

# The Impact of Cartoons on Child Development

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Picture from: <https://petmaya.com/24-disney-paintings/>

Nowadays, it's a common scene to observe parents giving their children tablets or cellphones to watch cartoons. This keeps children quiet and occupied during adult conversations or outings, preventing them from becoming a nuisance. Some parents even permit their children to indulge in watching cartoons throughout the day, especially during vacation time. According to AAP Policy Statement on Media Violence (year), children between 0 and 6 years of age spend an average of nearly 2 hours each day engaged with screen media, which includes television, movies, and computers. Additionally, American children between 8 and 18 years old spend an average of 6 hours and 21 minutes daily consuming entertainment media. Some caregivers believe that watching cartoons can provide children with an imaginative world that stimulates their creativity and imagination. However, certain parents believe that viewing cartoons is unproductive, as it primarily offers entertainment without providing any educational value. So, which perspective is correct? Cartoons, like any other form of entertainment, can both have positive and negative impact on child development; consequently, parental guidance is absolutely essential.

Numerous researchers have studied the impact of cartoons on child development. Some studies have uncovered positive effects on children. For instance, a study conducted in Turkey by Omer Kocak<sup>1</sup> found that educational cartoons support children's conceptual development. This means that cartoons can help children acquire

new words, aid in acquiring new information and improve their thinking skills. Another study from Thailand presented in International Conference on Primary Education<sup>2</sup> revealed that media had an effect on children's behavior and keep it into their character in the future and cartoon animation with conceptual elements can be used to release their aggressive behavior and develop the right behavior. Conversely, many studies emphasize the critical importance of being cautious about exposure to violence in cartoons. The American Academy of Pediatrics (year), recognizes the exposure to violence in various media, including television, movies, music, and video games, as a significant risk to the health of both children and adolescents. The impact of cartoons on children's development depends on several factors, including the content of the cartoon, the age of the child, and the timing of viewing.

Furthermore, cartoons can also benefit children's development by introducing them to new words and phrases, stimulating their imagination and creativity, teaching them about morals, and helping them develop problem-solving skills and teamwork. Some cartoons can also teach children about emotions, social situations and how to interact with others. Educational cartoons can teach children about specific topics such as science and history. However, it is important that the content is age-appropriate and should be balanced with other activities.

Although cartoons can have many positive effects on children, they can also have negative consequences, especially when children are exposed to inappropriate content such as violence, sexual themes, and harmful content that they cannot understand. If children watch cartoons with negative attitudes and behaviors such as disrespectful behaviors, it can lead to the development of aggressive and negative behavior, attention deficit, impulsiveness and lack of self-control. Overexposure to screen time can also lead to a sedentary lifestyle and can have a negative impact on physical health, limiting opportunities for social interaction and even correlated with depressive symptoms.

### **What is the appropriate age for watching cartoons?**

The first two years of life are critical periods for brain, language, and emotional development. Children develop language skills through observation and listening, prompting parents to engage in two-way communication using interactive activities and book reading, instead of solely depending on television. Multiple studies have revealed that children learn more effectively from a person who is with them face-to-face than from a person on a screen. Storytelling and reading books enable toddlers to learn about language, sounds, and words, boost their imaginative capacity, foster social skills, and expand their

knowledge of the world around them. Even though bright colored cartoons may attract young children, they are incapable of understanding the content, and the language used in cartoons is too rapid for their capacity, resulting in delayed speech and language babbling.

From 3 to 5 years of age, children can understand and enjoy simple plots of cartoons, so educational cartoons that teach basic concepts such as colors, numbers, and letters will be helpful. Cartoons with simple, repetitive phrases and songs can also help them develop language skills.

Children aged 6 to 9 years old can watch cartoons with more complex storylines and characters, as well as some adventure, but parents should be careful about introducing violent and sexual content in cartoons.

Similarly, teenagers can watch cartoons designed for older audiences, such as anime, but parents should still be cautious about the content. In the present day, there is a significant prevalence of anime and webtoons that include attractive sexual content under the name of comedy and action. This makes children susceptible to the potential risk of negative influences.

It is also not recommended that children are exposed to cartoons that contain violence as it can have negative effects on them such as developing aggressive behaviors and difficulty controlling their emotions. Cartoons like "Tom and Jerry" and similar shows which feature slapstick and chase scenes with many unrealistic dangers, may not be suitable for younger children. Similarly, cartoons featuring teams of teenagers using special powers to fight evil or crime may as well be too intense for them but can be allowed for older children who can distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Children under the age of 3 may not understand the difference between real and animated characters, but they still have perceptions and reactions to visual and auditory elements presented in cartoons. Bright colors, simple shapes, familiar images, happy and positive characters, and soothing music can calm them, but loud and scary images can provoke anxiety and fear.

It is common for babies and young children to imitate their favorite characters. Parents should be mindful of both the positive and negative effects of this imitation. While cartoons can serve as role models for positive behavior such as kindness, empathy, courage, and teamwork, they can also promote the use of violence or aggression to solve problems and risky behaviors. It is important for parents to view and preview cartoons before allowing their children to watch them and to monitor screen time to balance it with other activities such as physical play, reading, and socializing with others.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has established recommendations for children's media use. The current recommendations advise:

- For children under 18 months, avoid screen-based media except video chatting.
- For children 18 months to 24 months, parents should choose high-quality programming and watch with their children.
- For children 2 to 5, limit screen time to one hour per day of high-quality programming.
- For children 6 and up, establish consistent limits on the time spent using media and the types of media.

Given that cartoons can have both positive and negative impacts on children, parents and caregivers should consider the following factors:

- The content of the cartoons: ensure they are age-appropriate, avoids excessive violence or inappropriate themes.
- Guided Viewing: Engage with your child, especially younger children, by watching with them and discussing the theme and message of the cartoon can help them better understand the difference between fantasy and reality. This can also help parents identify any negative messages or behaviors displayed by the characters.
- Setting Limits: Establish clear guidelines for screen time and the types of cartoons children are allowed to watch. Balance screen time with other activities.

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