



Choose Fright-free Viewing

Young Media Australia has launched a new package, *Choosing Fright-free Fight-free Viewing: a resource for parents of children under seven* to parents of young children.

For many years YMA has collected research about the impact of media violence on young children. Evidence is clear that media violence can frighten children, and it can also raise the risk that they will become more aggressive now or in later life. Nightmares, irrational fears, feeling threatened, bullying and fighting can sometimes be traced back to what children are watching on TV or in movies and the computer games they are playing.

With these impacts in mind, in 2006 YMA applied for and received funding from the Australian Government's National Community Crime Prevention Program for a project to minimise the impact of media violence on children under the age of seven.



During 2007, in consultation with key early childhood groups in Adelaide, YMA produced a package for parents, and for education and welfare professionals, consisting of a 5 minute DVD, *Choosing Fright-free Fight-free Viewing*, a booklet, a poster, and a flyer. Session notes for educators are available on request.

An important element of the *Choosing Fright-free Fight-free Viewing* initiative is the development of a list of about 200 titles of non-violent media - media where there are no instances of people deliberately hurting other people. The list was created by a team of three media reviewers who reviewed hundreds of DVDs, TV programs and video games. All reviewers have tertiary qualifications in child development. Primarily intended as a web resource, the current list (printed in the *Choosing Fright-free Fight-free Viewing* booklet and available as a two-page stand alone document) is a snapshot in time of some titles that parents could

look for to avoid violent product. YMA is currently seeking funding to maintain, update and add to the list on its website.

Many of the titles reviewed as non-violent media are available in public libraries as well as the usual rental and retail outlets.

The package was launched on November 28, 2007 at the Mercury Cinema in Adelaide. We were pleased to have newly re-elected Member for Hindmarsh, Steve Georganas to do the launch.

Keynote speaker, Professor Philip Gammage delivered his last speaking engagement in Australia as a consultant on early childhood to the South Australian government. He challenged the current trend in many western countries of being over-protective of children in terms of physical safety and close contact with children, while allowing children to be exposed to much inappropriate and unsafe materials via the media.

YMA patron Steve Biddulph contributed a 'fireside chat' (on DVD) reminding the audience about how damaging media impacts on very young children can be.

During the first half of 2008, the *Choosing Fright-free Fight-free Viewing* resource will be distributed, promoted and evaluated in South Australia through the primary education sector (both government and independent), kindergartens, child care and early learning centres, Playgroup SA and Communities for Children. Although the initial promotion and distribution has only been funded for South Australia, YMA will seek funding to promote and distribute the package nationally after July 2008. However, in the meantime, the list of non-violent media for under sevens can be accessed nationally via the YMA website.

For more information about this exciting initiative, or to request educator session notes please contact Young Media Australia on helpline@youngmedia.org.au, or phone the YMA Helpline (1800 700 357, national, freecall).



Our reviewers. From left: Corrie Cupit, Sarih Raisi and Marilyn Coleman.

The media reviewers who created YMA's Fright Free list

Corrie, Sarih and Marilyn (pictured above) are to be congratulated on the great care and professionalism with which they approached their task of sifting through hundreds of children's media products to arrive at a list of 200 titles which contain no interpersonal violence.

They were a tremendous asset to the YMA team for the first six months of 2007, working largely at home, but having a shared day in the office once a week to ensure the final reviews were as consistent as possible, to talk through difficulties and to support each other. Each media type had its challenges. For Corrie reviewing computer games, it was hard to know just how long she had to 'play' before she could confidently approve a product as non-violent; for Sarih reviewing television programs, trying to cover the sheer volume of short products was at times daunting; for Marilyn reviewing movies and DVDs, it was alarmingly difficult to find products that met our criteria for containing absolutely no interpersonal violence.

We extend to our reviewers a very warm thank you. The excellence of the final YMA Fright-free Media List is due in no small part to their expertise and commitment.

