Harmful Effects of Watching Television

In a recent cartoon, one character said to another, ‘when you think of the awesome power of television to educate, aren’t you glad it doesn’t? It is true that television has the power to educate, and to entertain, but unfortunately, these benefits are outweighed by the harm it does to dedicated viewers. Television is harmful because it creates passivity, discourages communication, and presents a false picture of reality.

Television makes viewers passive, Children who have an electronic babysitter spend most of their walking hours in a semiconscious state. Older viewers watch tennis matches and basketball games with none of excitement of being in the stands. Even if children are watching Sesame Street of Barney and Friends, they are being educated passively. The child actors are going on nature walks, building crafts projects, playing with animals, and participating in games, but the little viewers are simply watching.

Older viewers watch guests discuss issues with Oprah Winfrey, but no one will turn to the home viewers to ask their opinion. Worst of all, TV presents a false picture of reality that leaves viewers frustrated because they don’t have the beauty of wealth of the characters on television. Viewers absorb the idea that everyone else in the United States owns a lavish apartment, a suburban house, a sleek car, and an expensive wardrobe. Every detective, police officer, oil baron, and lawyer, male or female, is suitable for a pinup poster. The material possessions of TV show and commercials contribute to the false imam of reality. News anchors and reporters, with their perfect hair and makeup, must fit television’s standard of beauty. From their modest homes or cramped apartments, many viewers tune in daily to the upper-middle class world that TV glorifies.

Television discourages communication. Families watching television do very little talking except for brief exchanges during commercials. If, next-door neighbor Aunt drops for a visit, the most comfortable activity for everyone maybe not conversation but watching Cricket. The family may not even be watching the same wet, instead, in some households, all the family members head for their own rooms to watch their own sets. At dinner, plates are plopped on the coffee table in front of the set, and the meal is wolfed down during Dawn Nightly News. During commercials, the only communication a family has all night may consist of questions like “Do we have any popcorn?” and “where’s TV Guide?”

Television, like cigarettes or saccharin, is harmful to our health. We are becoming isolated, passive, and frustrated. And, most frightening, the average viewer now spends more time watching television than ever before.