

Transcribed from the Family Album Radio Program, a co-production of University of Florida IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences and of WUFT-FM. If you'd like to learn more, please visit our website at [familyalbumradio.org](http://familyalbumradio.org)

*Listening, learning,  
and living together:  
it's the science of life.*

## TV and Very Young Children<sup>1</sup>

*Suzanna Smith<sup>2</sup>*

Television is a huge part of family life in the United States. Most households have 3 or more TVs, and "in the average American home, the television is on about 6 hours a day" (Vandewater et al., 2005, p. 562).

Television is a big part of children's lives, too. Recent research conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2005) found that nearly 60% of children under the age of two watch TV on a typical day for an average of two hours. Nearly 40% of children ages 6 and under live in a house where the TV is always or mostly on, even if no one is watching (Vandewater et al., 2005, p. 573).

For years, TV programming for children was aimed at preschoolers and older children. Research showed that some educational programs could help three-, four- and five-year-olds build vocabulary and develop language and thinking skills (see review in Kaiser, 2005). New programs are now targeting toddlers and even babies. Current research shows that children under the age of two do pay attention to programs that are made for them, but that babies and toddlers do not seem to learn much from TV, while they do learn more from live interactions with people (Anderson & Pempek, 2005). In fact, watching TV or having TV on in the background may interfere with their

1. This document is FAR0425, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published March 2009. In the interest of time or clarity, the broadcast version of this script may have been modified. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Suzanna Smith, associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

cognitive development and ability to focus (Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Wartella, Vandewater, & Rideout, 2005; Vandewater et al., 2005).

Researchers admit that not much is known about the impacts of media on the very youngest children, and more research is needed.\* But in the meantime, parents who want their children to watch TV may want to choose high-quality educational programs—and make sure to balance these with time for just plain playing and talking.

Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life. "Family Album" is a co-production of University of Florida IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences and of WUFT-FM. If you'd like to learn more, please visit our Web site at <http://www.familyalbumradio.org>.

To listen to the radio broadcast:

[http://www.radiosource.net/radio\\_stories/427.mp3](http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/427.mp3)

[http://www.radiosource.net/radio\\_stories/427.wav](http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/427.wav)