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March 10, 2009

Ms. Sandy Wax  
President and General Manager  
PBS KIDS Sprout  
PO Box 9303  
Bridgeport, NJ 08014

Dear Ms. Wax,

We are writing to urge you to stop packaging your evening programming as the *Good Night Show* on PBS KIDS Sprout. As aired, this block of programming is likely to mislead parents into incorporating television into their children's bedtime routine when, in fact, research suggests that screen time can undermine healthy sleep habits. For children three years and younger, television viewing is associated with irregular sleep patterns.<sup>1</sup> Studies of both 5-6-year-olds and 4-10-year-olds found that children who watched TV at bedtime were more likely to have difficulty sleeping.<sup>2</sup>

A show designed around a bedtime theme may also have the unfortunate consequence of encouraging parents to put televisions in their children's bedrooms. Children with a television in their bedroom go to bed later, sleep less, have more sleep anxiety and bedtime resistance.<sup>3</sup> Television in children's bedrooms has also been linked to poor academic performance<sup>4</sup> and higher rates of obesity.<sup>5</sup>

It is especially egregious that the *Good Night Show* is aired under the PBS imprimatur. Because parents trust PBS to create programming that is beneficial for children, they are likely to believe that *Good Night Show* will, as the Sprout website claims, "help preschoolers wind down after a busy day"<sup>6</sup> and make the show part of their child's bedtime routine. The National Sleep Foundation calls television a "sleep stealer" and urges parents to avoid making television a part of their bedtime routine.<sup>7</sup> Watching television right up until bedtime may take the place of parents reading to their kids, an activity with proven benefits for children.

There is little doubt that the *Good Night Show* is designed to be watched right before children go to bed. Not only is it called the "*Good Night Show*" and structured around a sleep theme and sleep-related activities, but the programming airs from 6:00 – 9:00 PM, the period of time when

most young children go to sleep. Yet the content of *Good Night Show* segments featuring co-hosts Nina and the puppet Star, who take on the roles of parent and child respectively, may actually influence children to be more resistant to bedtime and promote family conflict.

On the February 23rd show, for instance, most of the bedtime interactions between Nina and Star end with a tease about what's coming next, giving the viewing audience a reason to want to continue watching and not go to bed:

- At 7:12 Star began lobbying to stay up longer. When Nina refuses his request to stay up all night, he says, "Well, maybe just a little longer?" Nina replies, "We can stay up a little longer, because coming up our Sproutlet friends have something to share with us." Then she added to the viewers, "Don't go away. We're going to hear what our Sproutlet friends have to say."
- At 8:02 p.m. Star asked Nina, "I don't have to go to bed now, do I?" She responded, "No Star, not yet. We still have lots of great things to do with our Sproutlet friends." It is disingenuous that a show that markets itself as an aid to parents at bedtime would actually provide ammunition for children who are lobbying to stay up later—after all, if Star doesn't have to go to bed why should they?
- At 8:40 even after Star is ready for bed, Nina encourages children to keep watching. She says, "If it's not your bedtime yet, let's see who's here to play with us." She then asks Lucy the firefly, the character who introduces each segment, "Can you tell us who's next?"

The *Good Night Show* seems more intent on keeping kids glued to the Sprout network or website – both at night and throughout the day – than on helping children unwind. During the February 23<sup>rd</sup> episode, thirty-five promotions aired for Sprout programs and the Sprout website. Then at the show's closing, when Star and Nina are finally asleep, the following ad ran encouraging children to wind down all over again by logging on to [www.sproutonline.com](http://www.sproutonline.com):

Get on your way. Get your dad. Get your mom. Go to Sproutonline.com. For the perfect way to wind down your day, join Nina and Star from the *Goodnight Show*. Cozy up for a craft. Create your own bedtime story. Or spin the moonbeam wheel for a goodnight game to play. It's time to make a bedtime wish, sign your way to sweet dreams, and get ready to say, "Goodnight." *The Good Night Show*. On Sprout and Sproutonline.com.

If the goal of the *Good Night Show* is to ease the transition to bed by modeling their behavior after Star, it is astonishing that—after three hours of television viewing and after Star has fallen asleep—Sprout would encourage children to go online. From the placement of this promo, it is hard not to conclude that the real goal of *The Good Night Show* is to keep children engaged with Sprout throughout the evening into the night.

We understand that competition for preschool viewers is intense. But there is no justification for luring preschoolers to the *Good Night Show* by implying to their parents that the show will help children get ready for bed.

Because some of its programming is partially funded with public money, Sprout should be held to a higher standard than commercial stations. Parents believe programming on PBS – and PBS affiliated networks – will be good for their children. It is wrong to exploit that belief to promote round-the-clock Sprout viewing. We also disagree with the assertion that Sprout viewers would necessarily be watching other networks if the *Good Night Show* was not on. PBS's involvement with Sprout may very well legitimize bedtime viewing for many parents who would otherwise be engaging in activities with their children, like reading, to facilitate the transition to bedtime.

We urge you to stop packaging your evening program as a sleep aid for children. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Susan Linn, EdD

Robert Kesten

Director  
Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

Executive Director  
Center for SCREEN TIME Awareness

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<sup>1</sup> Thompson, D.A., & Christakis, D.A. (2005). The association between television viewing and irregular sleep schedules among children less than 3 years of age. *Pediatrics* 116(4): 851-856.

<sup>2</sup>Paavonen E.J., Pennonen M., Roine M., Valkonen S., & Lahikainen A.R. (2006). TV exposure associated with sleep disturbances in 5- to 6-year-old children. *J Sleep Res.* 15(2):154-161; Owens, J., Maxim, R., McGuinn, M., Nobile, C., Msall, M., & Alario, A. (1999). Television-viewing habits and sleep disturbance in school children. *Pediatrics* 104(3): electronic pg: e27.

<sup>3</sup> Li, S. Jin, X. Wu, S. Jiang, F. Yan, C. Shen, X. (2007). The impact of media use on sleep patterns & sleep disorders among school-aged children in China. *Sleep*, 30 (3): 361-7.

<sup>4</sup> Borzekowski, D., & Robinson, T. (2005). The remote, the mouse, and the no. 2 pencil: The household media environment and academic achievement among third grade students. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 159: 607-613.

<sup>5</sup> Adachi-Mejia, A. M., Longacre, M.R., Gibson, J.J., Beach, M.L., Titus-Ernstoff, L.T., & Dalton, M.A.. (2007). Children with a TV in their bedroom at higher risk for being overweight. *International Journal of Obesity* 31(4): 644-651.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.sproutonline.com/sprout/originals/GoodnightShow.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.sleepfoundation.org/site/c.huIXKjM0Ix/b.2574199/k.9227/Sleep\\_Stealers\\_The\\_Electronic\\_Sandman.htm](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/site/c.huIXKjM0Ix/b.2574199/k.9227/Sleep_Stealers_The_Electronic_Sandman.htm)