**[Is Watching 'SpongeBob' Bad for Young Kids?](http://www.aoltv.com/2011/09/12/is-watching-spongebob-bad-for-young-kids/)**

**American Academy of Pediatrics**

**by** [Catherine Lawson](http://www.aoltv.com/bloggers/catherine-lawson/), **posted** Sep 12th 2011 6:45AM

Most parents who allow their young children to watch TV spend a lot of time fretting over issues such as which shows are age-appropriate, which ones are educational or improving, and which ones could be harmful.  
  
The latest kids' show to be called into question is Nickelodeon's long-running cartoon series, ['SpongeBob SquarePants.'](http://www.aoltv.com/show/spongebob-squarepants/184854) According to [The Wrap](http://www.thewrap.com/tv/article/spongebobs-latest-tormentor-american-academy-pediatrics-30885), a study due to be published online Monday by the journal 'Pediatrics' found that watching just nine minutes of 'SpongeBob' had a negative effect on four-year-olds' attention spans.  
  
Nickelodeon questioned the validity of the findings, criticizing the small size of the control group and pointing to the fact that 'SpongeBob' is targeted at children aged six to eleven, not four.

The problems were seen in a study conducted using what the American Academy of Pediatrics calls a "controlled experimental design." University of Virginia researchers recruited 60 mostly white and middle- or upper-middle-class four-year-olds and randomly divided them into three groups.  
  
One group watched 'SpongeBob' -- in which there were scene changes on average every 11 seconds -- one watched slower-paced PBS cartoon 'Caillou' -- in which there were scene changes on average every 34 seconds -- and one was assigned to draw pictures. The children took mental function tests immediately after these nine-minute assignments, and the 'SpongeBob' viewers did measurably worse than the others.  
  
Prof. Angeline Lillard, who carried out the experiment, [said](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/8755839/SpongeBob-SquarePants-bad-for-concentration.html) researchers found "little difference" in behaviour and performance between the drawing group and the 'Caillou' group afterward. However, they found that the "executive function" -- the ability to pay attention, solve problems and moderate behaviour -- in those who'd watched 'SpongeBob' was "severely compromised."  
  
She suggested: "It is possible that the fast pacing, where characters are constantly in motion from one thing to the next, and extreme fantasy, where the characters do things that make no sense in the real world, may disrupt the child's ability to concentrate immediately afterward.  
  
"Another possibility is that children identify with unfocused and frenetic characters, and then adopt their characteristics."  
  
In a statement, Nickelodeon spokesman David Bittler said "Having 60 non-diverse kids, who are not part of the show's targeted demo, watch nine minutes of programming is questionable methodology and could not possibly provide the basis for any valid findings that parents could trust."  
  
'SpongeBob' follows the adventures of a ten-year-old fry cook and his friends in the underwater city of Bikini Bottom. It's been Nickelodeon's [top series](http://www.aoltv.com/2011/01/03/nickelodeon-renews-spongebob-squarepants-for-season-9-john-ro/) among children aged two to eleven for ten years, and earlier this year the series was renewed for a 26-episode Season 9, which will air in 2012.  
  
It's not the first time the show's been in hot water. In 2005 it came under fire from Christian Right group Focus on the Family, which said the cartoon's tolerance themes were really code for gay-agenda promotion. And last month Fox News personalities Steve Doocy and Gretchen Carlson [slammed it](http://gawker.com/steve-doocy) for teaching children about man-made global warming.  
  
Dr Dimitri Christakis, child development specialist at Seattle Children's Hospital, [said](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2036270/Does-Spongebob-SquarePants-wreck-childrens-ability-concentrate.html?ito=feeds-newsxml) that although the recent results should be interpreted cautiously because of the study's small size, the data do seem robust and bolster the idea that media exposure is a public health issue.  
  
"Put simply," he said, "television is both good and bad. ... The effects of media are more down to what is watched than how much is watched."

