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## Planning the Family Media Diet

BY PEGGY O'BRIEN, PH.D.

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JUNE—THE MONTH OF WEDDINGS, GRADUATIONS, Father's Day, and the start of summer vacation for millions of students around the country. For the next many weeks, they will be sleeping in, taking classes, building forts, working summer jobs, and probably spending a lot more time in front of the television, computer, and video game console. This realization, coupled with the fact that kids can easily access good and not-so-good content through a wide variety of media, can lead parents to question how to understand and control what their children see, view, read, and hear.

Recently, the National PTA and Cable in the Classroom introduced a report for parents of young children, "Navigating the Children's Media Landscape: A Parent's and Caregiver's Guide." This guide addresses concerns parents have about how their children are using media and provides practical guidelines for developing a plan to create media-savvy children.

It's important that parents ask themselves a series of questions about their family's media use:

- > What media do you currently use? What would you like to use?
- > What media are you and your children comfortable using?
- > What are children viewing at school and friends' homes?
- > What are the current shows, Web sites, magazines, toys, and computer games that are popular with children today?
- > Is the media you select age-appropriate? Does it engage your child, or does it seem to be confusing and frustrating?
- > Do you use media in creative ways? Do you encourage reflective opportunities by asking your children questions while they use media?
- > Do you work with your child to access, understand, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a wide range of media?
- > Do you encourage your children to explore media while supervising and considering each use?

**"A good family media-use strategy can only produce articulate and astute kids and adults."**

The cable networks that create programming and online resources for children take seriously their responsibility to present the best material available. This issue of *Access Learning* is all about solving the dilemma of how to educate children to both understand and question media, thereby allowing them to develop their own media habits. Much like bringing up children to eat foods they like while maintaining a healthy diet, a good family media-use strategy can only produce articulate and astute kids and adults.

Monitoring what media your young children use is similar to monitoring older children's friends and social activities. If you don't agree with the plan, location, curfew, or group, tell them no. This isn't the time for negotiation. As parents and caregivers, we should be educated ourselves, use good judgment, and decide what is best for our children. Parents do not need to be fearful or turn a blind eye to media. Media has the singular ability to take us around the world, teach us new languages and cultures, or simply entertain—and the summer is the perfect opportunity to begin this process!

"Navigating the Children's Media Landscape: A Parent's and Caregiver's Guide" is available at [www.ciconline.org/navigate](http://www.ciconline.org/navigate)

