

THE OFF SWITCH

I know I am not the only parent who has wished for an 'off' switch.

Just reach around to the back of their neck and **click** ahhh... calm... Now, I can finally tidy away the toys. Now, I can just sit and read with a cup of coffee. Now, I can just pop them in the bath, wash them, dry them and get them dressed before **click** turning them back on again for a story.

We have the next best thing though.

Turn the television on and, suddenly, all is calm. No other activity compares. Bubbles come close. It says something about the power of television that it's *that* close to an off switch.

As a parent, *that power scares me.*

Sometimes I get quite uncomfortable with how much television my children watch. I know I'm not alone in that. As it happens, I like television. I'm not about to get rid of it.

But I think, for people like me, there are two things we can do -

a) Have our children watch less, and carefully chosen, television.

Yeah, okay so perhaps some broadcasters aren't going to like me suggesting we restrict television. But many broadcasters are parents and most who aren't parents love children. I'm sure they want the best for them. They know that, just because they broadcast 18 hours of children's television a day, they shouldn't expect every child to *watch* it for 18 hours a day.

And...

b) We can strive to make *better* television.

If we're going to have children watching television at all, let's make it *good* television. Thought-provoking, educational, enriching, challenging, artistic. Television that presents children with new words, new concepts, new ideas.

So they come away having been entertained, but also having learned something. Something *real*. Even better, perhaps having gained a thirst for more knowledge. I know some people out there are already working towards that. Some only have the best interests of children at heart. I would love to see that become *every* person in *every* area of children's television.

AND PARENTS...

Parents, you can play a role in that. Make your view heard. With the internet and email, it's pretty easy these days. I can tell you that it's often very difficult for show creators to find out what is really working when the shows are out there in homes. So, positive or negative, let people know. There may be little they can do then and there but you can be sure they'll remember when it comes to their next show.

So, whether as a parent or as someone creating children's television, we need to think of television as a very active choice.

Rather than an **off switch**.

All that said, if any scientists have worked out a way to fit an off switch to a child, please get in touch. I have two test subjects who I think it could work wonders for.