STOP PRESS
ACMA has released the *Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007* report. To see the report, go to:
http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_310893



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small screen

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EDITORIAL

That's dancing - or is it? by guest editor Cathy Sherry

Last week I had an opinion piece published in the Sydney Morning Herald and was surprised by the response. For a long time I have been concerned by the sexual nature of girls' dance concerts, but judging by the smiles of parents in the audience around me, I assumed that I was in the minority. Following the Herald piece I received emails of agreement from parents and interestingly, from many dance professionals. This is what I had argued.

If the radical religious zealots of the world needed any confirmation that the West is going to hell in a hand basket the suburban dance concert would do the trick. Gyrating bodies, thrusting breasts and pelvises, sultry stares and all from dancers still eligible for child concession cards.

I'm not a prudish person. I'd describe myself as broadminded. As an academic, it goes with the territory. As a mother, I'm relaxed. My primary school aged daughters wear mini-skirts and watch The Family Guy. However I viewed half of my daughter's end of year dance concert, (I could only stomach half), with increasing horror.

It is hard to know which is more disturbing - innocent eight year olds thrusting their non-existent and barely covered breasts at the audience or inexperienced sixteen year olds thrusting their ample, barely covered bosoms. There was not a jazz routine in the show that did not feature repeated hip-grinding, bum slapping and pelvic thrusts. The dance moves wouldn't be so confronting if the girls' bodies were actually covered, but many of the routines featured midrifts, leaving the girls' torsos completely exposed. Again, it is hard to know what is worse; the skinny little eight year olds looking vulnerable or the teenagers who are frankly too old to be gyrating that much of their uncovered bodies in a hall full of strange men. Of course, for the girls who are a bit plump, the midrift is plain humiliating.

Gifts which avoid commercialism & violence.

Two US organisations have come up with assistance for parents and others faced with the daunting task of finding the right gifts to create a special and memorable experience for the children in their lives. Media have become increasingly central to the holiday season, not only in driving consumer purchasing through advertising, but also as some of the most popular gifts given--video games, DVDs, MP3 players and mobile phones to name a few.

To help parents and their children make these holidays their own, Dr. Michael Rich, director and founder of Center on Media and Child

Maybe I'm being too analytical but I particularly hate cliches in porn through costuming. Last year we had "nurses" in white PVC mini dresses up to their bottoms. This year it was airline hostesses in mini dresses, (or were they just shirts?) As one of my friends asked, "What's next? French maids?"

I wonder what the dance teachers are thinking or if they think about these things at all. If they are not, they need to. I don't care how important flexibility is in dancing, it is never acceptable to make children wobble on stage, holding one ankle to their ear. It should be obvious that even clothed, there are some parts of a child's body that should not be displayed in public. Exactly the same degree of flexibility can be demonstrated by doing the splits with your underwear on the floor.

And that's the point of course: it is entirely possible to show creativity and skill in dance without being blatantly sexual. Human beings have been doing it for centuries. The New South Wales Schools Spectacular, which my daughter also performed in that weekend, is a perfect example. Hundreds of children and teenagers dancing and there was not a single slutty costume or movement in sight. And it was truly spectacular.

There is no doubt that dancing can be sexual. Belly dancing, some Latin dancing, pole dancing, video clip dancing, are all sensual or sexual. However, like all sexual activities, these dance styles are appropriate for consenting adults, not children. If Shakira wants to shake her barely covered booty for the world, that's great. She's being paid to do so and she is thirty. She's old enough to have sex and dance however she wants. None of the children dancing in suburban dance concerts are old enough to be having sex, thus making them dance in sexual ways is at best thoughtless and at worst exploitative.

Cathy Sherry teaches Children and the Law in the Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales and has three daughters.

Health and CMCH researchers have developed a gift giving strategy for parents and caregivers. For more information go to the CMCH website at: <http://www.cmch.tv/gifts/>

At the same time Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE) has released its annual *Toy Action Guide*, an invaluable resource for anyone concerned about the commercialization of children's play. It contains information on how to select toys that promote positive play and reduce the influence of harmful toys on children.

The guide is available at :
http://www.truceteachers.org/toyguides/T_Guide_web_07.pdf.

