A Family’s Guide to Digital Media
Creating Guidelines and Great Discussions about TV, Social Media, Video Streaming, Apps, Internet Use, and More

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Have you seen our latest book *Conversations with My Kids: 30 Essential Family Discussions for the Digital Age*? A simple, super-helpful guide that gives YOU the words to talk about tough, timely topics of today (like social media, changing technology, LGBTQI issues, integrity, racism, overcoming fears, setting goals and more). Available in print and Kindle on Amazon.
A Family’s Guide to Media Usage

The media is part of our everyday life, from streaming services to smartphones we are always connected to the online world with a simple click or swipe. There is much good that can be obtained from media usage. Through the use of media, we can acquire knowledge, communicate with others, and have time to unwind.

But how much media is too much? How is media usage in your home affecting your family members’ relationships, education, face-to-face time, sleep, exercise, and eating habits? The amount of time we spend on media and how we use media makes a big impact on our own lives and the lives of our family.

This guidebook is intended to assist you and your family in finding a balance by providing tools and information to create your own family media usage plan.

Dr. Megan Moreno said, “Parents can set expectations and boundaries to make sure their children’s media experience is a positive one. The key is mindful use of media within a family.” (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

“Parents can set expectations and boundaries to make sure their children’s media experience is a positive one. The key is mindful use of media within a family.”

Dr. Megan Moreno, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016

Resources:
Studies have shown that very young children do not seem to benefit from screen time. Excessive screen time can have adverse effects on a child’s physiological and psychological development. This can lead to numerous negative effects, such as an increase in depression and anxiety, addiction, and antisocial behavior as well as a decrease in prosocial behavior (Lissak, 2018).

Other studies have found that when a child watched a screen, there was little brain activity (Dunckley, 2014). However, when the baby watched and heard their mother, their brain lit up and formed numerous learning connections (Université de Montréal, 2010). This is a sensitive period for brain development as well as physical and emotional growth. It is crucial that young children have the opportunities needed to enhance and support their learning and development. Screen time does not aid in this effort but rather it takes up fundamental learning time.

### Screen Time Recommendations by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newborn to 18 months</td>
<td>No screen time, with the exception of video-chatting with family and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Kids Health, n.d.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 months to 3 years old</td>
<td>Minimal amounts of screen time with the supervision of a parent or caregiver.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At this age, children gain very little from sitting in front of a screen alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>However, as a parent engages with them, it can aid in their learning. (Kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health, n.d.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 3 to 5 years old | No more than 1 hour a day of **educational programming** together with a parent or other caregiver who can help them understand what they’re seeing (Kids Health, n.d.). Parents should look for programming with the following characteristics: (PBS Parents, n.d).

- Activities worth repeating
- Constructive ways to resolve conflict
- Strong male and female characters
- Positive social models
- Characters from around the world
- Lessons that foster love and learning
- Humor that appeals to parents and children
- Characters from different age groups
- Few or no commercial messages |

| 6 to 12 years old | Have consistent time limits (less is best) and to utilize programming with the following characteristics (PBS Parents, n.d).

- Lessons in thinking and learning
- Positive social models
- Strong male and female characters
- Activities that get them off the couch
- Characters from a variety of cultures and historical time periods
- Characters from different age groups
- Few or no commercial messages |
It can be challenging to monitor teenagers’ screen time but it is vital for parents to continue placing consistent limits on screen time and content. Screen time should not take the place of getting enough sleep and being physically active (Kids Health, n.d). Regarding content, PBS Parents suggests the following characteristics be found:

- Introduce them to scientific discoveries
- Encourage investigation of other cultures and times
- Focus on art and people who make it
- Explain how to do something new
- Offer an alternative to network reality programming
- Feature characters who have full lives and healthy relationships
- Offer rich news and information
- Limit commercial content. Programs that are free from commercial messages and interruptions allow the focus to be entirely on the programming

Points to Consider

- Long term consequences of our children learning to be soothed by screens are very detrimental. Rather than use technology during a tantrum, have a supply of other toys or distractions with you at all times. Speak calmly to your children and remind yourself it’s okay to not give in to tantrums. Take time each day to teach your children and spend time with them on more meaningful activities such as those that encourage interaction or development of skills.

- Share screen time with your children. Watch the YouTube video they think is funny, share a video you found inspirational on Face-
book, watch their new favorite movie with them. Make screen time a bonding experience rather than a solitary experience.

- After watching something together, have a discussion about it. Talk about the positive things portrayed and share new ideas. Listen to any concerns your child might have, and answer their questions (FilmRating.com, n.d.).

