

Taking Charge of Your TV

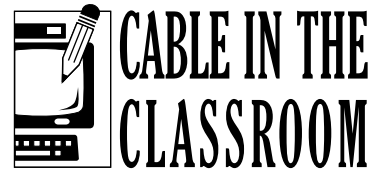
A Guide to Critical Viewing for Parents and Children



Revised 2001

Taking Charge of Your TV

A Guide to Critical Viewing for Parents and Children



A Partnership of
National PTA
Cable in the Classroom &
National Cable & Telecommunications Association

Acknowledgements

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Ms. Thoman is founder and Executive Director of the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles, California. We thank them both.

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INTRODUCTION

Television has an influence on American family life. As the dominant force in our media culture, television has changed our habits, what we do with our free time, when and how we eat meals, when we go to bed, and how we raise and entertain our children. Television is an important part of children's lives, offering them a look at many things they will never have the chance to see themselves. But TV viewing, especially by children, needs to be controlled.

Above all else, television teaches. And that's why the PTA and the cable industry are concerned about what our children learn from watching television.

We hear that too much TV is bad for our children and that exposure to violence, especially at a young age, can have harmful, lifelong consequences. What can we do about it? With children viewing, on average, 20,000 advertisements a year, how do we defend against such an endless bombardment of TV commercials so often directed at our vulnerable children?

We could get rid of our TV's altogether, but for most of us that's just not realistic. Television communicates important information that we want to know. It's an important part of our society, and at its best TV is not just informative, it's very entertaining.

You can be in control

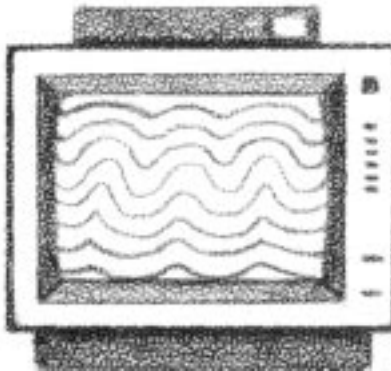
How much TV to view is a personal choice for every family, but experts tell us the key is to change the way we view television.

That's what this parents' guide, and the accompanying workshop, are all about: practical ways we can take charge of our TV's, to make television viewing a conscious choice, not just a habit.

This guide, a key part of the *Taking Charge of Your TV* project, will help you learn how to plan for a better TV viewing, by:

- 1) becoming more aware of what is behind the way that TV programs are produced,
- 2) establishing limits on how much TV your family watches each week, and
- 3) by developing family guidelines for program selection.

It will even encourage you, when appropriate, to "Talk back to your TV," by expressing your opinion of what you are seeing and hearing.



"Television can be an effective and persuasive teacher of prosocial attitudes and has the potential to make a major contribution towards reducing violence."

***Summary Report of the
APA Commission on
Violence and Youth***

GETTING STARTED

How Do You Take Charge of Your TV?

The focus of this parents' guide is on viewer control over what children and their families watch on television. The workshop and this guide look at issues of television awareness, demonstrate critical viewing skills and suggest media literacy techniques that can change our relationship to TV, thus changing the potential impact of television on children—and ourselves.

Three groups have an effect on program content and TV violence—the government, the media industry and viewers. The government could set uniform rules for programming. These rules might be seen as violating First Amendment rights. Most people seem to want less government regulations, not more. The media industry could do it—they have control over program production. Media companies, however, are in business to make money—they base their decisions on viewer and advertiser demands. Media education is a way for people to take charge of their TV.

Though the television industry ultimately controls what viewers will see, they are quick to point out that they base their programming decisions on viewer and advertiser preferences. Efforts to create more television programming for children are essential. But equally important are the ways we change our family's relationship to TV. We can all become "TV Aware," learn how critical viewing skills can lead to media literacy, and take control of the television sets in our homes. If enough people become more "TV Aware" viewers, individual acts of choice will begin to bring about changes in both viewer and advertiser demands.

What Are Critical Viewing Skills and Media Literacy?

In the past it was primarily words—written, read and spoken—that defined literacy. Books and newspapers made people literate and gave them the power to get important information, helping make decisions about their lives. Today, information comes through a variety of media-delivered messages and images, especially electronic. For our children to be media literate today—and into the 21st Century—they must know how to "read," interpret and evaluate the images, words and sounds that make up our contemporary mass media culture.

Our first step is to have an awareness and understanding of critical viewing skills. When we, as television viewers, learn to ask questions about what we see and hear, when we recognize and defuse the effects of commercials and media violence, and when we intentionally evaluate program content, we are on the road to media literacy.

The Four Literacy Skills Required for the Information Age

Print

Reading, writing

Language

Speaking
Listening

Computer

Using software
Using technology to create
and send messages

Media

Critical viewing
Image and video production

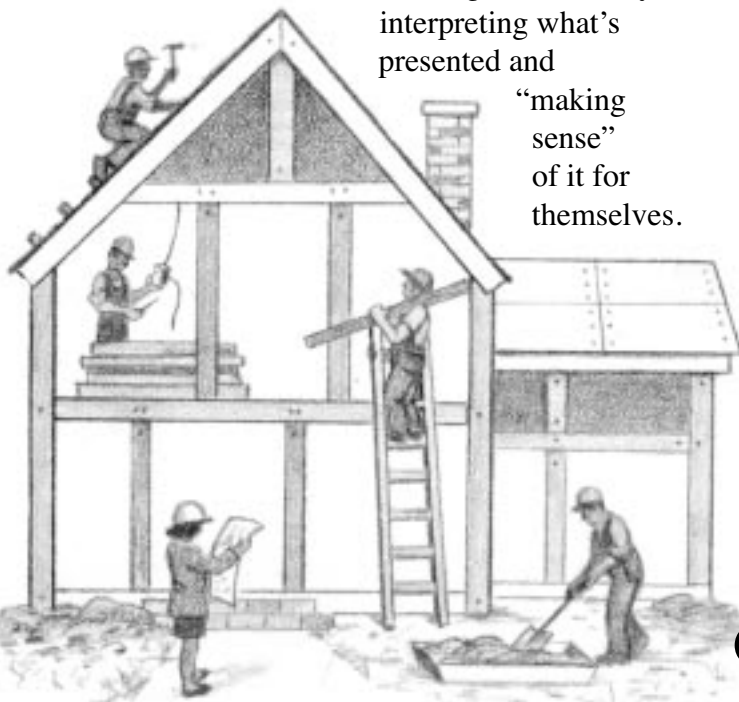
FOUR POINTS TO REMEMBER AS YOU WATCH TV

1 Be Aware: TV Programs and their Messages Are Created To Achieve Specific Results

All TV programs and their messages are deliberately put together piece-by-piece to get the desired final effect. Putting together a TV program is like building a house—there are numerous choices to make at every step. Each decision determines what is included, what is left out, and what the overall house will look like. When complete, the house will send clear “messages” about the kinds of people who built it.