Clips 'n' Cuts

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Internet bullying warning to parents

Barney Zwartz

MORE than one-third of teenage girls in Australia have been sexually harassed via the internet, and more than a quarter admit to cyber-bullying other girls, according to a survey released yesterday.

A psychologist, Michael Carr-Gregg, told a national conference on bullying in Melbourne that more than 90 per cent of parents were not taking seriously enough their responsibility to protect their children online.

"Most parents haven't got a clue," he said. "This is part of the digital divide. Parents have fallen for the two-card trick that what goes on online is private and that children have a right to be online."

A Victoria Police cyber-safety specialist, Susie McLean, said cyber-bullying affected more young people every day than drug abuse.

"There's no school in Australia not dealing with cyber bullying," Senior Constable McLean said. "It's the number one safety problem confronting young people."

The cyber survey, run in *Girl-friend* magazine, showed that more than two-thirds of teenagers had tried to hide their internet use from their families, and that almost half felt their relationships suffered because of excessive internet use.

Mr Carr-Gregg said the survey, using questions he designed, mirrored academic surveys and was very reliable.

He said cyber safety began with "online contracts" available from the Government online protection website NetaAlert, but 91 per cent of families had not done so. Many did not have internet filters.

The 26 per cent of girls who admitted cyber-bullying - via mobile phone, email, internet chatrooms and social networking sites such as MySpace - was a significant underestimation because most girls would not admit doing it, he said.

The survey found that more than one-third of girls had been sent sexually inappropriate material via the internet; 70 per cent had accessed pornography sites by accident and 21 per cent on purpose; 41 per cent had been asked to post naked pictures of themselves.

He said sexual harassment - usually messages such as "you're a slut" - was a particularly odious form of bullying.

"The Government emphasises sexual predators. What we've found is that the vast majority of sexual predation is from peers.

"In the US, one in five girls has been solicited online. We are nowhere near that, but we'll catch up," Mr Carr-Gregg told the conference.

SMH, 5 November 2007

ABC in kids' TV appeal

By PAUL KALINA

THE ABC yesterday waded into the election campaign, pressuring the ALP to back plans for a dedicated children's channel to be launched next April.

The Coalition announced last week that it would spend \$82 million over the next four years on an ABC digital children's channel.

Yesterday the ABC's head of television, Kim Dalton, said the channel would be on air by April, "provided the funds are approved by government soon after the election".

The ALP is yet to announce whether it supports the proposal, which has been put forward by the ABC and the Australian Children's Television Association.

ABC3, as it is to be known, would be free of commercials and transmit programs between 6am and 9pm daily for children up to the age of 17. It would be available free to viewers with a digital television or digital set-top box and be re-transmitted via subscription TV services. Half of the \$82 million in funding would be spent commissioning new local programs.

"If we're not careful, we will find that Australian children are no longer having any contact with Australian-produced children's television, Australian stories, Australian voices, Australian values," Mr Dalton said. "Research shows that the numbers of children viewing television between 6pm and 9pm is very high, but on free-to-air TV there are no children's programs broadcast at that time."

Mr Dalton said the proposal was "received with enthusiasm" when put to the Government 12 months ago. "It's in the national interest for the sake of Australia's children. It's something that needs to be looked at very seriously, and I would hope we get the support of the ALP..."

But he conceded "we can't proceed unless we have the commitment of whoever is in (government)".

The proposal has been welcomed by the Screen Producers Association of Australia, whose executive director, Geoff Brown, said the networks are not meeting licence requirements for Australian-made children's television.

The Age, 16 November 2007

A vindication of standards

THE Australian Children's Television Foundation, which worked with the ABC in pitching for the new channel, says the channel will screen new programs as well as selections from the rich catalogue of programs created during the past 25 years as a result of the Australian content standard and children's television standards. "We see this as a way that local content created for our children, much of it supported by taxpayers, actually reaches and connects with its intended audience," ACTF chief executive **Jenny Buckland** says. "It will enhance the effectiveness of existing policy initiatives by increasing access to both new and older Australian children's programs."