- Find ways to connect often with your kids without screens

- With so many choices available choosing a movie or show for your child can be difficult. Raising Children Network suggests that parents try to avoid the following when choosing a movie for their child.

  - Violent material
  - Scenes the children might find disturbing
  - Sexual references
  - Nudity
  - Coarse language
  - Use of illegal substances

**Questions For You to Consider**

- What types of media is your child interested in?
- Does the show/movie provide truth?
- Will my child realize what they are watching is fantasy?
- Do I want my child to take on the attitudes of the characters?
- From 2011 to 2017, mobile media use by our children ages 0-8 tripled (Common Sense Media, 2017). What could you do to ensure media is a positive part of your family life?
Questions For Your Kids to Consider

- How much time do you spend in front of a screen? What are other ways you could spend your time?
- Was there anything in a movie/TV show you were unsure about or that didn’t make sense?
- Was there a character in a movie you liked/didn’t like? Why?
- What kinds of movies or TV shows do you want to watch?
- Was there anything in a movie/TV show you didn’t like? Why?

Check out *Petra’s Power to See!* An engaging story to help you and your family understand the power of media and how to deconstruct its power in your lives.

Resources:


The internet is amazing and provides us with access to unlimited amounts of information, through the use of websites and apps. There are over 1.5 billion websites available and approximately 2 million apps. Teaching our children how to navigate through the myriad of choices and develop internet habits is crucial.

Parents must set appropriate time limits, studies have found too much time spent on the internet can lead to increased weight gain, increased depression and anxiety, decreased sleep quality/duration, and addiction (The Center for Parenting Education, n.d.). Additionally, it is important for parents to be aware of the websites/apps their children are using and consequently being influenced by.

### Recommendations by Ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newborn to 2 years</td>
<td>There should be no web use for children before the age of 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 years old</td>
<td>All technology usage should be done together with a parent (Ceder, 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 12 years old</td>
<td>All apps should be approved and monitored by parents. Set reasonable limits on time and usage. Explore educational apps and websites like Nick Jr., National Geographic for Kids, and PBS Kids.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents should continue to monitor the apps and websites being used and set reasonable time and usage limits. Make sure you approve every app your child downloads through services like Apple Family Share. Use filters and monitors for home computers and phones!

- Know how to use smartphones and their apps, even those used by schools like Google Classroom, Google Drive, and Google Docs.
- Explore helpful, meaningful apps such as those for learning, art, and relaxation.

**Points to Consider**

- Each website and app wants to keep a user online as much as possible. Websites make money based on views, watch time, and clicks. It is designed to keep you in front of the screen which can lead to addictive behaviors. Here are some signs that can indicate a technology/screen addiction (Schwartz, 2018):
  
  - Inability to stop
  - Loss of interest in other things, only motivated by screen time/technology
  - Preoccupied with technology/digital media
  - Child’s use interferes with family activities
  - Creates serious problems in daily life and schedule
  - Need for more and more screen time
  - The child uses digital media/technology as an escape

- While children are developing and learning to set limits for themselves, parents and educators should step in to help them and act as protectors until they learn to be their own protectors.
Just because something is stamped “healthy” does not mean it is completely beneficial for our bodies. The same goes for technology. Just because something is labeled “educational” does not mean it is a green light for kids to use without supervision or review. It is important for all websites and apps to be reviewed before our kids use them.

Create personalized media standards for each child. These standards should be based on maturity, age, and need. A great way to monitor technology usage is through parental control apps. There are many apps based on different parental needs, and what you decide to use is ultimately up to you. You know your child best. You can adjust as you go as one rule does not have to stay in place permanently.

The most important rules are the rules kids pick for themselves (Heitner, 2017). This means there should be conversations occurring between you and your children about technology. Involve them as much as possible setting media limits and guidelines, allow their point of view to be heard and understood.

Relationships are more important than technology, and homework, chores, and other obligations should be met before technology usage (Lewis, 2014).
Children should not go to bed with their phones. You will not be able to monitor what apps they are using or their time usage. Tech in the bedroom is averse to healthy sleep habits. Devices emit a blue light that causes the brains to interpret it like daylight, which creates overstimulation making it harder to fall asleep.

Get to know your child’s habits. It’s important to be aware of who their online influences are, who they are fans of, and what they are sharing with the world. This understanding can help you have an open conversation with them about what they are being exposed to. You can help them to interpret messages from the media and avoid emotional traps associated with online comparisons.

Talk to them about tech addiction.