Television programs are created in much the same way. Media literacy educators talk about TV being “constructed.” In television it means many people working together to control all phases of production—from hiring writers and actors, to refining scripts, to building sets and ultimately to editing images, which determines what gets left in and left out. TV programs are always the result of many choices made by writers, directors and producers. Finally, the viewers themselves participate in creating television by interpreting what’s presented and

“making sense” of it for themselves.



Activities

Children aren't expected to know that TV programs are “constructions,” but they will have ideas about how television shows are made. Ask them for ideas and use these activities to help your children “make sense” of what they see.

1. Discuss TV's Point of View. All shows carry underlying messages about who and what is important. Some people are cast as victims; others as heroes. Who's telling this story? How would it have been different if someone else had told the story?
2. Keep telling children that TV is pretend: that it tells stories someone made up for them to watch. Play “Real or Make Believe” with young children, asking whether a character is made-up or “real-life.” Could an inanimate object move by itself, or an animal talk?
3. Have elementary-age children think about their favorite TV show. What if one or two main characters switched gender? Would it work given the way the show is written? In what ways would it be fine? What does the switch say about our images of men and of women?
4. Pay attention to the camera angles, music and special effects in a TV show. Count the number of times music changes in a video, or listen for when a laugh track is added to a sitcom. These are revealing ways to take the mystery out of TV. By taking note of these and other production techniques, your child will gain valuable critical viewing skills.
5. Ask how did they make this program. What seems real? What doesn't? Is anything left out? How does it make you feel?
6. If you have access to a video camcorder, encourage children to make their own television shows.

FOUR POINTS TO REMEMBER AS YOU WATCH TV

2 Be Aware: Each Person Interprets Programs and Messages Differently

A common assumption about television is that all people watching a given show interpret or “read” its messages in a similar way, or receive the same impression from it. In truth, everyone brings to TV viewing their own—frequently different—levels of understanding because of personal identity, age and life experiences.

For parents it is particularly important to recognize that children receive and interpret messages differently at different ages. Parents are responsible for guiding and directing the meanings their children make from interpreting TV’s messages. The best way to do that is to talk openly with them about what they’ve just seen.

Activities

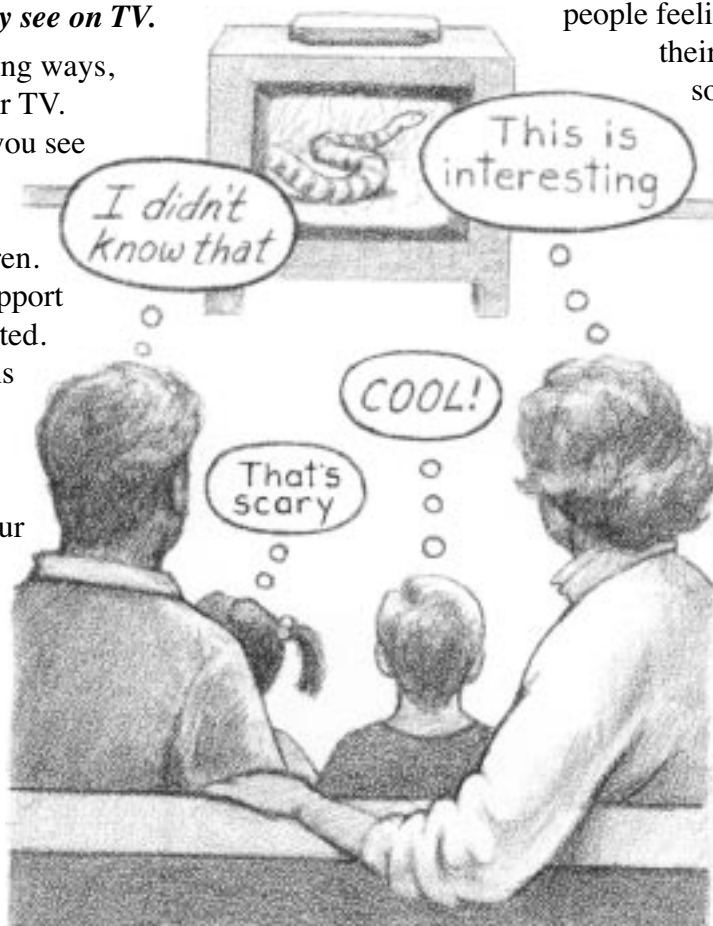
These activities will help your children interpret what they see on TV.

1. In non-threatening ways, talk back to your TV. Question what you see and hear on TV while watching with your children. Challenge or support the ideas presented. Express opinions about storylines and characters. Sharing your opinions lets your children know what you think and what you consider important.

2. Discuss how conflicts on TV are frequently resolved. Respond to unnecessary violence and point out characters who use positive behavior. Praise them as good examples for your children. Use TV programs as a chance to introduce your own values on topics such as drugs, alcohol and appropriate sexual conduct.
3. Ask your children who is being stereotyped in a program. Are people made to act or talk a certain way because of their age, gender, race, religion or culture background? Who’s wealthy, who’s poor? Who’s powerful, or intelligent, or obnoxious, or kindly, and how are they presented? What messages are being sent by the way people look and act.
4. Relate TV to real life situations. The way TV characters find simple solutions to complicated problems in a half-hour show can leave young people feeling frustrated with their own inability to solve problems.

Help them sort it all out.

