set time-table that her mother, Prema, is quite strict about. Nusaira is only allowed a couple of hours of TV. Prema also makes sure that her daughter is not exposed to violent shows as she tries to monitor what her child watches on TV.

"I like watching "Tom and Jerry" and "Oggy and the Cockroaches" on Cartoon Network. I spend around a couple of hours each day watching TV but I also have a number of other hobbies. I love playing football, I like going to the hardware store with my dad and I enjoy spending time with my friends," says the lively eight-year old.

Nusaira's parents understand that if they want to provide their daughter with a healthy childhood, they have to limit the TV hours.

Instead of despairing over your children's addiction to your television sets, parents can easily change the situation by making an effort.

Children should not be allowed to watch TV during meal times or when they are doing their homework. Tell your children that they must finish their homework before they can watch the TV, even if their favourite show is on. You could record the show so that your child can watch it later on.

Social interactions are a must for a child's holistic development. You should spend as much time as you can with your children. Your interactions with your child will improve his/her conversational skills and your relationship with them.

You could also encourage your kids to engage in other forms of recreation like sports, art, music and literature. One day of the weekend could be dedicated to family time. You could set a game night or plan a picnic.

Don't place too much value on the TV. You should never use it as a reward or punishment as your children will then attach importance to it as well. If you want to keep your children busy, involve them in what you are doing. If you are making a meal, your child could set the plates. If you are working on an assignment, set her up with drawing pencils, a notebook and other stationery items to make her feel like she is doing something important as well. Most importantly, discourage others from using TV as a distraction for your kids. When they are with other adults, supply them with puzzles, crayons and other fun items so that they are kept engaged.

Supervision is important if you want to understand what your child is watching. Instead of imposing an immediate ban on a show, watch it with your child and talk about it later on. Tell them why it is unsuitable for them. Talk to them about how certain shows stereotype people and situations. Discuss reality and fiction with them so that your children are aware that what they are watching on the telly is not representative of the real life.



There needs to be more shows like the popular animated series "Meena," which was both entertaining and educational.

As said earlier, children learn by example. So you need to be sure that you practice what you preach. Don't watch shows with mature content in front of your kids. Just as your child needs to spend time away from the TV, you too need to spend your free time engaging in healthier activities like reading, listening to music or even exercising.

TV for kids ought to combine entertainment with some sort of value, be it educational or artistic. Furthermore, while it needn't be juvenile or dumbed down, it cannot contain elements that are completely unfit for a very young audience. Unfortunately, we cannot control what is being shown on our television sets. We can, however, lead our children to understand that there is a world outside of the virtual one. And it's not all that bad out there. ■