



Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

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Mr. Steve Burke
President & Chief Operating Officer
Comcast Cable Communications
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CCFC
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Dear Mr. Burke:

We are writing to urge you to not carry BabyFirstTV, the first television station for babies, on Comcast Cable. The network, which until now has been available only on satellite TV is working to expand its reach to cable.¹ BabyFirstTV is the subject of a Federal Trade Commission complaint for false and deceptive marketing. The complaint, filed by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, is under review.

BabyFirstTV seduces potential subscribers with false claims that its programming is educational for infants. **There is no evidence that television is beneficial for babies and growing concern that it may be harmful.** A recent study found that the mistaken belief that programming is educational and/or good for brain development is the number one reason why parents allow babies to watch television and DVDs.² If Comcast Cable provides BabyFirstTV with a platform, you will be profiting from this deception.

BabyFirstTV claims that it "... goes above and beyond traditional TV – it is an educational tool that provides a positive learning environment"³ for babies as young as six months.⁴ The slogan, "Watch your baby blossom," implies that its programming encourages infants' development--that watching BabyFirstTV will help babies grow and develop.⁵

BabyFirstTV even claims that specific programs are designed to develop different skills; it uses a color-coded system labeling system which "helps inform parents about the educational value of each segment." For example, yellow indicates "Thinking Journey" programs, which "[e]ngage children in identifying patterns of thinking and developing creative ways of viewing the world." Orange indicates "Feeling Garden" programs which "[e]xpose children to basic social skills and learning how to relate to others."⁶



BabyFirstTV provides no research to support any of its claims and some have been disproved. For instance, BabyFirstTV states that “[e]ducational television programming has been associated with very positive results such as improvements in vocabulary.”⁷ For babies, this claim is patently false. Studies show that television is not an effective means of teaching babies and toddlers the meaning of new words or for promoting their phonetic learning.⁸ In addition, BabyFirstTV recommends its “Rainbow Dreams” series for babies before bedtime, but research suggests that television interferes with regular sleep patterns.⁹

BabyFirstTV claims that television is not harmful to babies¹⁰ and does not cite any studies that raise concern about the possible harms. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under two.¹¹ Research suggests that TV viewing may interfere with cognitive development.¹² The more time babies spend in front of TV, the less time they spend engaging in two activities that really do facilitate learning: interacting with parents away from screens, and spending time in creative play.¹³ **Withholding this important information compromises parents’ ability to make informed choices.**

Parents deserve honest information, particularly when the wellbeing of their youngest and most vulnerable children is at stake. We understand that you strive to provide your customers with a wide range of channels and programming but a company like BabyFirstTV that relies on deception in order to attract subscribers does not belong on Comcast Cable. We urge you not to carry BabyFirstTV.

We look forward to discussing this matter with you.

Sincerely,

Alvin F. Poussaint, MD

Susan Linn, EdD

¹ Koidin Jaffe, M. (2007, April 17). Growth spurt seen in TV fare for babies. *San Antonio Express-News*. Accessed on April 18, 2007 at <http://www.mysanantonio.com/business/stories/MYSA041607.01A.BabyTV.346bb34.html>.

² Zimmerman, F.J., Christakis, D.A., Melzoff, A. (2007, May). Television and DVD/video viewing in children younger than two years. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. 161:473-479.

³ <http://www.babyfirsttv.com/content.asp>.

⁴ <http://www.babyfirsttv.com/faq.asp#4>.

⁵ <http://www.babyfirsttv.com/>.

⁶ <http://www.babyfirsttv.com/categories.asp>.

⁷ http://www.babyfirsttv.com/parents.asp?xml_id=1627&subXml_id=1773.

⁸ Grella, B.G., Kromar, M., Lin, Y. (2004, May 17). Can television help toddlers acquire new words? *Speechpathology.com*. http://www.speechpathology.com/Articles/article_detail.asp?article_id=72; Kuhl, P.K., Tsaw, F, Liu, H. (2003). Foreign-language experience in infancy: Effects of short-term exposure and social interaction. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. 100:9096-9101.

⁹ Thompson, D.A. & Christakis, D. (2005). The association between television viewing and irregular sleep schedules among children less than 3 years of age. *Pediatrics*, 116: 851-856.

¹⁰ http://www.babyfirsttv.com/faq.asp?xml_id=1641#6.

¹¹ <http://www.aap.org/family/mediainmpact.htm>.

¹² Zimmerman, F. & Christakis, D. (2005). Children's television viewing and cognitive outcomes: A longitudinal analysis of national data. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. 159(7):619-625.

¹³ Vandewater, E.A., Bickham, D.S. & Lee, J.H. (2006, February). Time well spent? Relating television use to children’s free-time activities. *Pediatrics*, 117.2.