amount of time their children spend watching television and monitor the programs they are viewing.

2. Parents and pediatricians should actively oppose television-activated toys, as well as the growing commercialization of children's television that these toys represent. They should register their disapproval by writing to legislators and the television networks.

3. Congress should continue to hold hearings on the effect that televised violence and toys that glorify war have on children.

4. Research on the impact on children of telev...
vised violence and toys that glorify violence should be encouraged and supported.

5. Legislation that mandates daily broadcasts of educational and instructional programs and provides alternatives to programs that promote toys should be introduced and supported.

COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, 1987–1988
Robert A. Mendelson, MD, Chairman
William H. Dietz, MD, PhD
Stanley Karp, MD
Larry Patton, MD
Steven P. Shelov, MD
Loraine M. Stern, MD

Consultants
Robert C. Hauck, MD
Victor S. Strasburger, MD

REFERENCES


### Commercialization of Children's Television and Its Effect on Imaginative Play

*Pediatrics* 1988;81:900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Updated Information &amp; Services</th>
<th>including high resolution figures, can be found at: <a href="http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/81/6/900">http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/81/6/900</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permissions &amp; Licensing</td>
<td>Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online at: <a href="https://shop.aap.org/licensing-permissions/">https://shop.aap.org/licensing-permissions/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprints</td>
<td>Information about ordering reprints can be found online: <a href="http://classic.pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/reprints">http://classic.pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/reprints</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commercialization of Children's Television and Its Effect on Imaginative Play

*Pediatrics* 1988;81;900

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:

http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/81/6/900