

# Television and the Family

## Part II Additional Resources



In 1996, Congress passed a law that gives parents the ability to control what their children watch on television. The law set up a rating system called the TV Parental Guidelines. The ratings can help parents avoid programs that contain sex and violence. By using a computer device called the *v-chip*, parents can block these programs from their televisions. By 2000, all new television sets with screens 13 inches or larger will have the v-chip.

The ratings apply to all TV programs except news and sports. They can sometimes be found in your local TV listings and appear for 15 seconds at the start of a program. The ratings are as follows:

- TV-Y**      **For all children**
- TV-Y7**      **For children age 7 and older.** The program may contain mild violence that could frighten children under age 7.
- TV-Y7-FV**      **For children age 7 and older.** The program contains fantasy violence that is glorified and used as an acceptable, effective way to solve a problem. It is more intense than TV-Y7.
- TV-G**      **For general audience.** Most parents would find this program suitable for all ages. There is little or no violence, no strong language, and little or no sexual content.
- TV-PG**      **Parental guidance is suggested.** Parents may find some material unsuitable for younger children. It may contain moderate violence, some sexual content, or strong language.
- TV-14**      **Parents are strongly cautioned.** The program contains some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under age 14. It contains intense violence, sexual content, or strong language.
- TV-MA**      **For mature audience.** The program may not be suitable for children under age 17. It contains graphic violence, explicit sexual activity, or crude language.

This ratings system was created to help parents choose programs that are suitable for children, even without the use of the v-chip. Before watching, check your local TV listings to find out if a program contains violence, sexual content, or strong language. Remember that ratings are not used for news programs, which may show content that is not suitable for young children.

Also, TVs with screens smaller than 13 inches will not have the v-chip. So, if your child is allowed to watch TV alone, choose a set that is at least 13 inches so you can use the v-chip to block programs. Avoid putting a television in your child's bedroom.

### A word about...TV for toddlers

Children of all ages are constantly learning new things. The first 2 years of life are especially important in the growth and development of your child's brain. During this time, children need good, positive interaction with other children and adults. Too much television can negatively affect early brain development. This is especially true at younger ages, when learning to talk and play with others is so important.

Until more research is done about the effects of TV on very young children, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not recommend television for children age 2 or younger. For older children, the Academy recommends no more than 1 to 2 hours per day of educational, nonviolent programs.

### The Children's Television Act of 1990

The Children's Television Act ensures that TV stations pay attention to the needs of children from age 2 to 16. Under this law, stations must air at least 3 hours of educational and informational shows for children each week. They must also limit advertising during children's shows to 12 minutes per hour on weekdays and 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends.

TV stations that do not follow the law risk losing their licenses. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) makes sure stations obey the law. For the law to be even more effective, keep tabs on TV stations in your community and report any violations to the FCC. If a station does not appear to be complying with the Children's Television Act, inform the FCC by sending a written complaint to:

Mass Media Bureau  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St, NW  
Washington, DC 20554

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

