The day the TV broke

Last summer, I recall arguing with my 2-year-old Melise about the TV. It had been a long, stressful day. I had used the TV to distract her throughout the day while I got work done.

By the evening, I was ready to take my turn in front of the boob-tube. Unfortunately, Melise wanted to watch Dora instead of a “Mommy show.” No amount of reasoning would convince her that it was Mommy’s turn.

“Not Mommy’s turn!” Melise wailed, “Meese’s turn!” (That’s what she calls herself.)

I thought if I just started my show she would get over it. I turned on the TV and found absolutely nothing to watch among the hundreds of channels. Melise was crying and storming around. I thought I must have missed something, so I scrolled through the channels again. Alina, my 4-month-old, started crying, too.

I begged, “Please just let me find a show. Doesn’t Mommy deserve to take a break?” Still she tantrumed.

Then I snapped like a crocodile: “It’s Mommy’s turn! Cool it, Melise!”

Finally, I asked myself, what are you doing? Arguing with a toddler over the television when there’s absolutely nothing of interest on? How ridiculous!

I gave up and turned the TV off. I decided right then that Melise and I both needed a change of pace. I put us all to bed.

The next morning, Melise jumped out of bed and ran to the TV yelling, “Watch a show! Watch a show!”

I shrugged, “Sorry honey, the TV is broken.” I prepared for a tantrum.

Melise said, “Oh, broken.” Then she found a toy to play with. No tantrum.

That first day of my “Broken TV Project” was very quiet. I had to think hard about how to keep Melise busy, but she was happy all day long. She helped in the garden, read books, helped in the kitchen, played with her toys and danced to the radio. Every day after that just got easier.

For three or four days, Melise asked each morning if the TV was still broken. She helpfully suggested that I fix it, too. I told her that I would get it fixed, but it may take a while. She accepted it.

One result of the “broken” TV was that Melise became a book junky. We spent large portions of each day sitting on the sofa together reading. When I wasn’t able to read to her, she flipped through the books on her own, telling herself the story that she remembered from the pictures.

Much of the reading was also done while she was sitting on her potty. It just happened to be a convenient spot to sit still and read. One day while on the pot, Melise finished a book, got up to get another, and as she came back to the potty she stopped dead in her tracks, her eyes on its contents.

Sounding a little nervous she said, “Poop in potty, Mommy.” You would have thought I had won the lotto! It was the first time she had ever done it! Melise and I did a dance of joy around the potty. The next night we even invited her grandparents over to celebrate.

That was the last night before I got the TV “fixed.” We survived—or rather, we enjoyed—eight days without it.

In the year since, we’ve had a pretty good run of watching less television. Lately though, we’ve had more tantrums involving it. Maybe it is time for the TV to brake again and reset our appreciation for the real world!

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