5. Use the TV as a tool for promoting learning and inspiring creativity, for education and information. It’s an important part of children’s lives.



3 Be Aware: Television Violence Takes Many Forms

Violence grabs viewers' attention. It can create emotional shock or set the stage for eye-catching special effects. It's a quick and easy way to show conflict, requiring little background or explanation and ending with clear winners and losers. Television producers like using violence because it sells well—and "travels" well—overseas; meaning that violence is universal and requires no language translation.

Violence takes many forms on TV: realistic and unrealistic; justified and unjustified; humorous, irrelevant, evil, thrilling—even sexy.

Concerned parents and teachers must recognize, as the American Medical Association did in 1976, that "TV violence is a risk factor threatening the health and welfare of young Americans, indeed our future society." Doctors knew early on that graphic television images could influence a child's developing knowledge of how the world works. Follow their good advice choose your child's TV images wisely.

Activities

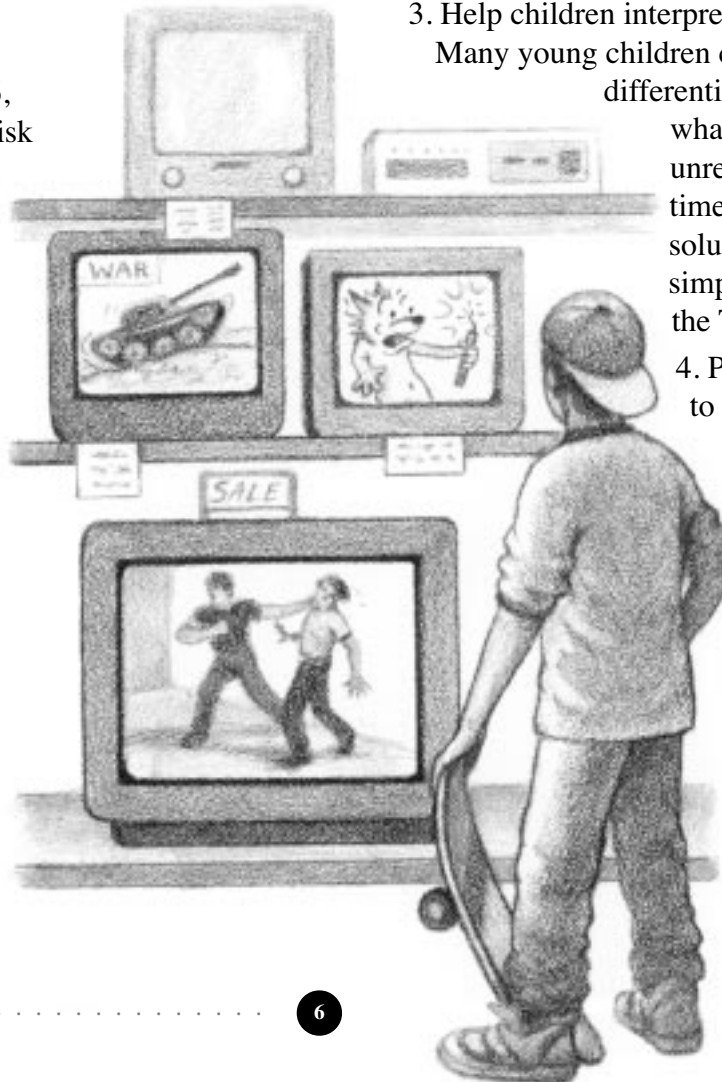
These activities will help your children interpret TV violence.

1. Re-sensitize your children to TV violence by asking how the victim might feel. How do you think you would feel if the violent act happened to you or someone you cared about? If your child is old enough, talk about real life encounters with violence which you or other members of your family have experienced.
2. Ask your children if violence is ever funny, as in cartoons. Point out how real life doesn't work that way. Remind them that if a person gets hit on the head with a piano or falls off a cliff, they will be seriously hurt, even killed. Ask your child why violence is funny in cartoons, but not in real life.
3. Help children interpret what they see.

Many young children cannot filter or differentiate between

what is real and unreal. Sometimes the best solution is to simply turn off the TV and talk.

4. Pay attention to what your preschooler sees you or another adult watching. Children are often unknowingly exposed to programs, which contain violence or very mature subject matter.



4 Be Aware: All TV Programs Have an Underlying Economic Purpose

The television industry, like all industries, is in business to make money. When watching television, it's important to recognize the reason why television exists—to deliver audiences to advertisers. Producers sell programs to networks. Networks sell time to advertisers. And advertisers then hope to sell products to viewers through the use of commercials.

We tend to think that programs are brought to us by sponsors, but it's really the other way around. We're brought to sponsors by programs. Mothers are brought to toothpaste by family shows. Teenage boys are brought to expensive shoes with "pumps" in them by basketball games. And children are brought to sugary cereals by Saturday morning cartoons.

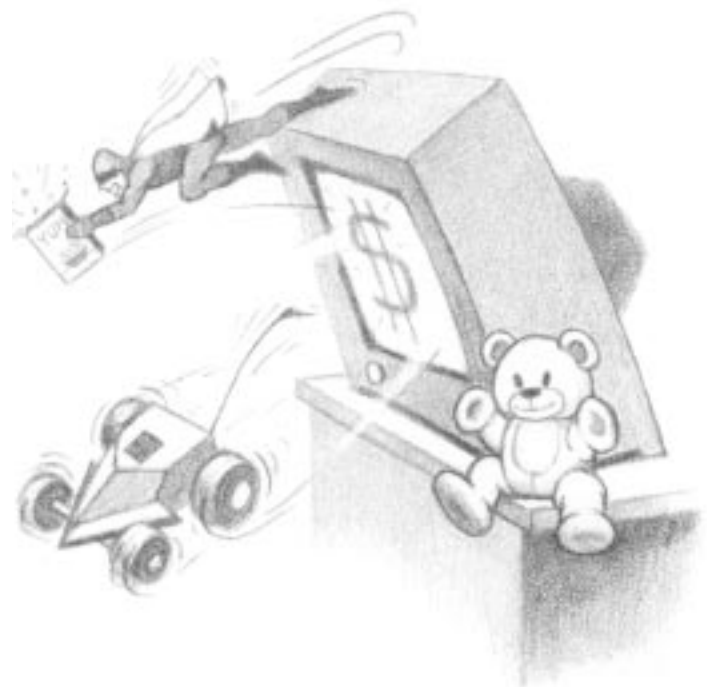
It's a commercial operation in every sense of the word, and it's important to teach children that commercial television is not "free" entertainment. It makes money by selling viewers to advertisers.