Questions for You to Consider

- Who is your child communicating with online? Individuals, they know? Individuals they don’t know?
- What advertisements do your children encounter online?
- What apps, websites, or accounts may your child be hiding from you?
- Is your child’s physical, mental, and/or emotional health negatively affected by their technology use?
- Are your children looking for answers to questions online before they come to you?
- How much time do you spend online? Is your online time interfering in your role as a parent? Are you available for kids to come to or are you distracted by your computer/smartphone?
Questions for Your Kids to Consider

- Do you interact with strangers online?
- What apps do you use?
- Do your parents know about all of them?
- What type of websites do you visit?
- Do your parents know about all of the websites you use?
- How do you feel when you visit these websites?
- Do you feel like your technology use interferes with other aspects of your life?

Check out our amazing resource to help you have great discussion with your kids about technology, online safety, and more.

Resources:


Total Number of Websites, Retrieved from https://www.internetlivestats.com/total-number-of-websites/

Social media is a prominent force in the lives of our children, and it is a force we as digital immigrants must take seriously. Our children are digital natives and although they may be more savvy with how social media works, they are not mature enough to navigate the risks. It is critically important for parents to understand and then teach both the benefits and the real dangers on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram.

Benefits of Social Media for Kids

- It helps them to have a voice in the world and do good, much change has occurred from one or many kids/teens using social media to take a stand against bullying, gun violence, and climate change
- Allows them to express themselves
- Builds friendships
- Provides a sense of belonging
- Can provide genuine and instant support for difficult times through online support groups

Dangers of Social Media for kids

- Sharing too much information
- Believing that “private” means it is protected and safe
- Connecting with an online predator
- Falling prey to false advertising
- Online bullying (being bullied and/or being the victim)
- Being exposed to an overly sexualized online world
- Too much time on social media has been linked to depression, anxiety, and loneliness

### Recommendations by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newborn to 2 years old</strong></td>
<td>No social media other than video chatting with another family member present. (American Academy, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3-5 years old</strong></td>
<td>No social media other than video chatting with another family member present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6-12 years old</strong></td>
<td>Children at this age may begin to request social media accounts but it is not recommended, the later the better. There is little benefit but many risks for children in this age group to have a social media presence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13-18 years

These are the years where most of our children become active social media users, so there are various things to keep in mind.

- All social media apps should be approved by parents! There should be a discussion between parents and children on what is appropriate and what should be avoided.
- Know your child’s username and password,
- Keep profiles on private and location settings off, but be mindful that you must still be aware of your child’s online activity
- Time limits should be implemented. Apps such as Screentime and devices like Circle provide screen time management, allowing you to set up content filters, as well as view time spent on social media
- Designate social media-free times together, such as at dinner or once a child has gone to bed. Be sure to follow these rules yourself.
- Be aware of secondary social media accounts such as spam accounts, and finsta accounts, kids often set these up to hide online posts and friendships from parents. You can check if your child has another account by opening up the social media accounts you know they have, often there is an option to go to the additional account
- Create open communication about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline (American Academy, 2016).
Points to Consider

Our example as parents and educators is extremely important. If our kids see us engaging with social media instead of them, posting mean comments and presenting a less than accurate social media profile, they will do the same. We should hold ourselves to similar standards we expect our kids to keep.

As mentioned in the section on websites and apps, it is important to be aware of who our children’s online influencers are, such as who they “follow” on social media. Understanding can help you have a more open conversation with them.

Social media and smartphones often go hand in hand, consider participating in the Wait Until 8th, a national campaign encouraging parents to delay giving their children smartphones until the eighth grade and access to data until the age of sixteen.

Keep in mind the prevalence of cyberbullying, if you notice the following it may indicate your child is being bullied:

- Major decrease or increase in social media use
- Child hide screen from your view
- Child avoids social situations that he/she once enjoyed
- Exhibits strong emotional reactions while using social media
- Shuts down all social media sites
- The child shows signs of depression, becomes withdrawn and anxious

For more on social media, check out our guide Social Media and Teens: The Ultimate Guide to Keeping Kids Safe Online.
Questions for You to Consider

- Who will your kids be interacting with?
- How much time will they spend on their social media?
- What will they do when they inevitably encounter inappropriate media?
- When should your children have access to social media?
- Am I friends with my child on social media? Do I know how social media apps work?

Questions for Your Kids to Consider

- How do you use your social media?
- How much time are you spending on social media?
- Do you interact with strangers on social media?
- What can you do when you come across inappropriate media?
- How can you use social media to help and lift others?
Check out our amazing resource to help you have great discussion with your kids about technology, social media, and online safety.