The Australian, 15 November 2007

Leave the kids to Aunty

AS was widely expected, the Coalition last week announced plans for a children's ABC channel if it is re-elected. ABC managing director **Mark Scott** said in a statement:

"We welcome the opportunity to create an ABC channel dedicated to non-commercial Australian children's television content.

This is a proposal the ABC has been talking ... about for some time. The ABC brand is a known and trusted brand in children's television, providing quality non-commercial children's content for Australian families for over 50 years. This service will be a great addition to the breadth of services that the ABC provides."

With TV executives such as Seven chief executive **David Leckie** on the record as objecting to laws that force him to produce and screen children's TV, ABC 3 may end up running all the unprofitable content the commercial channels don't want to run. One of the proposals in the review of Australian children's TV standards is to allow the networks to trade away their obligations to another platform. The channel will also be attractive to parents trying to shield kids from commercials. Pay-TV channels such as Nick Jr and the Cartoon Network feature ads for junk food and toys. Only the Disney Channel and Disney's Playhouse are ad free.

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The Australian, 15 November 2007

Artists ignored

NO doubt there will be enormous support from the silent majority of thinking people for Noni Hazlehurst's views on contemporary culture. One manifestation of the devaluing of real culture is the way newspapers reporting visual arts events rarely acknowledge the artists. For instance, in the same issue of *The Advertiser*, the unveiling of the memorial to the late Steve Irwin did not tell us who made it.

■ DONALD RICHARDSON, Mt Barker.

Hazlehurst's fury at 'child abuse' TV menu

Sandy George
Film writer

CHILDREN are being fed an imbalanced diet of information, images and concepts that they are developmentally unprepared to assimilate and it adds up to child abuse, according to actor and former *Play School* host Noni Hazlehurst said yesterday.

"They are growing up in the age of terrorism and fatuousness: the images that will be their earliest memories are the images of 9/11 and Britney Spears, and no one is doing anything about it," she said yesterday.

"I believe our children's imaginations are dying and it scares the hell out of me."

Hazlehurst's passionate criticism of television and the effect it is having on children was delivered in the annual Hector Crawford Memorial Lecture, which opened the three-day conference of the Screen Producers Association of Australia in the Gold Coast, Queensland.

Hazlehurst said it was a cop-out to dismiss her criticisms as being those of the older generation wanting to return to the good old days. "It is my contention that most of the well-documented problems kids today have are a direct result of their being bombarded, on a daily basis, by the popular media's increasing focus on commercial values rather than crea-



Attack on junk: Noni Hazlehurst delivers the Hector Crawford Memorial Lecture

tive ones, by the conflation of true psychological needs with wants, by the lauding of celebrity over actual achievement or contribution, and by their constant exposure to examples of our basest behavioural instincts."

She argued that mainstream media should be uniting people and teaching them the value of ordinary life and relationships, not fixating on the worst and teaching people to think that what counts is being rich, loud, and a

consumer. "Commercial values have replaced creativity and quality, so that we are left with an eminently dispensable, crude and irrelevant mishmash of recycled and watered-down insulting dross, which does little more than punctuate the ads," she said.

Children now think that if something is not for sale, it's not worth having, she said, and younger and younger children are being targeted by marketers who want them to buy

SCREEN PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA CONFERENCE 2007

things that make them appear older, cooler and richer.

"We have been asleep at the wheel and split from essential humanness by market forces," Hazlehurst said.

"I am furious about the dumbing down of audiences, the diminishing opportunities and encouragement for creativity and for originality, the constant call for clones of previous successes, and the lack of opportunity for most people to enjoy or participate in the arts," she said.

Hazlehurst said it was appropriate to be talking in Crawford's name because he felt acutely the responsibility to use the medium for good.

She implored producers to claim their rightful place as opinion-formers and world-changers.

"It is simply incomprehensible to me that in 2007 we are still fighting to achieve decent Australian content standards and decent funding levels, despite all the evidence pointing to the enrichment of life on every level that cultural relevance in the prevailing media can provide," she said.

