

cultural diversity

When watching television, there is a need to be aware of stereotyping; children are often sensitive to ethnic and racial prejudice depicted on TV. Reference to the ethnic or racial origin of a person or group should be directly relevant to the story or report, and in context.

You should also look to see if it is implied that only people from English-speaking backgrounds are Australian, or if there are stereotypes characterising how people from non-English speaking backgrounds speak English or behave.

Often television portrays one group as dominant over another and presents our children with biased opinions.

quality

What is a *good* television programme for a child? Parents differ in the ways in which they assess the quality of a programme for their kids, and the parent is the best judge of what they consider is suitable for their own child. However, there are some general points that may be useful in selecting programmes which children can be encouraged to watch.

We know that television is most enjoyed when it is attuned to the needs of the viewer. For children, the best programmes are those which speak to them in ways they can understand, about topics that are important to them. A good programme will encourage children to explore their feelings, learn about their world, and increase their competence and self-worth.

Programmes which exploit children's feelings of envy, competitiveness and anger, or encourage narrow and stereotyped views of the world, do not help children to grow and develop. Good programmes do not need to be *educational* in the sense of being designed to instruct. Rather, the best TV-teachers are entertaining as well as informative, child-centred, and designed to expand horizons.

Further information about YMA services and resources is available from

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Young Media Australia (YMA) exists to promote a quality media environment for Australian children and to raise community awareness of the needs of children and young people in relation to print, electronic and screen based media.

Young Media Australia is the trading name of the Australian Council on Children and the Media.
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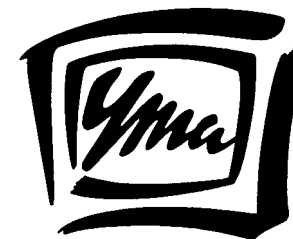
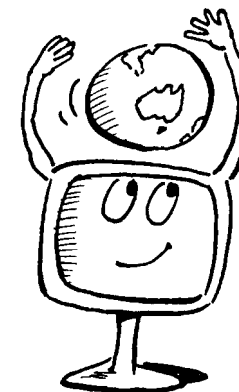
small screen

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Using television sensibly



Young Media Australia

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Using television sensibly

introduction

It's important that children's experience with TV enhance their development rather than hinder it. Time with TV is not just 'entertainment' – but for the young it offers a window on the world. Many early childhood professionals and parents questioned the quality of television programming designed for children, the amount of advertising directed to young viewers, and the way television portrayed women, men, and ethnic minorities, as well as the effects of the amount of time that children spent watching television in general.

The main concerns can be divided into five separate areas:

- the effects of the amount of time children spend watching television
- the impact of violence seen on the small screen
- the way life and values are portrayed
- the influence of television advertising directed to young children
- the indicators of quality programming for young viewers

Suggestions for parents and teachers to deal constructively with each of these issues are developed further in addresses to school, parent and other community organisations. Young Media Australia can provide guest speakers for these purposes.

time

Surveys by audience rating services show an Australian child watches an average of two and a half hours of television each day. This means that by the time they finish secondary school, those children will have spent 11,000 hours in school but more than 15,000 hours watching television.

What are the effects of all this time spent with an electronic playmate and teacher?

Researchers have found differences between children who are light viewers (one hour or less each day) and heavy viewers (four or more hours each day) of television. Heavy viewers put in less effort on school work, have poorer reading skills, play less well with friends, have fewer hobbies and activities, and are more likely to be overweight.

Children's professionals currently recommend no TV for children aged under two, 1 hour per day for those under eight, and up to 2 hours per day for older children.

advertising

Evidence suggests that children younger than six, or even eight years, do not understand that the purpose of advertising is to sell a product. Young children also have trouble distinguishing between ads and programmes. Yet the average child may see more than 20,000 commercials each year.

There are even TV programmes aimed at children which are 30- or 60-minute ads for expensive toys and games – programmes which feature all the 'fun' you can have with a particular product!

While it is true that advertising helps to support the programmes on commercial television, researchers have found that advertising can cause children to want toys or other products that they do not need and that their families cannot afford.

In addition to the resultant tension that arises in many families, many parents feel that advertising encourages their children to be more concerned about possessions than people.

life and values

Children may develop distorted views of society because, although television has changed over the years, women, young children, the elderly and people from non-English speaking backgrounds still do not appear on the screen as often as they do in real life. Further, minorities are often portrayed in narrow, stereotyped roles. On the other hand, male doctors, lawyers and police officers are still over-represented on television.

Topics such as drug abuse, alcoholism and sex may also be brought to a child's attention sooner than the parent(s) feel that the child can cope emotionally with that knowledge. In addition, children often have trouble distinguishing fantasy from reality.

Children and the media:
Let's talk



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