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A new study in the Journal of Pediatrics says that cartoons like *SpongeBob SquarePants* have a detrimental effect on 4-year-old kids. Researchers divided kids into three groups: one group of children watch *Caillou*, a slower-themed show on public television, the second group was given crayons and paper to draw with, while the third watched *SpongeBob*. Afterward, the group who watched the yellow square guy wasn’t able to follow rules as well or to delay gratification as easily. (Interestingly, the group of kids who watched *Caillou* and the group who drew pictures performed at pretty much the same level.)

Does this shock any parent who has  young kids? Watching *SpongeBob* even makes *me* a little manic. No surprise that four year olds are affected by the amped-up pacing and crazy antics of the characters.

The reason for this? The researchers concluded that fast-paced programs over-stimulate young kids’ brains.  Watching these cartoons makes it harder to employ executive function in the brain,  the process used to complete tasks. In addition, children “may mimic” characters afterward. (I love the use of the word “may” here. Um, yes, they *may* do that…and they *may* do it for hours on end until you want to scream.)

I don’t think this means that *SpongeBob* is bad or that kids should never be allowed to watch it, by any means. I think it all comes down to knowing your child and seeing how shows on TV  affect him or her. We actually didn’t allow our son to watch *SpongeBob* when he was younger — not because we were opposed to it, but because he acted like the characters from the show after watching it. (See above.) His behavior was so crazy it made *us* crazy, and we knew that it wasn’t doing him any favors, either, so we set some firm limits around that cartoon and others like it.  (We also didn’t let him drink coffee, eat cotton candy for breakfast, or stay up until 1 a.m. — all things he begged to be able to do — pretty much for the same reasons.)

Now that he’s 8, it luckily doesn’t have quite the same effect, but I still think cartoons are best watched in small doses.

*What do you think? Do you notice a change in your child’s behavior when he or she watches Sponge Bob or other amped-up cartoons? And how do you limit TV time?*

http://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/wp-content/plugins/wp-spamfree/img/wpsf-img.php

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**6 Responses**

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* *A....* Says:   
  [September 12th, 2011 at 11:22 am](http://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/younger-children/is-spongebob-bad-for-kids/#comment-6717)

I too have a son who is deeply affected by media. I will go one further, video games are also bad for kids, and for the same reason Sponge Bob is. I am surprised that they have not studied the effects that all media has on the brain. A simple EEG while playing video games or watching a movie would tell us a lot.

It has taken a while, but he is now down to 1 hour of media a day, I am constantly fighting the “It’s not fair” fight with him, but the end result is well worth the effort.

* *Bethwebb* Says:   
  [September 12th, 2011 at 12:53 pm](http://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/younger-children/is-spongebob-bad-for-kids/#comment-6719)

My son’s Kindergarten teacher, Master’s Degree and teaching for 35 years – said that with the onset of fast paced media – tv, video games etc. – children’s attention spans have gotten shorter and shorter.

This is a huge issue, if parents of young children only realized that what older children may be able to handle, younger children cannot.

* *DollFaceAZ* Says:   
  [September 13th, 2011 at 12:24 pm](http://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/younger-children/is-spongebob-bad-for-kids/#comment-6725)

I am the mother of three girls ages 9 to 13, and (among other cartoons that I find personally offensive such as “Family Guy” on Fox) Sponge Bob is banned from my TV. Not only would I rather listen to nails being dragged down a chalkboard than that irritating voice, watching Sponge Bob has had a negative affect on my childrens’ activity levels. When they were allowed to watch it, it had an almost hipnotic effect on them. I couldn’t get them to get up and do anything if the show was on, and if I turned the TV off to get their attention; they would yell at ME. Do I believe that Sponge Bob has a negative affect on children? Yes, I’ve seen it first hand.

* *sam* Says:   
  [September 14th, 2011 at 12:39 pm](http://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/younger-children/is-spongebob-bad-for-kids/#comment-6731)

I have three boys ages 8-15. Each one is unique in their own special way. So it is a challenge at times changing colors for each situation.This fast paced media really has me concerned as a parent. If we as parents are not getting the job done effectively at home, this country’s work force is in dire straights. I already see it with the new hires at the firehouse.The community counts on us!