Resources:


Miller C., Does Social Media Cause Depression, Child Mind Institute, Retrieved from https://childmind.org/article/is-social-media-use-causing-depression/

Streaming Services

Streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, and YouTube are extremely popular. These services stream movies, television shows, and web-based channels. A major benefit to streaming is the accessibility, as they can be viewed on any streaming device at any time. With this ease of access to entertainment media, we need to ensure our children are not watching too much by binge-watching and/or watching things that are age inappropriate.

**Netflix**

Netflix allows the parent to create separate accounts based on age-appropriate programming. Up to 5 profiles can be created, so if you have kids in different age groups, you can set up different parental controls for each account (Schroeder, 2018).

You can also set up a 4 digit pin number, which allows you an extra measure of control. The pin number is required to change the maturity settings and/or to restrict viewing a particular movie or show. (Netflix, n.d.).
**Amazon Prime Video**
While Amazon does not allow different profiles to be created for kids, it does offer kids viewing selections and channels. You and your child can choose TV shows and movies to be added to a “watch next” list. Doing this with your child and showing them where to go can help them know what movies and shows are okay for them to watch (Trisha, 2016).

Parental controls allow you to set up viewing restrictions based on appropriate age and maturity level. You may also set up a PIN number to prevent unwanted purchases, the PIN is also needed to watch a show or movie that is above the set maturity level.

**Hulu**
Hulu allows parents to create user profiles, (up to six) based on age and maturity level, your child will see and have access only to programs that fall into the setting you have selected. You also have the option to set the entire account to one particular setting.
Note: For devices with their own universal set of parental controls, such as Xbox One and Wii U, Hulu content will respect your device’s settings (Hulu, 2017).

**YouTube**
YouTube offers an app called YouTube Kids through both the Apple and Google Play stores for free. Through the app, you are able to create multiple kid profiles, adjust the content levels, keep tabs on your kids watch histories, block certain videos and channels, and more.

Be cautious, inappropriate content can get through the filters YouTube Kids has set up, and the videos are made primarily by independent video makers and are not posted due to educational value. Sometimes popular cartoon characters are animated in violent or sexual scenarios, which could be frightening and traumatizing for young children to view. Some alternatives to YouTube Kids are AmazonFree Time, DisneyNOW, PBS Kids, Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon.
In addition, YouTube also offers a “Restricted Mode,” which can be turned on under your account settings. Restricted Mode “hides videos that may contain inappropriate content flagged by users and other signals” and is meant to “help you avoid most inappropriate content” (YouTube, n.d.). Again, be cautious there are many tasteless and unsuitable videos posted to YouTube.

**General Recommendations for all Ages**

- Review the “screen time recommendations” at the beginning of the guide which outlines appropriate time limits and content
- Use the parental controls available on your streaming service, become familiar with how they work and use them!
- Watch with your children, make movie and TV watching a family activity, and for the times they are viewing things without you let them watch in a family area rather than alone in a bedroom.
- Use websites like Common Sense Media and IMDB Parent Guide to read movie/show reviews based on age and developmental appropriateness, before you watch

Petra’s Power to See offers powerful information for kids to learn about the influence of media, including advertisements, social media, websites, gaming, and more.

Resources:


Gaming consists of computer games, video games, and games that can be played on a phone, tablet, or gaming system, etc. Gaming is immensely popular, among all ages. In today’s digital world, gaming has become a method of socialization. It is important to know what our kids play, with whom, and for how long. There are many negative impacts for too much gaming time, such as weight gain, sleep problems, increased aggression, and addiction. In extreme cases, excessive gaming can lead to further health problems such as blood clots and severe dehydration (Oskin, 2012). While there are educational games that can be beneficial to children (in small doses), it is crucial to minimize the amount of time a child spends playing video and computer games to ensure their healthiest development.

**Recommendations by Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newborns to 2 years old</td>
<td>No baby or toddler should be playing video games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 7 years</td>
<td>Be in control of the amount of time they spend playing video games, with the recommendation being no longer than an hour. There are many educational video games, which may be beneficial for your child; these games can teach teamwork, spatial awareness, and creativity (Landau, 2017). Great examples can be found at ABCya! or Nickjr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 12 years</td>
<td>Just like 3 to 7 years, make sure you still maintain control of the time they play, with the recommendation being no longer than 1 hour. Be mindful of video game ratings and the types of games they play. Some good examples can be found at Brainpop, Funbrain or SmaryGames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to 18 years</td>
<td>Continue to keep screen time to a minimum, as with all other ages. While age is a factor when deciding when and how long your teen, tween, or youngster plays video games, it is always important to take into consideration your child’s maturity level and the family values for your home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Points to Consider**

- Don’t just quickly scan the cover and accept or reject the game based solely on the rating, hand it to your kid (or not), and walk away. According to the Academy of Pediatrics, the rating system for video games isn’t always reliable (McGrath, 2015). It’s our responsibility as parents to do our homework and make the final decision.