Activities

These activities will help children recognize that TV producers want to help advertisers sell products and services to viewers.

1. Ask young children why they think certain commercials are placed (or aired) on certain programs. For example, toy ads during the cartoons.
2. Try to predict the kinds of commercials that will appear in a selected show. See how program content connects with commercial intentions.
3. When your children see their favorite sports hero telling them to try this food, or shoe, or other product, ask them if they think the star gets paid to say those things. Would the star really eat the food or choose the shoes for him- herself if he or she weren't getting paid?
4. Use the activity sheet *Five Things to Teach Your Children about Commercials* on page 11 to help your children better understand the techniques used in television advertisements.



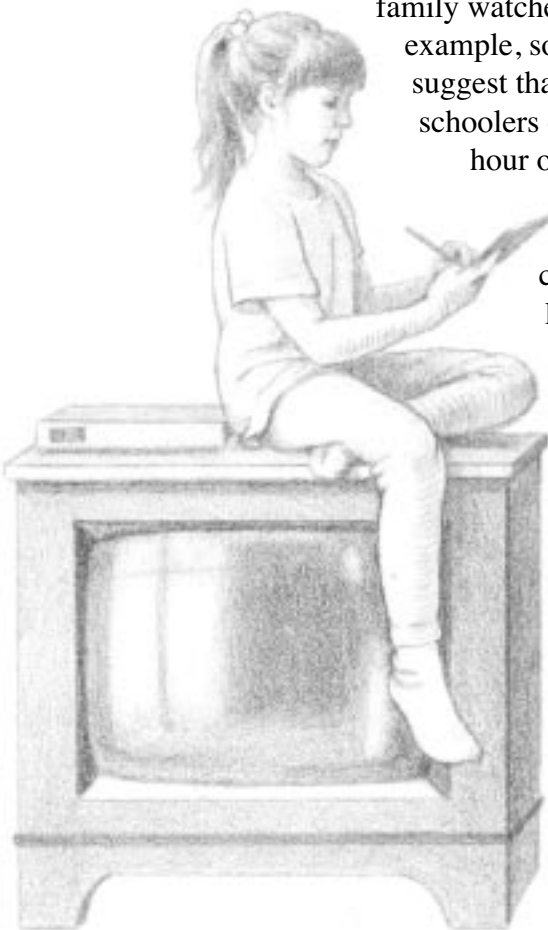
Suggestions for Taking Charge of Your TV Viewing

Make TV watching a conscious, planned-for activity

Children should ask your permission to watch TV and not be allowed to just casually “channel surf” to see if anything sparks their interest. The simple act of asking gives you the opportunity to respond with a very important one-word question of your own: Why? Each time you do it you’ll be reinforcing the principle that “We watch specific shows, not just whatever is on.”

- Establish family guidelines for selecting programs. Children should know what you value and the reasons for your choices. (For ideas on guidelines, see the activity sheet called *Questions and Guidelines To Evaluate TV Programs for Children* on page 14.)

- Set limits on how much TV your family watches. For example, some experts suggest that pre-schoolers only view an hour or so a day, and that older children be limited to a maximum of two hours a day. Once you determine the right limits for you and your family, stick to them!



- Set an example for your children. Make your own TV watching a conscious planned-for activity.

Choose programs together

Take time one day each week to review TV program guides for the week ahead. Check channel listings for programs with themes and subjects matching your guidelines. Decide together how your children will “spend” their number of TV viewing hours.

Look for programs that offer other perspectives, principles or images your children usually do not see on TV. For example, shows where non-violence wins out over violence, or where individuals aren’t always after money, sex or power. Different viewpoints are helpful to your child’s education.

And remember, when a selected program is over, turn your TV off!

Make TV watching an interactive family event

Television doesn’t have to end family discussion and interaction. Watch it together, and use every opportunity to talk about what you are seeing and hearing. Television can stimulate conversation about topics that can be difficult for some families to discuss, such as feelings about divorce or appropriate sexual behavior.

And it’s OK to talk back to your TV. Letting your children hear your values—in a non-threatening way—is useful. Make a particular point of responding to sexism, racism and unnecessary violence, but remember to point out positive portrayals on television as well.

Plan special viewing times to watch with your child and let TV expand and enlarge your world. Look ahead for programs, which will stimulate your

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR TV - HOW TO DO IT

child's imagination and watch them together. Then, find related books and magazines at your public library to help continue the learning process.

Use TV as a springboard for other learning experiences

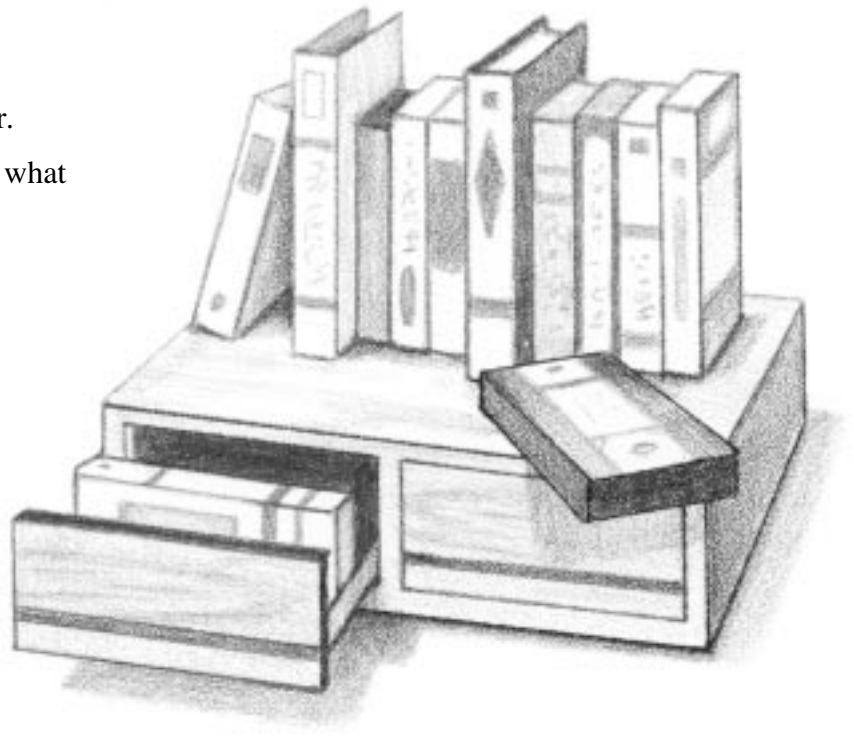
Watching a program on TV can be a useful bridge to reading and other real world activities. TV can create interest in a new topic or idea, thus providing opportunities to learn more about them in other ways. Here are some examples:

- When a topic on TV sparks your child's interest, get to the library or museum and explore the subject further.
- During program breaks, ask children what they think might happen next. This helps develop verbal skills and creative thinking

Building a Home Video Library

Make it a regular point to tape your child's favorite shows for future viewing, especially those that combine entertainment and learning. Taping shows to watch later helps children recognize that they can choose outside play, homework, chores, or other activities instead of being tied to the afternoon cartoons and reruns. Children will gladly watch repeated showings of a good video as much as they like hearing a favorite bedtime story again and again.

- Use TV shows to inspire creative expression through drawing or writing. Don't let TV be an excuse for not participating in other activities.
- The schedule of TV shows can be a good way for children to learn how to tell time. Ask them where the hands of the clock will be when it's time for their favorite TV show.
- Having your child tell you about a program you missed will help develop valuable communication skills.



Your Family TV Viewing Diary

One of the first steps in taking charge of your TV is determining exactly what and how much your family is watching. By using this Family TV Diary, you'll be able to evaluate your family's television viewing habits and decide how they might be changed.

Television in:

- Bedroom**
- Kitchen**
- Living Room**
- Den**



Who Watched	Day/Date	Program Watched	Amount of Time
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	
		<input type="checkbox"/> *	

*Check here if program was pre-selected.

Five Things to Teach Your Children about Commercials

Watching TV isn't as easy as it looks. The following list of advertising techniques can help you help your children become aware of the subtle difference between hip and hype! Read the following paragraphs and then fill in the chart below.

Incredible, indestructable toys

Many toy commercials show their toys in life-like fashion, doing incredible things—airplanes do loop-the-loops, dolls cry and drawing sets produce beautiful results. This would be fine if the toys really did these things.

Playing with our emotions

Commercials often create an emotional feeling that draws you into the advertisement and makes you feel good. The fast-food commercials, featuring father and daughter eating out together, or long distance phone companies reaching out to someone



are good examples. We are more attracted by products that make us feel good.

Pictures of ideal children

The children in commercials are often a little older and a little more perfect than the target audience of the ad. A commercial targeting eight-year-olds will show 11- or 12-year-old models playing with eight-year-old's toy.



Products in the very best light

Selective editing is used in all commercials, but especially in commercials for athletic toys like footballs. Commercials show only brilliant catches and perfect throws. Unfortunately, that's not the way most children experience these toys.

Big names, big bucks

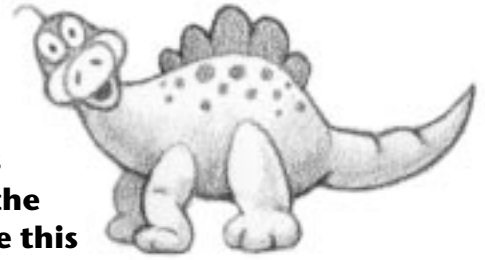
Sports heroes, movie stars and teenage heartthrobs tell our children what to eat and what to wear. Children listen, not realizing that the star is paid handsomely for the endorsement. See for yourself!

Watch Saturday morning TV or afternoon cartoons and fill in the chart below about children's commercials. When you spot tricks being used, enter them in your chart. Do the ads give a fair picture of the products? If not, what else should the advertisement tell you?

Commercial Product	Tricks Used	Did it Give a Fair Picture of the Product?	What Else Should the Commercial Tell You?
.....
.....
.....
.....
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.....
.....
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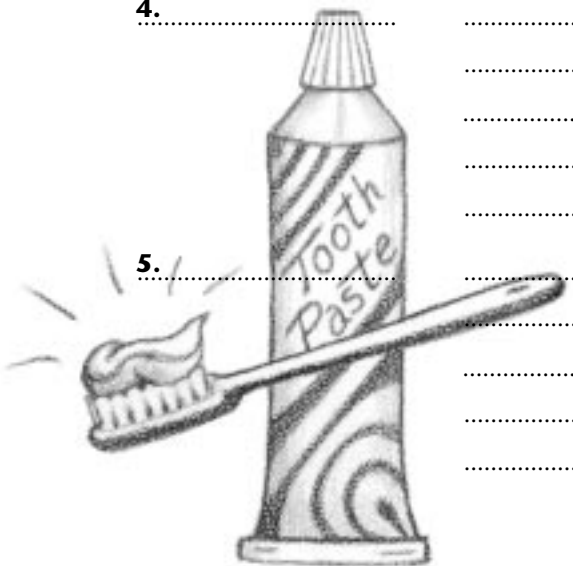
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Sellers Go Where the Buyers Are



Advertisers want their products seen by the most-likely buyers. At different times during the day, watch the ads from half-hour shows, and fill in the Show column and the Products Advertised column on his worksheet. Then give this to someone else who hasn't seen the show. Just by looking at the types of products advertised, can they figure out what types of viewers the show is trying to attract? Can they also figure out what time of day the program aired?

Show	Products Advertised	Time of Day	Type of Viewer Sought
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			



Evaluating TV Violence

Is violence on television always bad? How can you recognize a television program or movie that might be harmful to your child?

The following checklist, based on studies of typical violent television programs, will help you answer some of those questions. Complete the checklist while watching a prime-time television serial or a movie. The more statements you check, the less appropriate that particular show, and others like it, may be for your child.

