

For Immediate Release

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10 Tips on Using TV and Video Games to Help Your Child Learn

With summertime in full swing and the kids out of school, the Turtle Wing Foundation wants all families to have positive summers, especially those who have children with learning differences. It can be a dance with child and parent as to how much screen time is OK and also how to work in some academics to keep brains primed and ready to go back to school in a few months. According to Lexi Walters Wright (www.LD.org) it's smart to limit screen time—whether television, video games or tablets. But sometimes screen time and learning can go hand in hand! Check out ways to use TV and video games to your child's advantage. Tech can forge friendships. Does your child feel different around his classmates and peers? Knowing the names of characters in popular video games, television shows and movies can help him feel like he fits in and give him a leg up on building social skills. Plus, being able to invite someone over to play a new game or watch an episode can create inroads to new friendships. Media can motivate. For kids who have trouble completing homework or following through with chores, screen time can be motivating. Just be sure to discuss in advance the terms of your agreement, including what your child must accomplish before turning on the device, when he has to shut it off, and what the consequences will be if he doesn't follow the rules. It's a good idea to write down your agreement and post it where your child can see it. It's also wise for the deal to include you reviewing your child's work for quality and accuracy. Games can improve memory. Research shows that certain types of video games can help children who have weak working memory and executive functioning skills. Games that require players to make a plan and follow it through—like espionage games—force players to remember the results of each action and make decisions based on them. TV shows can model behavior. Are social interactions a challenge for your child? Transform a favorite television program into a tool for discussing troublesome interactions. For example, you can turn the volume off and ask your child to interpret characters' body language

and facial expressions. Another good exercise is to pause a show and ask your child to predict the reactions of various characters. This gives your child a chance to work on these skills in a context that's familiar but nonthreatening. Games can connect kids. Many video games now pit multiple players against one another in real time. This allows children to communicate directly with other players. These online exchanges can feel meaningful for kids who have trouble making connections with their peers at school. It can allow your child to feel engaged and understood, even if he's exclusively talking about the game. TV, games and apps can reinforce basic concepts. If your child is in preschool or grade school, ask him to look for specific letters, numbers or shapes onscreen during TV time. This encourages active TV watching as well as letter, number and shape recognition skills. Lots of apps and games help reinforce these skills, too. If your child is in middle school or high school, TV can be a good tool for understanding humor, sarcasm and wordplay. There are also some video games that can help kids work on physical coordination. Discussing programs can increase attention. Let your child choose a TV show or movie to watch with you, then talk about what happened: How did the plot unfold? How did the characters feel at key times? Was there anything confusing about the show? These conversations encourage memory, attention to detail and time organization skills (called sequencing). Plus, they get your child thinking and talking critically about something he has demonstrated an interest in. Set limits on screen time. Even though TV shows, video games and other media can be used as learning tools, experts recommend parents set limits on how much children use this technology. It's recommended not to allow screen time for kids under age 2. Babies and toddlers are learning rapidly, and they do this best by interacting with people, not screens. Try to limit screen time each day to one to two hours for children and teens. Create technology-free zones. Just because kids can use technology anywhere doesn't mean they should use technology everywhere. Help your child get more sleep by keeping screens and game consoles out of his bedroom. Turning off the TV during dinner will help the family focus on listening to one another and practicing conversation skills. Seek out quality content. Be aware of the quality of what your child is watching and provide input on your child's choices. Visit CommonSenseMedia.org to browse titles and reviews of movies and TV shows. Apps like Zoodles can restrict access on computers and phones to age-appropriate games. Sites like Netflix also have a "kids" setting that provides only child-friendly content.

Lexi Walters Wright is a writer, editor and sometime librarian whose work has appeared on health, family and home design websites. She chases her toddler through the woods of Florence, Massachusetts.

For more information on the Turtle Wing Foundation and the upcoming Toast please contact DeeAnn Hooper (979-743-5371) or visit www.turtlewingfoundation.org.

PHOTO: Texas State Seal piece to be auctioned off at the Turtle Wing Toast

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