- Don’t be afraid of video games, but always stay alert. Take the time to research the video games your child would like to play; have your child help you research, and then decide together if it would be a good game to play. Apply your family values to the situation and determine what video games you will allow in your home.
If possible, play with them! Doing so can create opportunities to bond with them and teach them while playing. At the very least, encourage your child to play games with a sibling.

Be very cautious of your kids’ activity in gaming chat rooms. They are at greater risk of coming in contact with online predators. Pedophiles go where kids go, and especially where kids are not being supervised by adults, which is often the case in chat rooms. Kids often provide information about their age, location, likes and dislikes as the online predator works on building trust and comfort level.

Explore details about the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating system here. Common Sense Media has a page dedicated to video game reviews especially for parents as well.

Every home is different. Family values, game ratings, the age of the children—all of these will come into play. The decisions of what is best for your family is up to you.
Questions for You to Consider

- Are you aware of how often your child plays video games?
- Are you aware of the games he or she plays?
- Is your child aware of the consequences of long-session gaming?
- Is your child playing **MMO** (Massively Multiplayer Online Games) or **RPG** (Role Playing Game)? Some examples are: Minecraft, Battle Royal, Agar.io, Fortnite, Roblox, Final Fantasy, League of Legends, Everquest, World of Warcraft, etc. These games put your child in contact with other online gamers, although some offer a **solo gaming** feature.
  - Be aware of their username, email address used to set up the account, etc.
  - Check restrictions on age limits, language, etc.
  - Be sure your child understands to never share personal and/or family information
- Many games have upgrades that often require credit card information, be informed of how purchases work, most games have a “no purchases allowed” setting
Questions for Your Kids to Consider

- How much time do you spend playing video games?
  - Are there ways you could better spend your time?

- What type of video games do you play?
  - Do these games portray positive or negative messages?
  - Do these games bring about positive or negative emotions?

- What are some games we can play together as a family?

Resources:


Music plays an important role in shaping our socialization and cognitive development. Music is often used to regulate emotions and to enhance emotional states, such as listening to sad songs after a break-up. Studies have shown that even babies as young as 8 months can tell the difference between happy and sad music. (Roberts, Christenson, & Gentile, 2003) As children mature music takes on an even more important role. It becomes an extension of who they are and is used as a form of expression. Teens’ choice in music also is an indicator of their peer group and if often accompanied by a certain style of clothing and vocabulary.

Points to Consider

- Current music apps such as AppleMusic, Spotify, Pandora, IHeartRadio, etc, have made access to music extremely easy, it is vital to be aware of what your children are listening to, since many lyrics have become more explicit in their references to drugs, sex, and violence (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009).

- There is a connection between exposure to ideas and then acting on those ideas. When kids are constantly being exposed to messages about risky they have a higher risk of adopting the unsafe practices. (Holody, Anderson, Craig & Flynn, 2016)

- Be conscious of the volume level your teen has set while using earbuds, AirPods, and headphones, as listening to loud music for an extended time can cause hearing loss. (WHO, 2015) If you are sitting next to them and you can hear their music it is too loud.
There are benefits to music, such as the following.

- Classical music improves children’s concentration and verbal abilities.
- Children and teens who learn an instrument show better motor and multisensory skills (Luo et al., 2012).
- Listening to music reduces stress and anxiety.
- Elevates mood and assists the brain in producing dopamine.
- Helps to deal with pain both physical and emotional.
- Background music may help children concentrate.
- Pleasing and soothing music can contribute to the improvement of happiness and friendliness, as well as a decrease in anxiety.

Things You Can Do to Protect Your Kids

- Set a rule with smartphones/IPods that specifies your approval to all music downloads and music videos.
- Teach kids to choose the right volume setting. Let your kids set their normal volume setting and then hold the headphones at arm’s length. If they can hear the music it may be too loud and should be adjusted.
- Take time to go to iTunes or another music streaming site and look
up the lyrics to 5 of the top 10 songs. Discuss the lyrics with your kids and what they mean. Ask questions such as: Are they healthy? Are they a positive view of women? Of men?