Does violence drive the storyline?

- In this program, there wouldn't be much of a story without the violence.
- In this program, the hero is never safe (or never seems to feel safe).
- Do the violent acts seem to be a showcase for special effects by the media makers?
- It would be difficult to sum up what happens in this program without describing at least one act of violence.

Does the violence portrayed include the real-life consequences?

- The leading "good guy" character in the story survives the episode with few serious injuries.
- When people die in this program, they seem to simply disappear.
- No one is shown mourning when a person is killed or seriously injured.

Does the story describe a world of all good and all bad?

- The "good guys" in this story have few bad qualities.
- The "bad guys" in this story have few good qualities.
- The "good guys" are, in some way, the "winners" in this program.
- The "bad guys" seem to have no family or friends who will care if they get hurt.

If you were a child, what lessons about the world might you learn from the program you just watched?

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**Questions and Guidelines
To Evaluate TV Programs
For Children**

Use the following checklist as a guide when reviewing television programs and videos your child may want to watch.

Yes No

- 1. Does the program present conflict that a child can understand, and does it demonstrate positive techniques for resolving the conflict?
- 2. Does the program present racial groups positively and does it show them in situations that enhance a child's self-image? Who has the lead role? Who is the villain? Are the supporting roles stereotyped?
- 3. Does the program present sex roles and adult roles positively? Are the men either superheroes or incompetents? Are the women flighty or disposed to deception? Are the teens portrayed with adult characteristics? Is the story told from a male or female point of view?
- 4. Does the program appeal to the audience for whom it is intended? (A program for 12-year olds should be different from a program for 6-year olds.)

Yes No

- 5. Does the program present social issues that are appropriate for the child-viewer and something a child can act on at a child's level? (Pet care versus saving endangered species: recycling cans versus global warning.)
- 6. Does the program encourage worthwhile ideals, values and beliefs?
- 7. Does the program present humor at a child level? (Or is it adult sarcasm, ridicule, or an adult remembering what was funny from childhood?)
- 8. Does the program stimulate constructive activities and enhance the quality of a child's play?
- 9. Does the program's pace allow the child to absorb and think about material presented?
- 10. Does the program have artistic qualities?
- 11. Does the program separate fact from fantasy?
- 12. Does the program separate advertisements from program content?



Originally developed by San Francisco's Committee on Children's Television. Reprinted in Parenting in a TV Age, A Media Literacy Workshop Kit,™ ©1991, Center for Media Literacy, Los Angeles, CA.

Activities for Taking Charge of Your TV

Make TV viewing intentional. Set family rules on how and when you watch television and stick to them. Use TV to your advantage. Use it intelligently.

This activity sheet is organized by age groups and contains many of the strategies found on other activity sheets.



ACTIVITIES FOR PRE-SCHOOLERS

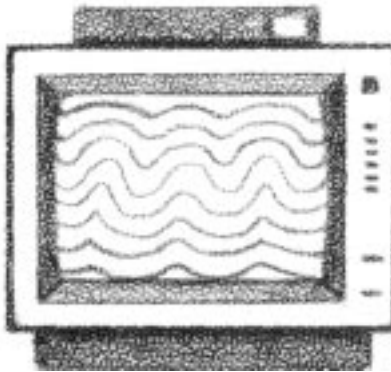
Before starting school, the average child has seen over 5,000 hours of television. While it is all too easy to let TV function as an electronic baby sitter, it can also be a parent's ally if you help your children learn good viewing habits early.

1. Collect some fun things in a "P&Q (Peace and Quiet) Box," like coloring books, puzzles and stickers, that children can do when the TV is off or when you need a few minutes of peace and quiet.
2. Tell children that TV is pretend: that it tells stories which are made up. Have them make up a story for TV.
3. Watch cartoons carefully and point out when "real life" doesn't work that way.
4. Watch a show and have your child practice memory skills by recalling details of the story.
5. Foster children's imagination by having them retell a TV story with their own ending. Ask your child to solve a dilemma on a television show without using violence.
6. Pay attention to what your pre-schooler sees when you or the babysitter are watching TV. Children are often inadvertently exposed to programs containing violence or adult situations.
7. Screen and evaluate new TV shows—even cartoons—before your children view them.

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN 6-11

School-aged children are hungry for information about how the world works. Much of what they learn may come from television programs and commercials. Help them filter the messages they receive from TV.

1. Ask your children to compare what's on TV to real people, places and events they have read or talked about. Talk about how realistic a story and its characters are. Do they seem like they could be real? Point out make-believe from reality.
2. Point out times when a TV character behaves in a way that is not consistent with your values. Talk about what should have been done.
3. When sensitive themes arise in programs, use them to open up discussions with your children.
4. When a program takes place in a far-off land, have your children find out more about the setting in a reference book.
5. If there is violence on a program, ask your child how the conflict might have been solved without using violence.



ACTIVITIES FOR TEENS 12-16

Television can offer you and your teenager a springboard for discussing important issues and events during a difficult time when conversation is not always easy.

1. Ask your teenager's opinion about a particular program. Also ask: what would you do in this situation? Do you know anyone who has had this experience?
2. Have your teenagers watch for stereotypes of women as sexy but dumb; men as tough and not sensitive; or older people as feeble or helpless.
3. Find a story in the news that interests your teen and compare the story as it's presented on TV, in the newspaper or in a news magazine.
4. Talk about who advertisers are trying to reach. Have them figure out who the "target audience" is based on what products are advertised during a given show.
5. After a violent program, talk about the consequences of violence. Ask your teen to predict what would happen to the victim and the victim's family in real life. What happens to the criminal and his family after the criminal is caught?

TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES

TV Parental Guidelines

Launched October 1, 1997, these guidelines were developed to provide parents with information on specific material in television shows, so they can better supervise what their children watch on TV. These guidelines were developed by members of the television industry with input from the advocacy community to help parents choose programs they want their children to see or not see. The combined age- and content-based system is used to rate all television programming, except for news and sports, and unedited movies with an MPAA rating aired on premium cable channels. The ratings icons which are described below appear at the beginning of each program, in the upper left hand corner of the television screen.

