



Guiding Your Family's Media and Technology Use

Tip Sheet

Category: Television

What You Need to Know

Benefits

- Television programs can inform, educate, and entertain.
- The Children's Television Act of 1990 ensures that broadcast networks now show at least three hours of educational programming each week. Educational and informational programs are often identified by an E/I icon in the corner of the television screen and are more likely to offer some educational benefit to your family. You might want to take a closer look at these programs.
- DVRs (digital video recorders, which allow you to record from your television to a hard drive-based digital storage system) can be used to preview shows to ensure they are what you want your child watching.

Risks

- Many parents are concerned about their children watching television programs that have content more suitable for mature audiences.
- The advertising and marketing industry can influence consumers, including children.
- The popularity and abundance of reality TV shows has the potential to create confusion about what is appropriate to share publicly and what behaviors are socially acceptable.

Ratings

Television ratings indicate age appropriate programming. Ratings appear in the upper left-hand corner of the screen at the beginning of all broadcast programs and many cable programs. Ratings include: (V) violence, (S) sex, (L) adult language, (D) suggestive dialogue, or (FV) fantasy violence. The ratings are voluntarily agreed to by the broadcast and cable television networks and are assigned episode by episode.

What You Can Do

- Do your homework. Television ratings, the v-chip, and other types of parental controls from your cable provider are designed to give parents guidance. In addition to previewing a recorded version of the show after the kids are in bed, consider speaking to older children and other parents, or look for newspaper, magazine, and online reviews.
- Learn how to program your v-chip and to use your cable provider's parental controls.
- Watch with your child. The best way to know and understand what your children are watching is to sit down next to them and take a look.
- Establish a media use contract with each child in your family. It is important that you have a conversation with each child to set rules and limits that are appropriate for him or her. In your conversation, be explicit about what types of shows you are comfortable with your child watching and what the consequences will be if the contract is broken. Once the contracts have been signed, post them in a prominent place in your home as a reminder.

Visit these online resources for in-depth information:

- Parent Teacher Association, www.pta.org/tvtipsheet
- Cable Puts You in Control, www.controlyourtv.org
- Common Sense Media, www.common Sense Media.org/tv-reviews/
- TV Parental Guidelines, www.tvguidelines.org

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