The Australian, 15 November 2007

We are all responsible

ARCHBISHOP Philip Freier is right. Why are our young people so unhappy? What messages are being sent that make them feel so lacking in self-esteem? The belief that true worth lies in a person's personality, compassion, talents and achievements has been forgotten. The past five years has seen a proliferation in the number of fashion and gossip magazines all peddling to girls, in particular, the message that it is what you look like that really matters.

Look closely and you'll also see there are now publications aimed at young men, peddling the male version of the same message. There is also a new demographic, the "twens", to whom the same message is being sold, along with the resultant sexualisation at an obscenely young age.

The media need to take some responsibility for peddling these messages, but we, as a society, need to make it clear that the messages being sold are unacceptable. We also need to keep plugging away against this barrage of personal image, and instil in our young people acceptance of who they are, regardless of looks.

Alison Crofts, Mount Waverley

Fight commercialism

I WOULD like to applaud Noni Hazlehurst's honest, intelligent and outspoken comments about our cultural drought. I just wonder whether this is where we are all being politically led as a nation, as our present leaders tell us we should commercially expand, at any cost. I also noticed the comments by Archbishop Philip Freier on the effects of commercialism on our young. What a force it would be if all churches could put aside their differences and act as one to fight this corruptive element.

Terence Donovan, Armadale
The Age, 16 November 2007

The 'revolution' starts in childhood

The Age, 16 November 2007

MONEY and computers alone will not lead to an education revolution (*The Age, 15/11*). It also needs programs and teaching methods that encourage students and workers to think creatively and critically for themselves. We live in a rapidly changing and competitive world — a world that demands societies that can solve problems with novel ideas and people who can reason and make relevant decisions. Inquisitiveness and inventiveness need to be the foundations of any education system.

Such a revolution has already begun in Singapore, where children are successfully being taught the mindset and thinking skills needed to create novel ideas and to make personal judgements. Both of our political parties are talking big about early childhood but have not announced any new programs for going beyond Plasticine, play, and paint. Please inform us with specifics rather than vague slogans.

John Langrehr, Hazelwood Park, SA

The consequences are dire

NONI Hazlehurst's fury is well justified ("Hazlehurst's fury at 'child abuse' TV menu", 15/11). Marketing and merchandising are dictating the content of our children's programs, and the short and long-term consequences are dire. The menu of children's programs is full of formula stories that lack diversity and fail to expand their imaginations and horizons.

A re-elected Coalition government would provide \$82 million to fund a children's digital channel on the ABC. This could provide much-needed diversity and help children avoid ads but only if the programs themselves are free of commercial influences. If all we get are the same old product-linked programs designed to promote a line of toys and other products, then children will have gained little.

What sort of a society are we when we can't provide quality TV programs for our children without selling them products and a consumer lifestyle at the same time?

Jane Roberts
Glenelg, SA

HEAR! Hear! Noni Hazlehurst. Edmund Burke said all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing. And that is exactly what is happening with the sexualisation of our children. They are not even collateral damage, they are the legitimate targets of explicit imagery for the sole purpose of making a buck. And we accept this or else we suffer the ultimate indignity of being labelled old-fashioned. Enough!

John Stanley
Balgownie Heights, NSW

The Australian, 16 November 2007

CHILDREN UNDER THREAT

Reality TV equals child abuse, says Hazelhurst

Actor attacks "cultural drought"

By LORNA EDWARDS

ACTOR Noni Hazelhurst made a scathing assessment of Australian film and television yesterday, accusing the industry of destroying children's imaginations and prematurely sexualising them in a form of child abuse.

Reality television caused children to believe being nasty, objectionable or stupid was the best they could be and implied that contestants were the "cream of the crop" and what they should aspire to.

"If vapidness and insincerity and self-absorption delivered at a hundred miles an hour is their primary experience in life, then that becomes the culture in which they live," Hazelhurst said after her speech at the Screen Producers Association of Australia's annual conference on the Gold Coast yesterday.