The NCTA and the National PTA, along with representatives from the education advocacy community, will work together to educate the public about the V-chip and the TV Parental Guidelines. These guidelines are another valuable tool and resource for parents to help them make viewing choices for their families. The following guidelines focus on programs directed specifically to children as well as to all audiences.

Special Categories for Children's Programs

Special emphasis has been placed on programs directed specifically to children. Two categories of CHILDREN'S GUIDELINES have been created: one identifying programs suitable for children of all ages, and a second category informing parents these programs are designed for children older than seven years, who are better able to distinguish between make-believe and reality.

In some cases, an FV will be applied to a program in the TV-Y7 category to indicate that the program contains Fantasy Violence which is more combative or intense than other TV-Y7 programs.

More about content

In order to help parents identify the kinds of specific material in television shows, the TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES include content information. For programs rated TV-PG, TV-14 and TV-MA, where appropriate, supplemental information is included with the basic rating which will tell parents more about what they can expect to see in that program. This information will be conveyed through the use of the following letters:

S Sexual situations	L Language
V Violence	D Dialogue

TV Parental Guidelines

The following categories apply to programs designed solely for children:

TV-Y All Children. This program is designed to be appropriate for all children. Whether animated or live-action, the themes and elements in these programs are specifically designed for a very young audience, including children from ages 2-6. This program is not expected to frighten younger children.

TV-Y7 Directed to Older Children. This program is designed for children age 7 and above. It may be more appropriate for children who have acquired the developmental skills needed to distinguish between make-believe and reality. Themes and elements in this program may include mild fantasy violence or comedic violence, or may frighten children under the age of 7. Therefore, parents may wish to consider the suitability of this program for their very young children. Note: For those programs where fantasy violence may be more intense or more combative than other programs in this category, such programs will be designated TV-Y7-FV.

The following categories apply to programs designed for the entire audience.

TV-G General Audience. Most parents would find this program suitable for all ages. Although this rating does not signify a program designed specifically for children, most parents may let younger children watch this program unattended. It contains little or no violence, no strong language and little or no sexual dialogue or situations.

TV-PG Parental Guidance Suggested. This program contains material that parents may find unsuitable for younger children. Many parents may want to watch it with their younger children. The theme itself may call for parental guidance and/or the program contains one or more of the following: moderate violence (V), some sexual situations (S), infrequent, coarse language (L), or some suggestive dialogue (D).

TV-14 Parents Strongly Cautioned. This program contains material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age. Parents are strongly urged to exercise greater care in monitoring this program and are cautioned against letting children under the age of 14 watch unattended. This program contains one or more of the following: intense violence (V), intense sexual situations (S), strong, coarse language (L), or intensely suggestive dialogue (D).

TV-MA Mature Audiences Only. This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17. This program contains one or more of the following: graphic violence (V), explicit sexual situations (S), or crude, indecent strong, coarse language (L).

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR TV — FACT SHEET

The Taking Charge of Your TV Project

The *Taking Charge of Your TV* project is a first-of-its-kind partnership of the National PTA, Cable in the Classroom and the National Cable & Telecommunications Association. Formerly known as The Family & Community Critical Viewing Project, this partnership was launched in 1994 to address concerns about the impact of television violence and commercialism on children.

Trainings and Workshops

The project trains cable and PTA leaders nationwide in the key elements of critical viewing, also known as media literacy, and how to present *Taking Charge of Your TV* workshops for parents, educators, and organizations in their communities. The goal is to help families make informed choices in the TV programs they watch and to improve the way they watch those programs.

As of September 2001, presenter trainings have taken place in 75 cities in 40 states. Over 3,000 PTA and cable leaders have been trained, and as a result, more than 5,000 workshops for tens of thousands of parents, educators and community members have been held nationwide. Several Members of Congress, state attorneys general and public officials have also hosted, endorsed, or participated in critical viewing project events and activities.

Choose Carefully, Watch Critically

The Project teaches techniques to:

- Set rules for television viewing and how to stick to those rules.
- Recognize the ways in which television can be used to manipulate viewers.
- Talk to children about violence on television.
- Turn what we see on television into positive and educational family discussions.

Using these techniques and strategies, parents open an important family dialogue, determine the strategies that make sense in their family settings, and teach their children to watch television carefully and critically.

The Partners

National PTA is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the United States. A nonprofit organization of parents, educators, students, and other citizens active in their schools and communities, PTA is a leader in reminding our nation of its obligations to children. PTA is a not-for-profit association with nearly 6.5 million members who work in 26,000 local units in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and in Department of Defense schools in Europe and the Pacific.

Cable in the Classroom is the public service education foundation of the cable telecommunications industry. Over 8,500 cable company members provide free installations and basic cable service to state approved, K-12 public and private schools in their service areas. Cable network members air over 540 hours of commercial-free, educational programming each month. Many members also provide online resources, workshops and award programs.

The **National Cable & Telecommunications Association** is the principal trade association of the U.S. cable industry. NCTA represents cable operators serving more than 90 percent of the nation's cable television households and more than 150 cable program networks, as well as equipment suppliers and providers of other services to the cable industry. In addition to offering traditional video services, NCTA's members also provide state-of-the-art technologies, such as high-speed Internet access and local telephone service to customers across the United States.

Contact Us

For additional information, please contact your state PTA office, local cable company, visit one of our Web sites or e-mail <criticalviewing@ciconline.org>.



TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR TV — RESOURCES

Free Videos and Workbook

View Smart to Vote Smart

Launched in 2000, this video and resource guide apply the key points of *Taking Charge of Your TV* to political advertising and election coverage. Dr. John Splaine, C-SPAN consultant and University of Maryland professor, leads a two-part workshop that analyzes how television covers election campaigns and then examines how campaign ads work. Extra footage of campaign coverage and political commercials are included for the viewer to analyze. The resource guide contains more detailed information, suggests additional activities, and lists a variety of useful sources. (25:35).

