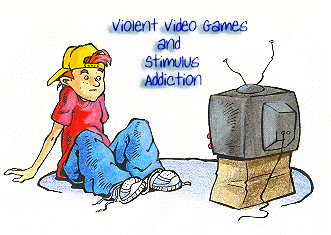
Media Addiction

Reference Material

The average television set is on for more than seven hours every day. The average person spends forty-two hours per week watching TV. The average American invests more time with television than with his job. If this average person lives to sixty-five, she/he will have given five years of their life, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to television. Even people who insist “I never watch television” watch more than twenty hours per week.



Adults set the pace for their children by not limiting viewing time. More than half the twelve-year-olds in America watch six plus hours of television each day. By the time most students graduate from high school, they will have spent more time watching TV than with any other activity except sleeping. In the process, they will have witnessed 18,000 murders and taken in 350,000 commercials.

**Signs of Addiction**

Let’s take a simple test to see if you’re a TV addict. You can also adjust these questions to apply to any media: tapes, video, magazines, etc. Answer the questions honestly:

1. Do you carefully select your programs in advance or do you simply watch whatever is on? Certainly, you pick your favorite show, but what about at other times like before, during and after dinner, after school, etc. times when you have “nothing to do.”
2. Does television crowd out of your life many things you insist are important to you … such as your friends, hobbies, projects? Be honest! You’re watching the tube and one of your friends calls. So, you either tell them to call back, tell them about the show you are watching (even though your friend could care less) or not say anything and watch the show while you “talk” on the phone (you throw in an “uh huh” every now and then to make your friend think you are paying attention to them).
3. Do you continually switch channels looking for higher levels of excitement? Are you a “remote control commando” always flicking the station? Some people watch several shows at one time so they don’t miss out on anything.
4. Do you “black out” on what you have watched? Can you remember what you watched the night before? Last week? When we are in the habit of doing something, we rarely remember what we do, except for maybe a couple significant events. This principle is true for any habit: like eating. Do you remember what you ate yesterday? Last Wednesday?
5. Do you have trouble crossing the living room without the irresistible urge to turn on the set? This one seems the funniest, but it is also the most revealing. I dare you to go sit in the living room and not turn the set on.
6. Do you believe that you watch less television than other families? An addict always feels that there are many others “worse off than me.” You have already done a “miniproject” which gives you an idea of how much you watch TV.
7. Is your television set the “center” of the living room? So often we arrange our furniture around the television because it is so important to us.

Well, how did you do? If you were honest, you fit in with most of the rest

of us. It is truly amazing how much control we allow our television set over us, isn’t it? Maybe you still do not believe that media can control you. That’s okay. I’m really not trying to convince you, either, but I am trying to bring some important issues to your attention for you to consider.

For the sake of argument, let’s go on with the assumption that media does have ‘some to a lot’ of control over us. Prime time television gives us a new culture relentlessly attacking the old. Media offers a “life in the fast lane, with-here-and-now, polished people who drive flashy cars and wear sexy clothes.” Who would want to adopt a dull life of commitment, friendship, service and (ha) consideration of others?



The fast lane almost always gives story lines that include sex outside of marriage, divorce, and homosexuality. Behaviors once considered improper or wrong according to former “traditional values” may now be pushed on the public as right. Change can be good. However, we should consider how accepting new values and adopting new ways of behaving will play out in the long run. Will there be undesirable consequences? Once people become “desensitized” to a new wave of thinking, things we once considered “bad” or “wrong” become okay and right. If these new values prove to have negative consequences in the future, then we have given into “alien” values. The bottom line: who is determining our values?

Media “attacks” us in the privacy and comfort of our own homes. We watch killing, illicit sex, rampant violence, good guys breaking the law … and best of all … we see “how much more we need because we don’t have enough,” thanks to advertising. We may be relaxing in our homes, but we allow strangers to teach us day by day. Hollywood writers and producers tell us what they think about violence, uncommitted sex and deceit. They tell us what they think the “good life” is and how we should live it.

