

What constitutes a good preschool programme?

Some ideas for TV producers drawn from research

A good preschool programme ...

... is specifically created for the age group

Preschool-age children's abilities differ so much from those of older children that they need their own programmes. Parents who (hopefully) co-view with their children can be considered in these programmes, too – but the preschool children should take centre stage.

... respects children's cognitive skills and preferences

Preschool children "watch more slowly", that is, it takes them longer to understand images and comprehend actions. Quality programmes for preschool children have to grant more time, focus on the essentials, and the editing sequences should be longer than those for older children. The plots should be simple and straight forward and be close to the children's realm of experience. The programme should repeatedly offer ways to think actively, empathise, and get involved, thus promoting an active TV reception.

... does not overexert or take unfair advantage of the children

Primarily, this means it should not strain the children emotionally. The programme should be predictable and controllable for children. That does not mean that you have to do without serious issues or any tension. But the emotional sensitivity of this age group

A quality programme for preschoolers ...

... is specifically created for the age group.

... respects children's cognitive skills and preferences.

- It has an appropriate narrative speed and length.
- It has an appropriate plot structure.
- It connects to everyday experiences.

... does no harm.

- It does not induce emotional strain.
- It does not present anti-social interpretative patterns.
- It puts the well-being of children in the forefront.

... enhances the child's development.

- It takes on children's themes.
- It influences their identity in positive ways.
- It advances cognition where appropriate.

... is fun and activates.

- It gives children a good feeling.
- It inspires involvement, interaction and staying active.
- It animates to communicate.

should always be kept in mind. Especially sensitive topics like "getting abandoned", "conflict between parents/divorce" can easily overwhelm preschool children. Already an uncanny, unrecognisable sound or a sinister character can evoke fear. Special effects should be avoided, especially surprising or scary ones, or those appearing to be steadily threatening. Also anti-social interpretive patterns like violence as a means of conflict resolution are harmful – particularly in the long run – to the children and to society. Last but not least, a quality show lets children's well-being take centre stage. This includes refraining from treating them as relatively potent customers, neither implicitly in the show nor through an advertising environment.

... enhances the child's development

Quality programmes for children pick up on topics from children's everyday lives and encourage them to a self-confident, active involvement with their environment. The focus should be on the children's perspective, their view and representation, i. e. the weakness they experience, and on pro-social ways of interaction. Another goal in addition to enhancing the preschoolers' social skills is to advance their cognitive skills. Here, it is important to make use of the wide spectrum and recent findings of early education research and to tap television's full potential.

... is fun and activates

Obviously a quality show for preschool children should be fun for the target audience. It is essential to take on their understanding and sense of humour and to release them from the programme with a positive feeling. Not only is laughing healthy (cf. the 2006 TelevIZion issue), but it also helps in coping with everyday life and in communication. Great fun for preschool children are programme parts that require their participation. What works are direct calls for action as well as a dramaturgically more elegant involvement of children that activates and inspires – physically and in communicative ways.

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