Tools To Use To Help You Choose — A Family Guide to the TV Ratings System

Introduced in 1998, this video and its companion materials help parents use the TV ratings system as a tool to better guide the TV viewing of their children. Bob Keeshan, the original Captain Kangaroo, and the musical group Rockapella explain the meanings of the television ratings categories in an engaging and memorable way. An informational booklet and a sticker for your TV remote are included. (9:00)

TV Smarts for Kids

Also released in 1998, this three-part video shows children and teens how they can use their “TV Smarts” to ask important questions about what they see on TV. Each of the three segments explains the basics of media literacy for a particular age group. Characters from TLC’s “Skinnamarink TV” show kids 5 to 7 years old what TV is all about. Actress Irene Ng demonstrates how TV makes things look good for youth ages 8 to 11. Irene also helps teens 12 to 17 years old realize why people watch TV. (25:00).

Taking Charge of Your TV

In this 1997 video, Rosie O’Donnell talks about simple steps families can take to control the impact of commercialism and violence on television. Rosie describes four key critical viewing concepts and gives examples of how families can “take charge” of their TVs. Further information and more tips are included on the video jacket. *Taking Charge of Your TV* was produced in consultation with the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Medical Association. (4:11).

Taking Charge of Your TV—A Guide to Critical Viewing for Parents and Children

The widely distributed workbook you are reading is used in *Taking Charge of Your TV* workshops and is also available in Spanish.

Over 150,000 copies of the videos and 250,000 copies of this workbook have been distributed. All five videos and this workbook are made available, free, to parents, educators, and other interested parties through local cable companies, or by writing to the address below. Please be sure to include your return address, as well as the titles of the materials you are requesting.

**Taking Charge of Your TV
c/o Cable in the Classroom
1800 N. Beauregard St., Suite 100
Alexandria, VA 22311
(800) 743-5355
criticalviewing@ciconline.org**

MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Organizations & Materials

Alliance for a Media Literate America

Membership organization dedicated to stimulating growth in media literacy education in the United States by organizing and providing national leadership, advocacy, networking, and information exchange. <http://www.nmec.org>

American Academy of Pediatrics

Representing the nation's pediatricians, this organization provides information about the impact of media on children, materials on media education and publishes brochures on television and the family. To receive information, send your request and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: American Academy of Pediatrics, Dept. C-MM, P.O. Box 927, Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0927.

Cable in the Classroom

The cable industry's \$2 million per week public service initiative to enrich education through the resources of the cable industry. Created in 1989, Cable in the Classroom now serves 81,000 schools, reaching nearly 44 million students with commercial-free educational programming at no cost to the schools. 1800 N. Beauregard Street, Suite 100, Alexandria, VA 22311; (703) 854-1400; <http://www.ciconline.org>.

Cable in the Classroom Magazine

A monthly guide, by subject area, to over 525 hours of quality, non-violent, commercial-free television programming. It also features helpful articles on how to use television for teaching in school and at home. A one-year subscription is \$22.95. Call 800/216-2225.

Center for Media Education

A leading national nonprofit organization whose primary goal is to improve the quality of the electronic media. Campaign for Kids' TV works to improve children's television and ensure the Children's Television Act (CTA) of 1990 is enforced and the V-Chip ratings system serves the needs of children and families. CME conducts research on electronic media and youth issues. Web site links to brochures about children's online privacy TV ratings and V-Chip. Publishes *eCME News*, an electronic newsletter on topics related to children and media. 2120 L St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20037; 202/331-7833; <http://www.cme.org>.

Center for Media Literacy

This nonprofit organization is a goldmine for both parents and teachers. It features a comprehensive online catalog of teaching materials (books, videos, curricula) and resources for parents, background articles and startup ideas, calendar of teacher training events, and free electronic newsletter with the latest news and information about media literacy in the USA. 4727 Wilshire Blvd., #403, Los Angeles, CA 90010; 800-226-9494; <http://www.meidalit.org>.

C-TREC/Children's Television Resource and Education Center

Social development and media education organization that creates award-winning services and products designed to touch all aspects of children's lives including workshops, materials, curricula, books, audiotapes, software and TV series. 444 De Haro, #117, San Francisco, CA 94107; 415/864-8424; <http://www.c-trec.org>.

KIDSNET

The only computerized clearinghouse devoted to children's TV, video, radio and audio programming. Kidsnet publishes monthly media guides, quarterly media news and study guides. 6856 Eastern Avenue, NW, Suite 208, Washington, DC 20012; 202/291-1400; <http://www.kidsnet.org>.

Media Literacy Clearinghouse

A rich source for articles, activities, lesson plans and information about media literacy, organized by category. Also contains information about state education standards relating to media. <http://www.med.sc.edu:1081>.

Media Literacy Review

Web site of the Media Literacy Online Project features a bi-annual electronic journal, database of articles, links to media literacy organizations, teaching resources and a calendar of events. <http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/mlr/home>.

Organizations & Materials

National Cable & Telecommunications Association

NCTA represents cable systems serving more than 80 percent of the nation's 64 million cable subscribers. NCTA also represents over 100 cable program networks as well as the hardware suppliers and providers of other services to the industry. The cable television industry has a long-standing commitment to use its state-of-the-art technology, quality programming and resources to provide enhanced learning opportunities to America's students and families. 1724 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036; 202/775-3680; <http://www.ncta.com>.

National Institute on Media and Family

Provides research, information and resources about the impact of media on children and families. Free checklists and tip sheets with membership. Check website for "Kids Score" ratings evaluating media products for kids. 606 24th Ave. South, Suite 606, Minneapolis, MN 55454; 888/672-5437; <http://www.mediaandthefamily.org>.

National PTA

The National PTA is the nation's largest volunteer child advocacy organization, with nearly seven million members, committed to uniting the home, school, and community in promoting the education, health, and welfare of children and families. The National PTA has addressed the issue of violence on television since the 1970's and PTA leaders have been involved in both community programs and in the legislative arena. 330 N. Wabash Ave., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL, 60611; 312/670-6782; <http://www.pta.org>.

National Telemedia Council

Promotes media literacy through the publication of *Telemidium: The Journal of Media Literacy*. The Council also conducts workshops for teachers, parents and others on teaching about the media, understanding media and managing television and the family. 1922 University Ave., Madison, WI 53705; 608/218-1182; <http://danenet.wicip.org/ntc>.

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