**Turning the Table**

How can we control the media rather than allowing it to control us? Below are a few guidelines, which can make media a positive part of our lives. I will discuss television in particular, but again you can adjust these guidelines to include any source of media.

1. Know that you’re going to look at. If we want to make wise choices concerning any issue, we need to not fool ourselves by pleading ignorance. If we know that is on the tube, we can make wise choices. Is what we’re watching going to promote something that we personally feel is wrong? Then, don’t watch.



1. Set limits. Many parents love to use the boob tube as a babysitting device. This is fine for a short time, but six to seven hours a day? Somebody has neglected his or her own responsibility. Setting goals on how much or how long we view media is a basic and necessary step to “taking control.”
2. Make viewing decisions ahead of time. We should know that we want to watch, when we will watch it and how long we will spend viewing. Use the TV guide to choose programs you watch in the coming week – and stick to your decisions. It is very difficult to discipline ourselves to adjust to our changing emotions. For instance, you may not want to watch TV all the time, but you had a bad day, so … buzz! You watch even longer than normal.
3. Evaluate the role media plays in our lives. What priority is media in your life? A priority is what we value … but the bottom line is how much time do you spend doing a certain thing. If we spend a lot of time watching television, listening to music, reading magazines, etc. then these things are important and a high priority to us.
4. What am I NOT doing while I spend time watching TV for several hours a day?
5. How does TV or media separate me from other people, from physical activity, from exploring new areas of life?
6. Does the entertainment and information I gain from the media compensate for everything else I give up to watch TV or view the media?
7. Do I spend time watching TV to escape from tensions or difficulties like conflicts with other people? Am I running from family problems, etc. In what ways am I using media s a temporary relief rather than seeking long-term solutions to problems?
8. What are my goals in life? A happy marriage? Raising children? Being a scum bum?
9. How does media affect my ability to fulfill my priorities in life? In other words, do I watch TV rather than work on hobbies or projects that I’d like to get done? What do I need to change in order to meet my goals?
10. Turn off the TV set for a week or two. This gives everyone a chance to see that life without television is possible. In addition, when you begin to watch TV again, it is easier to keep viewing at a lower level than if you try to work down to that point gradually. We become “numb” to the negative values we see in media because we see illicit sex, violence, deceit, and the importance of winning so often. We are flooded with these things. If you “get away” for awhile, you regain sensitivity and can “see clearer” that many of these things are unhealthy.
11. Set certain times of the day or week when the television will not be on, such as mealtimes or other family times … or even to do (cough) homework!
12. Fill up your newly freed up time with worthwhile activities and projects. Play some games. Make models. Paint your little brother’s hair green (oops, saw that on a commercial).
13. This last one may seem a joke, but it does help: form a support group. Tell one of your friends that you would like to reduce the amount of time that you spend watching TV. They can call you at certain "prime times” that you have wanted to cut out TV watching. Or better yet, they can come over and you can do something else. This is called accountability and is a very helpful tool to solve or alleviate a lot of problems and bad situations.

The bottom line of controlling our media “intake” is to be honest enough to ask the following questions and act on your solutions:

* How shall I use my time?
* What kind of entertainment will I allow to nourish or feed my mind?
* What programs and media forms will I support by viewing?
* What products will I purchase as a result of media advertisement?
* How will I allow media to change my thinking, my values (what you believe is right versus wrong), your beliefs and your relationships?
* What else could I do – or whom could I be with – if I did not spend a particular time watching TV or listening/viewing my media?

Television and media add much to the enjoyment and enrichment of our lives. So can games, reading healthy-wholesome literature, work projects, trips and conversation. Because it is so easy to hide behind a television show or some book or tape, we have lost the art of talking and LISTENING to each other. We need a balance of all those items, which are necessary to give us healthy productive lives.

It is possible to utilize almost every waste product in the world today. We use garbage to make oil. We recycle many things to reduce trash. We car pool to save on pollution and gas, etc, etc. But we cannot recycle or reuse time. The selective use of television or other media forms can widen our world, but time wasted on these can never be brought back.

**… think about it.**