"The mere fact that it is called reality is misleading in itself and I think it is giving them a very limited view of what is possible," she said, adding that many young viewers were unaware that reality shows were heavily manipulated, edited and commercially driven.

"The only talent you seem to need is to be stick-thin and/or outrageous, the only prerequisite for fame is a willingness to step into the spotlight," she said.

Hazelhurst, who has a role in the crime series *City Homicide*, said the "cultural drought" of television had forced children to create their own content on the internet as the reality genre bore little resemblance to most people's lives.

"They are creating avatars rather than lives and living as cyborgs rather than real people and spending far less time interacting with other human beings," she said.

The 54-year-old former *Play School* presenter said the media's lauding of celebrities behaving badly, such as Paris Hilton and Britney Spears,

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See the letters page today for full details.

created unhealthy role models for children.

"If these people are achieving more attention than people who are doing amazingly wonderful things in the world, then you are giving a view of the world that is completely skewed," she said.

"We are overloading and overwhelming their brains and causing their imaginations to atrophy, which, in my view, constitutes nothing less than child abuse."

News and current affairs images of events such as the September 11 terrorist attacks also bombarded children, giving them a negative, dysfunctional, depressed view of the world.

"Kids are suffering mid-life crises in their teens years because they're being forced to cope with too much, too soon," she said. "I don't blame children for feeling they don't want to be part of it and they'd rather create their own content."

Hazelhurst said she had witnessed the deterioration in Australian television in her 35 years in the industry with the growth of commercial advertising and its creep into program content.

She lamented that children's entertainment such as *Hi-5* and *The Wiggles* pushed commercial products but said she did not want to name specific shows that were harming children.

At yesterday's conference, the Screen Producers Association called on the Labor Party to match the Coalition's election pledge of an \$83 million package to create an ABC digital channel for quality children's programming.

Association executive director Geoff Brown applauded the proposal but warned that commercial networks should not shirk their responsibilities to children.

The Age, 15 November 2007

CHILDREN UNDER THREAT

Enough 'reality', it's a turn-off

THANK you to Noni Hazelhurst (*The Age*, 15/11) for saying in public what all Australians are thinking. Free-to-air television is an absolute disgrace and we shouldn't put up with it. Television is the greatest educational device known to humanity and what are we using it for? Hammed-up and fake "reality" shows, gory, ghastly and violent crime shows, and dumbed-down American anything.

What has happened to the real TV we used to have — quiz shows without the insufferable hype and fake emotions, talent shows where judges judged without histrionics and comperes talked to you like you were an adult not a kinder child, great movies and mini-series, not 48th re-runs; interesting "soap", not wall-to-wall sex and conflict?

Surely this type of television must be breeding a race who think you have sex with everyone, any time, you are in eternal conflict with everyone else, you can't trust anyone because they'll double-cross you. And this is life? Let's see some TV with human kindness; positive, uplifting stories that bring people together and promote harmony and happiness. Maybe then we will be a happier nation.

Spencer Leighton, Torquay

It's got to stop

AFTER reading the "Children under threat" articles (*The Age*, 15/11), I felt yet again the sense of urgency needed to tackle this terrible situation. I, like so many other parents, am desperately unhappy about the early sexualisation of children that continues to worsen unchecked. Even though my husband and I limit and monitor the television watched by our two girls, aged eight and six, they are still bombarded with overt sexual messages on billboards, via other children and in shops, etc.

Already, they talk about being fat and are becoming self-conscious of their bodies in a way years beyond where they should be. It's outrageous and depressing. The trouble is, even though so many of us as parents want it stopped, we don't know how to go about it. Action needs to be taken, including some responsibility. Who do we need to target?

Bernadette Robinson, South Yarra

The Age, 16 November 2007

Today Tonight panned

Sally Jackson

THE Seven Network's *Today Tonight* again attracted the most complaints of any TV program, with 83 viewers writing in to complain about it in the year to June.