* *rmrojo02* Says:   
  [September 15th, 2011 at 6:15 pm](http://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/younger-children/is-spongebob-bad-for-kids/#comment-6737)

Ok, let me start off by saying that SB is intended for kids 6-11 years old. The study was done on 4 year olds. There were 60 kids divided into 3 groups: the first group watched 9 min. of SB, the second group watched some boring program on pbs, and the third group drew pictures with crayons. Then they tested all 3 groups immediately afterwards. The 3rd group obviously did the best, but get this…the group who watched pbs did only about 5% better than those kids who watched SB. I think the study is completely overrated and at the end of the day, you just need to examine your own kid and see if the show really affects him/her or not. My 6 year old has been watching SB for almost a year and he does great in school. If you don’t want your kid watching the cute show, so be it, you have the right. But don’t base that decision over a study. Examining the actual chemistry of a child’s brain and testing something as nebulous as their attention span are two different things. Attention spans really vary from kid to kid. And if they would test 6 year olds instead of kids who shouldn’t be watching SB, I’m sure the results of that study would be harmless…

THIS STUDY HAS PEOPLE ALL WORKED UP FOR NOTHIN’……GEEEEEEZ

* *Caitlind21* Says:   
  [October 19th, 2011 at 3:11 pm](http://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/younger-children/is-spongebob-bad-for-kids/#comment-6911)

And we wonder why all these are now being diagnosed with ADD or ADHD!! its because they are so use to the fast pace media that they attention span is less and less. they need thinks quicker then what we as parents needed when we were younger and didnt have TV.

**Life Lessons Kids Can Learn From Watching SpongeBob SquarePants**

Before I ever had children I was adamant that they would not be allowed to watch SpongeBob SquarePants. I had listened to countless tales from co-workers about the little yellow sponge who resided in the underwater world of Bikini Bottom. I’ll never forget the day my friend got a call from her son’s teacher because he was talking about P.O.O.P. in class. The teacher was appalled, but in reality he was referring to the acronym for the Krusty Krab motto, People Order Our Patties. Her P.O.O.P. story, in and of itself, was enough to make me anti-SpongeBob.

My daughter asked me countless times to watch the series, and I always replied with a firm no. Then one day, she was home from preschool with a cold. She asked to lie in my bed and watch tv. The television in my room didn’t have a DVR, so we were stuck watching \*gasps dramatically\* live tv. Unfortunately, the only thing that was on was that evil yellow sponge. She looked at me, face flushed with fever, snot running down her face, and pleaded in a raspy voice, “please Mommy, it will make me feel better.” I mean really? Who can say no to that? So, I snuggled up next to her and watched my first episode of SpongeBob SquarePants.

It wasn’t as bad as I imagined. Yes, the humor was sophomoric, SpongeBob’s laugh was annoying, and Patrick was a complete buffoon, but it really seemed pretty harmless to me. From that moment on, SpongeBob became a staple in our house.

Its been 5 years since I watched my first episode of SpongeBob, and let me just say, I‘ve watched more episodes than I care to admit. I realize SpongeBob is not typical educational television. You child will not learn their A, B, C’s by watching SpongeBob slave away tirelessly at the Krusty Krab. They won’t learn to identify colors and shapes by seeing Patrick and SpongeBob frolic through Jellyfish Fields. But there are some very important life lessons that they can pick up just by spending some quality time with that annoying square yellow sponge who lives in a pineapple under the sea.

**Do you let your children watch SpongeBob SquarePants**

Top of Form

* Never! We don't watch any television.
* Nah. It seems pretty stupid and there are plenty of other good educational shows they can watch
* Sometimes. I really never gave it much thought.
* If they ask they can watch it, but I wouldn't sit and watch it with them
* Heck yes! Its hysterical! Our whole family loves that little yellow sponge.

Bottom of Form

**Life Lessons SpongeBob Teaches**

**Never Give Up** - Many of the episodes revolve around Mrs. Puff’s Boating School where SpongeBob attends in an attempt to get his boating license. Bless his little yellow heart, but he never passes the boating test. It doesn’t get him down though, he just brushes himself off and tries again. It goes along with the old adage, “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” That’s what SpongeBob does, he tries again, and again, and AGAIN…wearing a wide toothy grin with each attempt.

