

MONITORING THE MEDIA

10 Things Parents Can Do

As a parent, there are many ways you can help your child develop positive media habits. The following tips will help you and your family use media prudently.

1. Set limits.

Limit your child's use of TV, movies, video and computer games to no more than 1 or 2 hours per day. Do not let your child view media while doing homework.

2. Plan your child's TV viewing.

Instead of flipping through channels, use a program guide and the TV ratings to help you and your child choose shows. Turn the TV on to watch the program you chose and turn it off when the program is over.

3. Watch visual media with your child.

Whenever possible, watch visual media (TV, movies, video games) with your child and talk about what you see. If your child is very young, she may not be able to tell the difference between a show, a commercial, a cartoon, or real life. Explain that characters are make-believe and not real. Some "reality-based" programs may appear to be "real," but most of these shows focus on stories that will attract as many viewers as possible. Often these are stories about tragedy and violence. Much of their content is not appropriate for children. Young children may worry that what they see could happen to them or their family. News broadcasts also contain violent or inappropriate material. If your schedule prevents you from watching with your child, talk to her later about what she watched. Better yet, videotape the programs so that you can watch them with your child at a later time.

4. Find the right message.

If it happens that your child accidentally watches a poor program, turn it into a learning experience if you help your child find the right message. Some forms of media may portray people as stereotypes. Talk with your child about the real-life roles of men and women, the elderly, and people of other races that may not be shown on television. Discuss ways that people are different and ways that we are the same. Help your child learn appreciation for others. Remember, if you don't agree with certain subject matter, you must either turn off the media or explain why you object.

5. Help your child resist commercials.

Don't expect your child to be able to resist ads for toys, candy, snacks, cereal, drinks, or new media programs without your help. When your child asks for products advertised on TV or the internet, explain that the purpose of commercials is to make people want things they may not need. Limit the number of commercials your child sees by watching public television stations (PBS). You can also tape programs and leave out the commercials or buy or rent children's videos.

6. Look for quality children's videos.

There are many quality videos available for youth that you can buy or rent. If you have questions about children's videos or just want some suggestions, contact The Coalition for Quality Children's Media at 505/989-8076 or visit their Web site at www.cqcm.org.

Furthermore, the United States Bishops have a movie rating guide at www.usccb.org and click on movies; www.screenit.com reviews movies in great detail. It is not necessary to join and pay the fee, simply click "No Thanks" at the bottom of the page.

7. Give other options.

Watching TV, spending time on the internet or playing video games can become a habit for your child. Help your child find other things to do with his time, such as the following:

- Participating in outdoor recreation
- Reading
- Activities with family, friends, or neighbors
- Learning a hobby, sport, instrument, or an art

8. Set a good example.

You are the most important role model in your child's life. Limiting your own media usage (including PDAs) and choosing programs that are moral will help your child do the same.

9. Express your views.

When you like or don't like something you see on television, make yourself heard. Write to the TV station, network, or the program's sponsor. Stations, networks, and sponsors pay attention to letters from the public. If you think a commercial is misleading, write down the product name, channel, and time you saw the commercial and describe your concerns. Call your local Better Business Bureau, or send the information to:

Children's Advertising Review Unit
Council of Better Business Bureau
845 Third Ave
New York, NY 10022

Encourage publishers of TV guides to print ratings and feature articles about shows that are educational for children.

10. Get more information.

The following people and places can provide you with more information about the proper role of media in your child's life:

- **Your pediatrician** may have information about media or can help you get it through the American Academy of Pediatrics. Ask for the AAP brochure Understanding the Impact of Media on Children and Teens.
- **Public service groups** publish newsletters that review programs and give tips on how to make the media a positive experience for you and your child. Check with your pediatrician.
- **Your local Parent/Teacher Association (PTA).**
- **Parents of your child's friends and classmates** can also be helpful. Talk with other parents and agree to enforce similar rules about media usage.