The current affairs flagship, chosen by John Howard and Peter Costello for a rare joint interview on Monday night, also sparked the most complaints last year, with 95, and the second most in 2005, with 46.

Most of last year's viewer gripes concerned perceived bias and/or inaccuracy in reporting; showing material considered to be inappropriate for the time slot; and perceived discrimination in reporting.

Seven news and current affairs director Peter Meakin said he

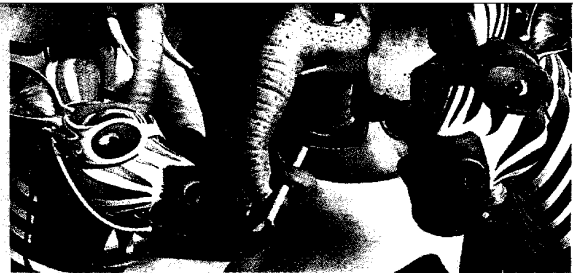
stood by the quality of the show. "Lots of viewers, lots of complaints: that's the rule in this business," Meakin said. "When you're dealing with contentious issues, you will get complaints."

Ten Network talent show *Australian Idol* received 51 complaints, mostly concerning perceived discrimination, sexual references and language considered to be inappropriate.

It was followed by Ten's comedy *The Ronnie Johns Half Hour* (45 complaints), 2006 New Year's Eve coverage (39), *The Biggest Loser* (21) and Seven's *Sunrise* (21) program.

Overall, stations received 914 written complaints during the 12 months to June, down from 1109 in 2005-06, according to the annual code complaints report released yesterday.

The Australian, 21 November 2007



Show's great, but not the timeslot

Review Nicole Brady

There is a lot to like about Channel Ten's new animation series, *Animalia*. Stripped back to basics, it is the classic tale of two children lost in a strange land, forced to trust strangers they quickly bond with to ward off a frightening, unknown adversary.

In building upon the best-selling and acclaimed (these two do not often go together) *Animalia* book by Graeme Base, the television series sensibly uses two children and introduces the striped sweater-clad Alex, whom many of us have fond memories of finding on each page of the book, to a feisty friend, Zoe.

Together, the children leave behind their grey city (this theme will be familiar to those who have followed Base's children's books) and enter the magical world of a library, which in turn introduces them to the vivid colours and excitement of the jungle world that is *Animalia*.

As the colours spring to life through the many and varied animals the children encounter, themes emerge: harmony, community, fear of new immigrants, environmental protection, media manipulation and exploitation of people's insecurities.

But the show is not didactic. Rather, the issues form part of the rich tapestry of a series in which children, tweens and adults familiar with the book will recognise their favourite animals coming to life through some very impressive animation.

In fact, so wide is the appeal that this show having the timeslot it does is very disappointing. Ten argues noon on a Sunday is a family-friendly timeslot that will enable the series, on which it and other international networks have invested heavily, to appeal to a wide demographic. According to Ten, slotting it in on a weekday afternoon, as the BBC is doing, or early on a Saturday morning, as the Canadian investor is doing, and "only children will watch".

But do they really think children, let alone parents, are sitting around watching television during the middle of a Sunday in November? The only folk likely to be doing that live in Springfield, Illinois.

Locally, families are so desperate for shows in which all members can watch together they have made a ratings winner out of *Australia's Funniest Home Videos* at 6.30pm on a Saturday and repeats of *Thank God You're Here* same time on a Sunday.

Ten programs repeats of *The Simpsons* at 6pm on both those nights. What a shame no one had the courage to give this local program a shot in that timeslot. It might just have worked.

The Age Green Guide, 8 November 2007

Guide for parents on film violence

JESSICA LEO
MEDIA WRITER

YOUNG Media Australia today will release a booklet and DVD aimed at promoting violence-free TV viewing and video games for children.

Detailing around 200 DVD, TV program and video game titles, the initiative is aimed at preventing children, aged less than seven, consuming inappropriate media and developing aggressive or unsociable behaviour as a result.

Titled *Choosing fright-free, fight-free viewing: a resource for parents of children under 7* the DVD will provide parents and education professionals with an overview.