Q As a family, you can use a shared Apple ID, or whatever account you want to use. That way you have access to all of your kids’ music.

Q Talk with your children. Especially for teenagers, it is important not to argue about music preferences or ban certain genres. Instead, explain why listening to inappropriate music may create a negative impression and can lead to inappropriate behavior. Take time to listen to their response.

Q On Apple Music, iTunes and Spotify there are options for clean lyrics. On Spotify, you can make a selection for “clean version of an album” (although many artists do not release clean versions to Spotify). On Apple products go to “Allowed Content Section” and tap on “Music and Podcasts.” You will find “Explicit” in red letters; select “OFF” and that will block optional content on iTunes, Apple Music, and podcasts.

Q Take time to listen to the music your child enjoys. Ask with a sincere desire to understand why they like it, rather than judge it immediately. Your openness toward their musical preferences will allow for honest communication and a greater willingness to hear your counsel.
Questions for You to Consider

- Are you aware of what music your child/teenager is listening to?
- Do you know his/her music preferences?
- What type of music do you listen to?
- Does it portray good messages?

Questions for Your Kids to Consider

- What type of music do you listen to?
- Does it have a good message?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does the music you listen to affect you?

Resources:


## Rating systems

### Movie Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>General audience indicates it is appropriate for all ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Parental guidance is suggested, may contain some inappropriate material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG-13</td>
<td>Parents are strongly cautioned as the movie may contain violence, nudity, sensuality, vulgar language, thematic elements, and adult situations inappropriate for children to view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>These movies are made for adults, and have content geared to adults, and can contain material that is unsuitable for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC-17</td>
<td>These movies have elements that go beyond the R rating due to the adult content being more intense and graphic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Ratings</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV-Y</strong></td>
<td>Appropriate for very young children, ages 2 to 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV-Y7</strong></td>
<td>Appropriate for children 7 and older, specifically for children who can tell the difference between what is real and what is make-believe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV-Y7-FV</strong></td>
<td>Content is for children 7 and older and contains fantasy violence that is combative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV-G</strong></td>
<td>Appropriate for all ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV-PG</strong></td>
<td>Meant to be watched with a parent, as there may be vulgar language, sexual situations, and moderate violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV-14</strong></td>
<td>For children 14 and up, and meant to be viewed with a parent, may contain more intense sexual situations, violence, coarse language, and suggestive dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV-MA</strong></td>
<td>Intended for 17 and older, shows with this rating often contain extremely mature themes, explicit sexual situations, crude language, and very graphic violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The rating system for TV and movies should be used as a general guide but not an exclusive source for preventing exposure to inappropriate content, since the majority of children’s programming contains examples of risky behavior, with violence being the most “pervasive”. (Gabrielli, Traore, Stoolmiller, Bergamini, & Sargent, 2016) Moreover, the rating system does not know your individual child and what content may be upsetting or confusing. For example, a G rated movie can still have images that can frighten or leave a lasting negative impression on your child. Young children under the age of 7 can have a hard time telling the difference between what is real and what is fantasy. Each child responds differently to what they view in movies. Some may take on the behaviors of the characters they watch, while other children become fearful of things that are not real. (Raising Children Network, 2016). Ratings of PG and PG-13 may still contain sexual content, violence, and mature themes. It is vital to do your own research and decide if the movie or show is right for your child based upon its content, not just the rating.

**Family-friendly resources**

When co-viewing isn’t an option, there are reputable parent resources that review media content for children, such as Common Sense Media (CSM), Kids in Mind, and IMDB Parent Guide. They review the content of movies, television shows, video games, apps, websites, and books. They make recommendations based on age and developmental appropriateness, based upon the following filters:

- Sex
- Language
- Consumerism
- Drinking, drugs, and smoking
- Positive role models and representation
- Positive messages
Further Recommendations
The following list contains some great websites where reviews are created with children in mind. Each contains their own unique way of rating movies and can be very helpful for parents with children and teenagers when it comes to picking a movie to watch.

- CommonSenseMedia.org
- Raising Children.net.au
- PluggedIn.com
- MovieGuide.org
- Kids-In-Mind.com
- KidsPickFlicks.com

Violent Content
Studies have found violence on television is positively correlated with an increase in aggressive behavior in children and teenagers (American Psychological Association, 2013). Chronic exposure to violent depictions can cause desensitization to violence, meaning children may become more willing to accept violence from others as well as perpetrate violent acts themselves. Chronic exposure may also lead to the following in children.