**Friendships Are Important** - SpongeBob surrounds himself with his friends. His two closest friends are a pink starfish named Patrick and a Texan Squirrel named Sandy. The dynamic of his friendships really does emulate real life. They play together, have fun together, share secrets, they fight, have disagreements, and as all good friends do, they always make up. Pretty amazing considering the time constraints of 11 minutes per episode.

**There Are No Small Jobs** - SpongeBob is a fry cook. Even in the underwater world of Bikini Bottom, it’s not a lucrative job. He loves his job very much though and is proud of his work. For him, making the best Krabby Patty possible equates to a great work of Picasso. What a great lesson to pass on to our children. Its not what you do, its how you do it that matters. Yes, as parents we all hope that our children grow up to do something important. We envision them becoming president, a doctor, a lawyer, a great novelist. But, if they didn’t would we love them any less? Would their life be of any less value? Absolutely Not!

**Work Hard** - Never has there been a cartoon character who has worked harder at his job then SpongeBob. His lowly job as a Fry Cook at the Krusty Krab is the world to SpongeBob. He prides himself on being on time for work, he does the best that he can each day, he never wants to disappoint his boss, and he helps his coworkers. I’m sure there are managers out there who watch SpongeBob with their kids and wish they had just one SpongeBob under their employment.

**Be a Good Neighbor** - Although SpongeBob’s next door neighbor Squidward cannot stand him, there have been many times where SpongeBob has helped him out. Ok, there have also been times when his attempts at being helpful were not so helpful. Yes, he stole the show at Squidward‘s talent show, he thwarted his attempts to sell his house, and he even has blown Squidward’s Easter Island house to smithereens. That doesn’t make him any less of a good neighbor though. SpongeBob helps Squidward to take pleasure in the little things in life, like blowing bubble and snowball fights. He aids the uptight Squidward in loosening up. Their relationship is the typical love/hate neighbor relationship, their dynamic is special.

**Enjoy the Simple Things in Life** - SpongeBob doesn’t need fancy video games and toys to make him happy. His home is simply decorated. His free time is spent with friends. He enjoys the same things that many kids do, blowing bubbles, fishing (jelly fishing in his world), camping and playing in boxes. He’s not caught up in “I need this” or “I want this.” He makes do with what he has in front of him, he utilizes his imagination, and he enjoys every minute of it.

**Be Helpful** - SpongeBob is helpful to a fault. It sometimes makes for his most exciting adventures. In a typical episode, SpongeBob will try to do something helpful for someone. It completely backfires in his face, and then he will make it right. In the end, everyone is happy.

**Find Your Bliss** - We all want our children to grow up to be happy well adjusted members of society. What better way to be able to accomplish that then by finding what you love and spending your time doing it. SpongeBob’s bliss is being a Fry Cook. In his spare time, he gets great joy from jelly fish hunting. So, the show gives us two examples of how doing what you love can make you happy. As adults, we don’t necessarily end up in a career that we love. Gosh darn those bills we have to pay. Its nice to know that SpongeBob also teaches kids that they can find what makes them happy not only through their place of employment, but also through other activities.

**Be Happy** - No matter what life throws at SpongeBob, he finds a way to overcome it to be happy. His moments of sadness are usually fleeting. His boss may yell at him, his neighbor may ignore him, and his best friend may be disappointed with him. But, you can always count on the fact that at the end of each episode he will be smiling his buck-toothed grin. If I wish nothing else for my children, I wish them to be happy.

Yes, I do realize that SpongeBob SquarePants may not be typical educational television, but he can teach our children a lot. In fact, as adults we could all more than likely take a few lessons from that goofy looking yellow sponge.

**5 Things SpongeBob SquarePants Can Teach You About Business**

America's favorite cartoon sea sponge and the rest of the gang from Bikini Bottom offer some surprisingly valuable lessons about life in the workplace.

