

# Rosa's Summary Report (DRAFT)

## **Major decisions from problem description:**

Broad target audience = children (not teenagers)  
Behavior to change = reduce television watching

## **Formative Research:**

The formative research conducted for this project included observations, key informant interviews, and focus groups with children and parents. Highlights of our findings (broken down by research question) were:

### RQ: What are the major influences on TV watching in the home?

- Amount of TV watching is connected to the home environment; i.e., number of TVs in the home, whether the TV is on all the time, whether meals are eaten in front of the TV, having a TV in bedroom
- Parents who set rules about TV have children who watch less TV
- Parents and children influence each other's behaviors (see next RQ)

### RQ: How do parents' behaviors change children's behaviors (and vice versa)?

- Parents make decisions they feel are good for the children, therefore are influenced by them
- Children are influenced by the rules and standards set up by the parents as well as a desire to please the parents
- Children are also influenced by the behaviors of their parents, i.e., children who watch a lot of TV tend to have parents who also watch a lot
- Children are also influenced by teachers and other guardians, as well as somewhat influenced by their peers

### RQ: Which TV behaviors are realistic to ask children and families to change?

- Parents were asked about three specific behaviors: taking TV out of their child's room, not watching TV during meals, and establishing and enforcing TV time limits.
- Not watching TV during meals was fairly well received, but barriers included not knowing what to talk about with children, bickering among family members, and if turned off family couldn't watch programs and discuss them together.
- Not having a TV in the child's bedroom was thought to be a good idea for others but not necessary for "my" child. Barriers included difficulty removing the TV once already in the bedroom and the fighting that would go along with that decision, and having to deal with fighting among siblings about what to watch on the family TV.
- Establishing and enforcing TV limits was discussed. The parents who had rules thought that they were helpful in keeping children from watching too much TV, or the wrong kind. Parents who did not have rules mentioned barriers such as: fighting with children about watching, wanting to watch TV themselves and not wanting to have to follow "rules"

### RQ: Do children (or parents) think they can reduce TV time in their household?

- Parents think their kids watch less than the kids actually reported
- Some parents thought that they could watch less TV (especially if it meant more quality family time), while others felt like it would be a serious hardship to try and watch less TV themselves
- Children tended to be able to come up with activities they could do if they needed to turn off the TV; mostly they wanted to spend time with their parents, although they could think of activities that didn't involve parents

### RQ: How do children watch TV now?

- Children reported most frequently watching TV during the following times:
  - In the afternoon before doing homework

- In the evening when parents getting home from work and fixing dinner and during dinner
- After dinner
- On weekends
- Children said that they turn on the TV to watch a favorite show, but then just start watching whatever comes on afterwards

RQ: What do parents/children get out of turning off the TV?

- Parents dislike the following about TV: uses time children could be doing something more useful, content concerns about violence and language, negative health consequences of always watching TV
- Parents perceived both improved school performance and improved behavior when children watched less TV
- Children could come up with activities to do on their own w/o having parents entertain them

RQ: What things do parents value that will help them reduce children's TV time?

- Spending time together was important to parents and children
- Closer family communication
- School performance

RQ: Do parents make the connection between weight and TV time?

- A few parents make the connection with obesity and TV time, but most are more concerned with other negative effects of TV, such as content

RQ: What makes it hard to turn off the TV?

- Parents see TV as a good babysitter, keeping children safely occupied; don't have the time to "entertain" the children
- Conflict within the household: parents were concerned that children would fight with each other without TV and that the children would nag them
- Parents think kids deserve "down-time" and a chance to relax, which they think they get from watching TV, especially after school and before homework
- Parents didn't see a problem in their family, as long as children got their homework done, made good grades, and behaved well
- Parents like to watch TV themselves
- Parents need time to get things done and are concerned about having to find activities instead of TV

RQ: What reasons do parents give for why their children watch TV?

- Eating snacks or meals while watching a movie together was noted by some parents as a fun family activity
- Parents noted that children watched TV and had snacks when they got home from school as a way to unwind and relax
- It is fun and entertaining

RQ: What environmental factors affect TV watching behaviors?

- Number of TV's in the household
- Whether TVs are "always on" or just turned on when someone is watching
- Whether children watch TV alone or with parents/friends
- Locations of TVs (in bedrooms, in dining areas)

RQ: How do parents currently limit TV time? What works?

- Parents limit TV by having rules about content, rules about getting work/chores done before watching, and some had rules about amounts of time
- Those that did limit TV time had rules that said children were not allowed to watch TV after a certain time, for example in the evening

- Limits on TV time were not set ahead of time, but when the parent noticed that the child was watching too much or becoming entranced
- Very few parents had set limits for the amount of TV their child could watch during a day
- Limits would be enforced if children started having trouble in school or were misbehaving

RQ: What do children do when they are not watching TV?

- Children often reported TV as a favorite activity, along with videogames and computer use. Other favorite activities included sports, playing with friends, and playing outside.

RQ: What benefits does TV offer? (competition)

- Children are safely occupied
- TV helps children learn new skills and information
- Improved communication between parents and children
- Use of TV as reward
- Prevents conflict with parents and between siblings
- It is fun and entertaining

RQ: When/where do parents think about TV? When/where do they think about limiting it?

- More parents think about limiting content rather than time, although a group was concerned about TV time
- Parents see weeknight TV as separate or different from weekend TV
- Times to think about TV: after-school, evenings/late at night/bedtime, during meals, weekends
- Start to think about limiting TV when children are misbehaving, start to get poor grades, or start zoning out

RQ: Who are credible sources of information about TV's effects? (for parents and children)

- Parents find pediatricians to be credible sources of information about their children's health, but don't always make the connection between TV and health issues
- Source of information must realize what it is like to be a modern-day parent with stresses and hassles and show how to do this in today's world; government sources like the Surgeon General aren't as appealing because they aren't seen as relating to parents and their issues, i.e. "Do they have kids?" "How do they know what my life is like?"
- Children name their parents as the people most likely to tell them about TV and any negative effects it might have
- Teachers and schools have credibility with parents
- Parents want information about negative effects of excessive TV time before willing to fight battles to make changes in their family

RQ: What types of activities would parents and children find motivating and relevant?

- Parents were in favor of the following activities:
  - "Selective" viewing or TV budgeting instead of "vegetative" viewing or channel surfing; children and parents would choose certain programs to watch each week and then turn the TV off after those programs
  - Teach games to their children that they can play alone or without constant supervision, especially ones for inside activities
  - Turning off the TV if no one was watching
  - Media literacy training (for themselves and for their children)
  - TV turnoff for a certain period of time (ex, 1 week)
  - Help with creating and enforcing TV rules
- Children liked the following activities:
  - Learning new games that they could play alone or without parental supervision
  - Creating a list of alternative fun activities that can be done without TV
  - Helping to cook dinner with their parents instead of watching TV

**Decision made during formative research:**

Narrow the age range for the target audience to children ages 4-7

Rationale:

- Starting school seems to be a good transition time when children are open to make changes.
- They're older than toddlers and infants and can respond to behavior change strategies.
- We've also got some national formative research on what children this age are doing.
- Other interventions have been successful for children in this age range.