- Believing the world is primarily a dangerous and unsafe place
- Beginning to overestimate the possibility they will be victims of violence, leaving them with undue anxiety and stress
- The increased likelihood of hurting another child (Frazier, 2001)
- Increased risky behavior, such as smoking, drinking, drugs, and sexual behaviors
- Disregard for negative consequences
Sexual/Pornographic Content
Studies show in mainstream media sexual content was found in 85% of movies, 82% of television shows and 59% of music videos. The content is varied from explicit to implied, realistic to comical, it is a prevalent theme in today’s media. (Ward, Erickson, Lippman, & Giaccardi, 2016) The study explained, constant exposure to sexual themes can have the following negative effects:

- Create a positive attitude about non-committal sex and increased participation in risky sexual behavior
- Objectification of women, and continued persistence stereotypes, such as when a woman says no to sexual advances she does not mean it
- The belief that “everyone is having sex”
- Idealized and unhealthy concepts of romantic relationships

Things You Can Do to Protect Your Kids

- Watch with your kids as much as possible, and monitor what they watch without you.
- Talk openly with your kids about the dangers of online porn and its opposite healthy sexual intimacy.
- Use resources to help you in having open conversations about sex and violence in the media.
- Help to alleviate peer pressure by communicating concerns about certain shows or movies with other parents and create a united front.
- Help your kids have a RUN plan for dealing with pornography exposure.
- Do a family night lesson on the dangers of online pornography for ages 3-7, 8-11, and 12+ kids.
Check out *How to Talk to Your Kids About Pornography* for helpful information and great discussions to help you have tough talks.

Resources:


Creating Your Family Media Guide

While media is beneficial, problems begin when media use displaces physical activity, hands-on exploration, and face-to-face social interaction in the real world, which is critical to learning. Organizations like Common Sense Media can help parents evaluate media content and make decisions about what is appropriate for their family. It may be helpful to create a family media plan consisting of things such as making a set of rules, keeping them consistent, and enforcing them (Common Sense Media, n.d.).

Points to Consider When Creating a Media Guide

- "Pay attention to how your kids act during and after watching TV, playing video games, or hanging out online. If they’re using high-quality, age-appropriate media, their behavior is positive, and their screen-time activities are balanced with plenty of healthy screen-free ones, there’s no need to worry" (Common Sense Media, n.d.).

- "If you’re concerned about heavy media use, consider creating a schedule that works for your family. This can include weekly screen-time limits, limits on the kinds of screens kids can use, and guidelines on the types of activities they can do or programs they can watch. Make sure to get your kids’ input so the plan teaches media literacy and self-regulation, and use this as an opportunity to discover what they like watching, introduce new shows and apps for them to try, or schedule a family movie night” (Common Sense Media, n.d.).
Is media use affecting health? Parents should place consistent limits on screen time, which includes TV, social media, and video games. Media should not take the place of getting enough sleep and being physically active (Kids Health, n.d.). Consider setting specific times for media use.

Involve your family. When creating your family media guide, talk to your kids about the amount of screen time and the type of media they want to use. Let them help you set some of the guidelines. As they feel their thoughts matter and they feel heard, you have a better chance of them embracing your family guidelines.

Resources:


Creating a Household Media Guideline
While our media guide offers numerous resources and suggestions, we respect you as a parent, and what you decide to do with your children is up to you. No one knows your children as you do! Whatever you decide, we have created a Household Media Guideline to help you make a plan for your family.
Household Media Guideline

In a family meeting, make a personalized, detailed guide and agreement, a standard, within your family to determine what types of media, devices, time-frames, and protection tools will be used. Have a discussion with your kids and teenagers; talk about the “why’s,” not just the “no’s.”

What to Include: Each family has to determine what their media standard will contain based on their individual circumstances and needs. However, we suggest including the following.

Taking Inventory
Our family’s internet-enabled devices:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How many hours of screen time are we each using each day?
(name): _______________________________ (hours): __________________________
(name): _______________________________ (hours): __________________________
(name): _______________________________ (hours): __________________________
(name): _______________________________ (hours): __________________________

Where do we keep our devices?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What video games/TV shows/social media are we using?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Setting the Standard
What kind of media do we allow?

What are our time limits for screen-time?

What are our rules for social media?

What filters, parental controls, and/or accountability software will we use?

