

# *Watch Less-Do More!* Screen time and Tweens

Nancy Gelbard, Chief  
California Obesity Prevention Initiative and  
School Health Connections  
California Department of Health Services



National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences  
June 2, 2005

# What's COPI?

- A program of Department of Health Services' Chronic Disease Control Branch
- Works in partnership with other national, state, and local organizations
- Addresses the societal, technological, and environmental influences of obesity



# Acknowledgements

- DHS – COPI staff, California Project LEAN
- Center for Weight and Health, University of California, Berkeley
- Sutton Group



# What is “screen time”?

- television
- videos/movies (DVD/VCR)
- computer and internet
- video games

# Why address screen time?

- Screen time is linked to overweight
  - ✓ TV viewing/screen time is associated with pediatric overweight.
  - ✓ Every additional hour of screen time increases a child's risk of overweight by 2%.
  - ✓ Those at over 5 hours have a 5-fold increase of overweight than those below 2 hours/day.



# Why screen time affects weight

- Influences what and how much children eat.
- Typical child sees about 40,000 ads/year on TV alone.
- Food ads were for low nutrient, calorie dense foods
- Screen time burns less calories than other activities (other than sleep)
- No correlation between time watching TV and physical activity

# A few facts ~ TV and other screen time

- Children's bedrooms have become multi-media centers.
  - ✓ 68% → TVs
  - ✓ 49% → video game player
  - ✓ 54% → VCR or DVD
  - ✓ 31% → computers
- Young people spend (on average)
  - ✓ 3:51 hours on TV/videos
  - ✓ 1:02 hours using computers (recreational)
  - ✓ 0:49 video games

## *Watch Less-Do More -- Goals*

- Prevent weight gain in “tweens
- Increase screen-free activities
- Reduce television viewing among 10-14 year old girls.





# *Watch Less-Do More*

## Design based on formative research

- 1. Youth Styles Survey** (Market Facts, Inc.)
  - a nationally representative survey of youth
- 2. Key Informant Interviews**
  - analyzed for common themes and incorporated into program.
- 3. Focus Groups**
  - identified benefits of and barriers to reducing screen time.



# Youth Styles Survey findings

- Those with more screen time:
  - ✓ Come from lower SES homes.
  - ✓ More likely to be African American or Hispanic.
  - ✓ Have difficulty communicating.
  - ✓ Value material possessions.
  - ✓ Are concerned with image.
  - ✓ Are less connected to parents.
  - ✓ Worry more.

# Key informant interviews (Adult)

- Identified critical program elements
  - ✓ Engage in temporary turn off period to increase confidence.
  - ✓ Have youth set goals and report progress.
  - ✓ Include an active tracking system.
  - ✓ Engage parents by sending home tracking forms.
  - ✓ Allow youth input so they feel in control.
  - ✓ Make it fun and challenging.
  - ✓ Use peers and older youth as role models.



# Focus group findings (Youth) – Benefits of screen activities

- Prevents/eliminates boredom.
- Is enjoyable/entertaining.
- Provides something to do indoors.
- Keeps girls informed on current events and trends.
- Gives girls something to talk about with friends.
- Provides something to do or background noise.
- Can relieve stress.
- Provides family time.
- Keeps some youth out of trouble.



# Focus group findings (Youth) -- Negatives of screen activities

- Provides limited social interaction.
- Is an indoor activity.
- Will become lazy, couch potato.
- Can hurt eyesight.
- Can leave you without anything else to talk about.
- Distracts you from other activities.



# Results → Critical areas to address in TV/screen reduction programs

1. Create disincentives -- identified & monitored by girls themselves.
2. Involve family members – support but not control.
3. Provide and promote attractive alternatives.



## Critical areas to address (con't)

4. Target “default” viewing as opposed to “must see.”
5. Include self-monitoring, goal setting and peer recognition.
6. Focus on social norms.



# COPI's new tool to reduce TV/screen time in "tweens"

Developed for use in after school programs and for youth-serving organizations.

[www.dhs.ca.gov/obesityprevention](http://www.dhs.ca.gov/obesityprevention)



CALIFORNIA OBESITY PREVENTION INITIATIVE  
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES



## *Food for thought .....*

### **Environmental aspects associated with screen time**

- Reduce access to TV/screen time.
  - ✓ # of “media devices” in families’ homes
  - ✓ Kids’ rooms are multi-media centers!
- Reduce amount of time that TV is left on @ home.
- Turn off during mealtime.
- Establish policies in after school programs that set limits on the amount of recreational screen time.





Nancy Gelbard, M.S., R.D., Chief  
California Obesity Prevention Initiative and  
School Health Connections

California Department of Health Services

[ngelbard@dhs.ca.gov](mailto:ngelbard@dhs.ca.gov)

(916) 552-9949

[www.dhs.ca.gov/obesityprevention](http://www.dhs.ca.gov/obesityprevention)