*By* [Geoff Williams](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/writers/geoff-williams/)

Posted 10/ 7 10 at 10:00 PM | [Business Trends](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/trends/), [Money](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/money/), [Advertising & Marketing](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/advertising-and-marketing/), [Sales](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/sales/), [Management](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/management/), [Leadership](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/leadership/), [Consumer Products & Services](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/consumer-products-and-services/), [Education](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/education/), [Food & Beverage](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/food-and-beverage/), [Media](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/media/), [Retail](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/retail/)

[[](http://www.nick.com/)Nickelodeon](http://www.nick.com/)'s [*SpongeBob SquarePants*](http://spongebob.nick.com/), with its brightly hued colors and juvenile hijinks, may seem like the last place you should look for business or career advice. But if you take a slightly closer look at SpongeBob's madcap energy and Mr. Krabs' relentless pursuit to sell Krabby Patties, you'll notice some familiar workplace scenarios -- and some surprisingly important lessons.  
  
So what can you learn from the gang from the underwater city of Bikini Bottom? We decided to take a closer look.

**1. SpongeBob SquarePants has integrity that every entrepreneur and employee should emulate.**  
  
When Mr. Krabs, in one episode titled "The Graveyard Shift," tells his staff that the Krusty Krab will now be open 24 hours a day, SpongeBob is thrilled. In the episode "Just One Bite," when Squidward sneaks into the Krusty Krab in the middle of the night to secretly eat some Krabby Patties, he spots the famed sea sponge and asks why he is there. "I always come here at 3 a.m.," SpongeBob replies. "This is when I count the sesame seeds."

Lisa J. Rinkus, president of [LJPR](http://www.ljpr.net/), a West Newton, Mass.-based public-relations firm, says one of her favorite pastimes is hanging out with her daughter after school and watching *SpongeBob SquarePants.* "During the shows," Rinkus says, "we chat about SpongeBob's incredible work ethic, his ability to work with what he has and make the best of every situation. I can't understand why many parents don't let their kids watch *SpongeBob*. It's chock full of great lessons -- business and otherwise."

**2. Don't stray from your core competency.**  
  
In "The Krusty Sponge," a restaurant critic applauds SpongeBob as one of two reasons to visit the Krusty Krab (the Krabby Patty being the first reason). Mr. Krabs is deliriously excited by the idea of promoting SpongeBob as another reason to visit his restaurant. So excited, in fact, that he goes overboard, changing the name of the restaurant to the Krusty Sponge and making perennially disgruntled employee Squidward wear a SpongeBob costume. SpongeBob, meanwhile, is made to run a SpongeBob train outside the restaurant. In effect, the restaurant's main reason for being -- the food -- is ignored. And just as one might expect to happen in real life, customers then become sick after eating the food.

Another example of this is "the episode when Pearl, Mr. Krab's daughter, wants to change the menu and [marketing](http://smallbusiness.aol.com/category/advertising-and-marketing/) strategy of the Krusty Krab" to be trendier, says Anu V. Murthy, avowed *SpongeBob* fan and president of [Rex](https://www.riskexchange.com/), a full-service wholesale intermediary offering agencies access to worker's compensation markets nationwide. "SpongeBob felt absolutely uncomfortable with it because it strayed from the 'core' strategy."

As it turns out, Pearl ended up leaving the restaurant, which returned to normal. "Lesson? Stick to your knitting," Murthy says.

**3. Quality counts.**In the episode, "Born Again Krabs," Mr. Krabs forces SpongeBob to sell an old, filthy, germ-infested Krabby Patty that was found under the grill. Mr. Krabs can't stand the idea that this patty, which could have been used to make money, would be allowed to go to waste. However, weeks go by, and the Krusty Krab loses a lot of business until Mr. Krabs, trying to prove the patty is perfectly good, eats the food and winds up in the hospital.

Then there's the "Patty Hype" episode in which SpongeBob starts his own stand, selling "pretty patties" -- Krabby Patties that are different colors. SpongeBob ended up having approximately 46,853 customers. Unfortunately, the colored patties literally make the fish in Bikini Bottom change different colors.