The booklet will feature in-depth analysis, tips and a listing of around 200 titles.

The launch at the Mercury Cinema will feature guest speaker Professor Philip Gammage who has spent 10 years advising the Department of Education and Children's Services and author and family psychologist Steve Biddulph.

Mr Biddulph says while it has long been accepted violence in the media has a negative effect on children's development, more needs to be done to address the problem.

"We need far better regulation of violent media in our society, it serves little real purpose and carries genuine risk, if only for a few, of creating imitative behaviour," he said.

"It also serves to frighten and make anxious children out of all proportion to the relative safety and manageability of life.

"Exposing children to fearful, ran-

dom, inappropriate violence, even in cartoon form, or computer game form, or in the news or movies, can teach them wrongly that this is what the world is really like, that this is the way to behave."

Over the next six months, a DVD/booklet package will be rolled out across Adelaide via education, child care and community sectors.

Several SA libraries have joined the initiative to make the listed titles readily available.

The sanctioned titles are filed under two categories: non-violent media and "approved with caution" titles which do not feature violence but may have some scary scenes.

Playgroup SA acting executive officer Donna Young says the in-

Better regulation of violent media

itiative will help educate parents and result in a positive flow-on.

"At Playgroup, we often see very young children playing aggressively and hurting one another," she said.

"Aggressive children can tear playgroups apart, with parents fearful that children may be seriously hurt. This resource shows parents the links between what children are viewing (TV, movies, computer games etc) and their subsequent anti social behaviours."

The launch follows former *Play School* presenter Nomi Hazelhurst's comments less than a fortnight ago that "most of what our kids watch is not helpful, at best, and damaging at worst".

The Advertiser, 28 November 2007

Time bombs

I agree with Nicole Brady (Cover story, 8/11) on the stupidity of *Animalia's* timeslot. Not only is noon Sunday a silly time for a children's show, it also replaces *Brainiac*, a show that entertained as well as educated on the subject of science.

Liam Rasmussen, Kew

The Age Green Guide, 15 November 2007

MySims builds a different kind of hero

Mahesh Sharma

MYSIMS is a game for those who have always thought role-playing games had far too much magic and fantasy and not enough construction and reconstruction.

Ten years ago if someone had pitched a game in which the hero was a builder whose mission was to save a broken-down town by making furniture, they probably would have been laughed out of town.

But the games landscape is very different now and can accommodate a game in which the key elements include building chairs and painting walls with apple-flavoured paint.

MySims is about an expert builder who has been called on to rebuild a rundown town.

It's not your usual role-playing game but it's the kind that only works on the

Nintendo Wii, and not just because it is aimed at the mainstream gamer that the console caters to so well.

As you meet the townfolk you're given building requests to get their spirits up.

You start out with a couple of basic blueprints for chairs, tables and a bed, but your portfolio grows as you complete tasks and your handiwork becomes bigger and better.

There are plenty of cartoon characters, flowers and happy music, but when it comes to building objects, this game is not child's play, so to speak.

You've got to co-ordinate both the Wiimote and the nunchuck (hand controller) to precisely and methodically construct items, and there's a lot of twisting and turning and positioning and balancing to get things right.

Nintendo has done such a good job of

recreating the hands-on experience of the workshop that you can virtually (pun intended) feel the timber in your hands and smell the varnish and paint cans in the corner.

It takes you back to your high-school woodworking days.

There is a point to all this construction, and as you start to restore your town to its former glory you earn the right to break down walls around the town and chase challenges around the MySims world.

The key elements in role-plays have always been the story and character development, but in the case of MySims these are just taped on.

This game is really about building, and finding blueprints to do more building, and it is a lot of fun.

What else would you expect from a game in which the protagonist is a carpenter?

The Australian, 20 November 2007 —

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CCFC's 6th Summit
Consuming Kids:
The Sexualization of Children
& other
Commercial Calamities

April 3-5, 2008
Wheelock College, Boston , MA

More details & registration at:
<http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/events.htm>

