



My dad has a 14" tube

This title surely captured your interest, but in today's playground talk, the reprisal would be "Oh yeah, my dad's is 21 inches and I control the remote," rather than what you might expect. These nineties playmates are discussing the fact that they are being raised by—for want of a better term—appliances. Busy, overworked, uninvolved or self-centered parents are turning to electronic caretakers in droves, with little attention to what will be the outcome of a childhood of boob-tube babysitting.

Mary Pipher is a psychologist in Lincoln, Nebraska, and her new book, *The Shelter of Each Other* talks about the delegation of child rearing by today's parents to electronic devices. Socialization is being done by the likes of the X-men, Batman, and Mario. Television is the long-time culprit, but traditionally it drained rather than malformed young minds. Today's network-TV violence and anything-goes cable has added a new dimension of aberration affecting children. Add to that the exploding Internet with its instant access to pornography and the violence of computer games. Gone are the days of reading, family dinner discussion and bed-time stories.

The problem lies in us as parents. It's easier to prop a child in front of TV than to help with homework or read together. Perhaps the most telling sign of how we have given up on our parenting responsibility is the clamoring for the V-chip to cut out noxious TV programming. (Last time I looked, most of these devices still had an on-off switch!) Many of the same people who rant about the intrusion of government into our lives are demanding that Uncle Sam discipline their children. The breakdown of our families and, cultural and religious institutions, and the rampant materialism have combined to wear us out, turn our priori-

ties upside down, and create a generation of electronic zombies.

One of our pediatric dental colleagues in New Jersey summed it up as he related a comment of a parent about the need for Ritalin for her child, "I don't think he needs it, he can sit in front of the TV for hours with no problem!"

All of us have dealt with these families. The child is out of control and self-centered, the parents tell us to take care of what needs to be done, but balk at doctor-to-child disciplinary approaches. And when is the last time you heard, "Doctor, what can we be doing at home to help Johnnie behave?" Today, it's more like, "Do you have Nintendo? He likes that."

The problem is not new, but will get worse before it gets better. It is a cultural and societal issue that must be addressed and alerts by Dr. Pipher and others help bring us back to reality. Pediatric dentists have a stake in the outcome of this debate, both professionally and as citizens looking to the next generation.

Do what you can personally for your own family and with families you care for.

If I can't end with optimism that this problem will soon be solved, then perhaps with a bit of cruel justice—for parents who won't raise their children and for our gatekeeper colleagues. A small clause in a managed care policy I came across reads, "On Pediatric Dentistry Specialist Referrals: Parents of children four years of age and over are expected to be able to manage their child's behavior in the dental office." Yeah, right!

Paul Casamino D.M.M.S.