

A Twelve-Step Programme for TV Addicts

Father John McCloskey

Is watching television a problem in your home? The average American family watches more than seven hours of television a day. From a Catholic standpoint, it becomes not simply a question of the use of leisure time, but also an issue of morality.

An axiom of traditional moral theology is that we try never to place ourselves in occasions of sin. And it is safe to say that the overwhelming content of today's television programming does not have a positive influence on its viewers. It does not reflect in any substantial way, except accidentally, a Catholic view of the meaning of life.

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With its unrelenting emphasis on violence, sexual license, glamour, frivolity and the unrelenting search for the amassing of wealth and ephemeral pleasures, we could say that it certainly is one of the major proponents of the "culture of death" that Pope John Paul II refers to. What can we do to control, if not eliminate, our addiction to the "plug-in drug"?

1 Throw the television out. First, calculate the total number of hours spent by your family watching television each week. Then figure out how that time could be spent constructively. How many books could be read, hobbies or skills acquired, museums visited, serious music listened to, instruments mastered, spiritual and corporal works of mercy performed, family get-togethers held or simply homework done more effectively?

2 OK, so you are not ready to go cold turkey. Consider keeping the television locked and in a high place. Television is a dangerous substance, not unlike alcohol or a gun. Parents should keep the key.

3 There should be only one television in the house. It is unthinkable to allow a child to have ready

access to a dangerous substance such as a television set in his room without adult supervision.

4 Television programs that are watched should be limited and generally educational, or at least entertaining in a way that is formative for a Catholic family.

5 Generally, television programs should be watched by the entire family. This should assure their decency, foster family unity and allow for reaction and discussion.

6 Channel surfing is strictly prohibited. No one in the family should sit down in the living room, ask out loud, "I wonder what is on television tonight?" and start changing channels.

7 Never use the television as a baby-sitter. Read to your children and open up their eager imaginations. There will come a time when they will thank you effusively for your loving care of their minds and hearts at a time they didn't know any better.

8 Never use television as a reward for homework done or household chores performed.

9 Yes, you can use television as an educational instrument. Go to your local public library or video store, or peruse the video catalogs and rent or purchase those films or television series that will form your children's character in virtue according to your standards, not MTV's. Make a plan for the academic or calendar year for regular Saturday-night viewing with family and friends.

10 Don't belong to "the church of what's happening now." Generally, have your children get their news coverage from a reading of the newspaper (with proper instruction as to the newspaper's particular slant or spin). Reading a newspaper or good magazine allows them to ponder and reflect rather than simply being told what is important by a "talking head" on television news.

11 As a rule, the television set should not be on during meals. Meals, apart from their nutritive aspects, are wonderful occasions for families to share experiences and grow in unity. Given today's breakneck lifestyle, meals often are the only opportunity on a daily basis for the whole family to be together.

12 Nintendo and Sega Genesis are out. Video games should not be allowed in the house. If television is marijuana, then video games are heroin. Never has so much time been wasted for so little.

I am sure that parents could give many additional tips. I simply suggest that several of these words of advice might help to assure that the Catholic family controls television rather than being controlled by it.

Christ, not your favorite sitcom, should be at the heart of the family. After all, what would it profit a family if it was "amused to death" but lost its soul?

Source: [Catholicity](#)