"SpongeBob comes up with a patty that seems to be, on the surface, what everyone wants," Murthy explains. "It was short-lived because, in the end, everyone was [ticked] off because the patties ended up changing and was *not* what the customers expected."

The lesson [entrepreneurs](http://smallbusiness.aol.com) can take away, Murthy says, is that you should "be sincere in what you are selling. Customers aren't idiots. They will learn quickly what you are all about. Long-term strategy is key for customers."

And, of course, we haven't even mentioned Mr. Krab's arch-enemy, Plankton, who is always trying to steal the Krabby Patty formula. Plankton clearly recognizes that the formula's quality would attract customers, but he's too lazy to come up with anything superior on his own. Instead, his restaurant, the Chum Bucket, is recognized throughout Bikini Bottom for serving inferior, pathetic food.

**4. You get what you pay for.**When Mr. Krabs shoots a Krusty Krab TV commercial, he shoots it himself, to bring the production costs down, and he pays for the cheap time slot of 3:28 a.m. Not surprisingly, few fish in Bikini Bottom see it.

In "Krabby Land," Mr. Krabs figures he can make a fortune if he has a playground for kids at his restaurant (shade of [McDonald's](http://www.dailyfinance.com/quotes/mcdonald-s-corporation/mcd/nys) and their playgrounds). It's a mess, cheaply made and not very safe. By the end of the episode, the children have tied up Mr. Krabs and are feeding him lima beans. If you're cheap in a way that insults your customers, you're the one who will likely lose in the end.

**5. Don't let your work take over your life.**  
  
Joe Wos, executive director of the [ToonSeum](http://www.toonseum.org/), Pittsburgh's Museum of Cartoon Art, notes that "with the exception of Patrick, everyone in the show has very defined jobs, and at least half the show revolves around their jobs, which is something you don't see in a lot of cartoons. They take their jobs very seriously in *SpongeBob*."

Wos adds that in the episodes where SpongeBob "loses his job or spatula, his life falls apart, and if you think about it, that often defines our own situations as well. When we lose our jobs, our world literally falls apart. I think one of the greatest examples of that is the episode where SpongeBob loses his name tag. Literally and figuratively, it's a complete loss of identity."

True enough, when SpongeBob discovers his name tag is gone, he freaks out until he faints. In this animated moment -- at least it can seem this way after the 27th viewing with your kids -- *SpongeBob* becomes something apart from a simple cartoon on a children's cable channel. It is a cautionary tale for the 21st century businessperson, a warning to everyone, from the CEO down to the lowliest fry cook, that while it's swell to be at one with your career, you can always take things too far.  
  
*Geoff Williams is a frequent contributor to AOL Small Business and is the co-author of the book* [Living Well with Bad Credit](http://www.amazon.com/Living-Well-Bad-Credit-VacationNo/dp/0757313582/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1285876631&sr=1-1). *He is currently trying to convince his editor on the merits of an article that looks at the business lessons one can learn from iCarly.*

**Researchers study the effects of watching SpongeBob SquarePants**

Posted: Sep 12, 2011 8:56 PM EDT Updated: Sep 12, 2011 8:56 PM EDT

By Karin McCay - [email](mailto:kmccay@kcbd.com)

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[[](http://kcbd.images.worldnow.com/images/15445784_BG1.JPG)](http://kcbd.images.worldnow.com/images/15445784_BG1.JPG" \o ")

The typical pre-schooler watches two to four hours of television a day.  That's the focus of a study out today in the journal "Pediatrics" The real concern?  It suggests what they watch could be more damaging than how much they watch.

The study divided dozens of four year olds into three activity groups.  They either were playing with crayons, watching a slow paced cartoon, or a fast one like SpongeBob SquarePants.

Turns out the SpongeBob kids tested the lowest in ability to focus and problem solving.

Dr. Dimitri Christakis said, "These children's brains were actually tired from all that stimulation, and they weren't as able to then focus the way they otherwise would be able to."

Experts say kids' developing brains don't have enough time to process fast-paced media. To be fair, Nickelodeon says it markets SpongeBob for kids over age six.