Accountability and consequences: Your guideline should address these issues in order to work. Discuss as a family how each of you will be accountable to stick to the guideline and what the consequences will be for breaking the rules. Make accountability part of the plan, but make it as difficult as possible to break the rules by installing filters and restrictions. Talk about expectations for media usage outside your home and what specific websites, social media accounts, games, movies, ratings, etc. are not allowed.

Glossary

**Addiction**: The condition of being addicted (physically and mentally dependent) to a particular substance, thing, or activity.

**Aggressive Behavior**: Behavior that consists of being ready or likely to attack or confront someone.

**Antisocial Behavior**: Behavior that consists of not wanting the company of others; being unsociable.

**Anxiety**: A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease; tends to be about an upcoming event or something with an uncertain outcome.

**Cyber Bullying**: Bullying using digital technology, such as texts, social media, emails, etc.

**Depression**: Feelings of severe despondency (loss of hope) and sadness.

**Desensitization**: A treatment or process that diminishes emotional responsiveness to a negative or positive stimulus after repeated exposure to it.

**Digital Immigrant**: A person who was born and grew up before the widespread use of digital technology.

**Digital Native**: Someone who was born or grown in the digital age of technology, making them very familiar with computers, social media, and the internet.

**Educational Games**: Games designed with educational purposes, which are meant to teach about specific subjects or aid in learning specific skills.
**Educational Programming**: Programming design as an instrument for learning.

**Finsta Account**: An Instagram account that is the “fake” account, this type of account can be used to post pictures, share private jokes with only a small group of friends, but it can also be used to hide posts from parents, and for cyberbullying.

**Motor Skills**: Movements and actions of the bone structures.

**Multisensory Skills**: Learning and developing through more than one sense (such as sight or hearing).

**MMO**: Massively Multiplayer Online game.

**MMORPG**: Massively Multiplay Online Role Playing Game.

**Online (Digital) Citizenship**: Persons who utilize information technology (IT) in order to engage in society, politics, and government; using the internet regularly and effectively.

**Prosocial Behavior**: Behavior that is positive, helpful, and intended to promote social acceptance and friendship.

**Rinsta Account**: This is the “real” Instagram account that mom and dad know about and is used to post pictures the teen wants to share with everyone.

**RPG**: Role Playing Games, allow the player to have control over their character, some examples are The Legend of Zelda, Elder Scrolls, The Witcher.

**Screen Time**: Time given to activities in front of a screen, such as watching TV, interacting on social media, or playing video games.
Socialization: The process of learning to behave in a way that is acceptable to society.

Social Media: Websites and apps that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

Solo Gaming: Playing an online game without interacting with other players online.

Spam Account: An Instagram “spam” account is an additional account created to post unpolished pictures, share private, personal details with a small group of friends, the user puts the word spam into their use name, “spam_sallyq” for example.

Victim: A person who is harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action.

Additional Definitions

Augmented Reality Gaming: Blends the individual’s actual physical environment with audio and video game elements such as Pokemon Go.

Avatar: An icon or figure that represents a player in an online game, they are often personalized to match the users’ personality or an alter ego.
**Bots**: A program or network designed to interact with players in a game or in an online platform.

**Confession Sites**: Sites designed to allow users to anonymously share secrets in an online format, examples are Lipsi, Yik Yak, After-school and Whisper.

**Dating Apps**: Apps like Tinder and Bumble which are designed to connect adult singles together, but can be used by underage teens and online predators.

**Digital Hangouts**: Apps that provide a group video chat, Houseparty app is an example.

**DM**: A private message sent to the user on a social media account, a “direct message”.

**Doxing**: A technique of retrieving another individual’s personal information through the internet, can occur with online gaming.

**Live stream**: A real-time transmission over the internet, many social media apps have a live stream feature.

**Open world games**: A gaming genre where the player has the freedom to roam and explore the virtual world in the game.

**Sandbox games**: Allow players the freedom to play the game as he/she wishes, it is a non-linear game.

**“Stories”**: Short videos users post on Instagram, SnapChat and Facebook, that delete themselves after 24 hours.

**Subbing**: Being humiliated or “roasted” in a sarcastic and belittling online comment.
**Subtweets**: Insulting comment made on Twitter or Instagram that does not mention the user by name, but is obviously focused on a specific person.

**Trolling**: When a person purposely posts mean and nasty comments in an online community in order to start contention.

**Vault App**: Also known as a ghost photo, decoy, or photo vault app, among other names, is a tool people can use to hide pictures, videos, and sometimes calls and texts. Most commonly, a vault-app looks like a calculator, but entering a secret code unlocks a trove of often salacious photos and videos.