Young Media Australia fact sheet

How to decide what is appropriate for your family

Whether or not we are aware of it, we are constantly making decisions about our use of the media. Unlike other family values and parenting methods, many of us did not have the opportunity to learn from our parents how to make the most of the media without leaving ourselves and our children open to harms. There is little inherited wisdom.

Ask yourselves these questions to help you decide how your family should use the media. Or maybe set aside some time to go through them as a family

What...?

Are your children watching quality and age appropriate shows? (See related topic: *How to choose the best television, movies, games and websites*)

When selecting programs, are program classifications and consumer advice lines considered?

Are the values and messages contained in certain programs the ones you want your children to absorb?

Is TV advertising having too big an influence on the amount and type of toys and food that your children want?

Do you have a system for ensuring that everyone gets to watch their favourite program, but that when they are finished the TV is turned off?

When ...?

Are your children watching at times where P, C or G programs are screened? (See related topic: *Classifications—Free-to-air TV*)

Are your children watching television to the exclusion of other childhood activities?

Are your children's developmental needs being met, e.g. bonding with caregivers, using fine and gross motor skills, imaginative play and so on? (See related topics: *How much time should my children spend with the media* and *Effects of the media from a child development perspective*)

Where ...?

Is the TV in a family area where children are still part of family life? It is not a good idea to put a TV in a child's bedroom as you are less able to monitor the amount and quality of TV being watched or to take opportunities for you to use what is on the TV as a "teachable moment".

Who ...?

Do you occasionally watch TV with your children? Sharing a program you all enjoy can become an enjoyable time for both parents and children. With younger children it is a good idea to sit with them as they watch shows they are seeing for the first time. You can then be sure that it is appropriate for them.

Are you using shared viewing time to educate your children about the processes of media, including the tricks and techniques used by film-makers and advertisers?

If there is a mixture of ages watching TV, do you have strategies in place so that older children are able to watch material that is suitable and enjoyable for them, while younger children are protected from the same material that may be unsuitable for them? This is a difficult problem which may be addressed to some degree by a roster system. You may find it works better if you have organised an alternative activity to attract the younger child out of the "TV" room when it is the older child's "turn".

What activities are undertaken within the family to build on viewed information, and integrate it into the rest of the child's life?

Why ...?

Are your children watching TV to escape from reality or to avoid difficult situations that would be better dealt with another way?

If you allow your children to use the TV to deal with feeling tired, sad or under stress, are you also teaching them other strategies to deal with these negative feelings, so that a dependence on the TV in those times is less likely to develop?

How ...?

Are your children passively or critically viewing programs on the TV? Are they able to talk about what they have been looking at, and for older children, to describe their thoughts and feelings about it?

Are they snacking more than usual while watching TV?

Are they at a safe distance from the TV? Is their posture OK? (See related topic: *Physical effects of media use*)

What now ...?

If answering these questions has raised concerns for you about your family's use of the media, think about which aspects you would like to change. Develop with your children some 'house rules' for the use of the TV and ways of sticking to them. (See related topic: *Top ten tips for parents*)

For more information about Children and the Media, call the

Young Media Australia Helpline

Up to date and reliable information for parents and caregivers about the impact of the media on children.

1800 700 357

Freecall anywhere in Australia, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Or go to the Young Media Australia website

www.youngmedia.org.au

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To get a list of available Young Media Australia fact sheets, or to order your copies call the
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1800 700 357

You may also download a fact sheet order form from our web site **www.youngmedia.org.au**
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