

Ratings: Making Healthy Media Choices

Why do we need ratings? Research has shown that children are influenced by what they see and hear, especially at very young ages. To help parents make informed choices about what their children see and hear, many entertainment companies use ratings systems. Ratings give parents more information about the content of television (TV) programs, movies, music, or computer and video games. Read on for more information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about ratings and how you can help your children make healthy media choices.

What You Can Do

Your children will be exposed to all forms of entertainment and media at a very young age. One role you have as a parent is to help your children develop the skills to question what they see and hear in the media. Using these skills, they can learn how to pick media that has positive influences and avoid media that has negative influences. The following tips can help your family use ratings to select media:

- Ratings, when available, can be useful tools but should only be used as a guide. It also is important to watch and listen to media with your children. This allows you to talk with them about the content and meaning of the shows they watch, music they hear, or games they play.
- Look for ratings and warning labels. Ratings can help your family choose movies, shows, videos, music, websites, and computer and video games that are appropriate for their ages and interests.
- Beware of products that have no ratings. When products have no ratings, find out more about them before letting your children watch, play with, or listen to them. Keep in mind that companies do not have to use ratings.
- Apps do not have ratings, but you can find reviews of many apps on the Internet. Until a rating system becomes available for apps, reviews from trusted sites, such as www.common sense media.org, can help your family pick apps that are appropriate for their ages and developmental stages.

MPAA Movie Rating System	
Rating	Description
G	General Audiences. All Ages Admitted. Contains very little violence and no nudity, sex, or drug use.
PG	Parental Guidance Suggested. Some Material May Not Be Suitable For Children. May contain some profanity, violence, or brief nudity. Does not contain drug use. Parental guidance suggested for more mature themes.
PG-13	Parents Strongly Cautioned. Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13. Contains more intense themes, violence, nudity, sex, or language than a PG movie but not as much as an R movie. May contain drug use.
R	Restricted. Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian. Contains adult material. May include graphic language, violence, sex, nudity, and drug use.
NC-17	Adults Only. No One 17 and Under Admitted Children. Contains violence, sex, drug abuse, and other behavior that most parents would consider off-limits to children.

NOTE: Children younger than 17 years should not be allowed to view R-rated movies. Even though the rating system seems to suggest that younger children may watch an R-rated movie when a parent is present, it is not recommended they watch at all. Also, no child 17 years or younger should be allowed to watch a movie rated NC-17.

TV Parental Guidelines Rating System		
Rating	Guideline	Program Description
TV-Y	All Children	Appropriate for all children. Not expected to frighten younger children.
TV-Y7	Directed to Older Children	For children 7 years and older. Themes and elements may include mild fantasy or comedic violence or may frighten children younger than 7.
TV-Y7-FV	Directed to Older Children—Fantasy Violence	Same as TV-Y7, but programs may be more intense than TV-Y7.
TV-G	General Audience	Most parents may find this program suitable for all ages. Contains little or no violence, no strong language, and little or no sexual dialogue or situations.
TV-PG	Parental Guidance Suggested	Parents may find material unsuitable for younger children. 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	Parents may find some material unsuitable for children younger than 14. 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 Audience Only	Designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children younger than 17. Contains one or more of the following: graphic violence (V), explicit sexual activity (S), or crude indecent language (L).

NOTE: The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages TV watching and other media use by children younger than 2 years and encourages interactive play. For older children, total entertainment screen time should be limited to fewer than 1 to 2 hours per day.

About Ratings

Most entertainment companies provide ratings for their products. Ratings are usually based on the amount of violence, sex, nudity, strong language, or drug use your children will see or hear. Here is a summary of different rating systems.

Movies

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rating system is the oldest, most well-known, and most widely used rating system, but ratings should only be used as a guide. You should find out as much as you can about a movie before letting your children watch it. Take time to watch it first to make sure

it is appropriate. You can also read reviews, check the Internet, or ask other parents, but remember that each child is different.

Most big screen movies are rated, even though it is not required.

Television

The TV Parental Guidelines rating system was created to help parents choose programs that are suitable for children. The ratings are usually

included in local TV listings. Remember that ratings are not used for news programs, which may not be suitable for young children.

All TVs 13 inches or larger made in the United States after 2000 are required by federal law to have a V-chip. The V-chip allows parents to block programs based on ratings or times or to block specific shows.

For more information, go to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Parents' Place Web site at reboot.fcc.gov/parents.

ESRB Ratings	
Rating Categories	Description
eC (Early Childhood)	Content is intended for young children.
E (Everyone)	Content is generally suitable for all ages. May contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.
E 10+ (Everyone 10+)	Content is generally suitable for ages 10 and up. May contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.
T (Teen)	Content is generally suitable for ages 13 and up. May contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling and/or infrequent use of strong language.
M (Mature)	Content is generally suitable for ages 17 and up. May contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.
Ao (Adults Only)	Content suitable only for adults ages 18 and up. May include prolonged scenes of intense violence, graphic sexual content and/or gambling with real currency.
RP (Rating Pending)	Not yet assigned a final ESRB rating. Appears only in advertising, marketing and promotional materials related to a game that is expected to carry an ESRB rating, and should be replaced by a game's rating once it has been assigned.

Video Games and Apps

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is the nonprofit, self-regulatory body that gives ratings to video games and apps so parents and other consumers can make informed choices. Almost all video games that are sold at retail in the United States and Canada are rated by the ESRB.

The following ratings information and a complete list of Content Descriptors and Interactive Elements are published on the ESRB Web site at www.esrb.org. The ESRB ratings are trademarks of the Entertainment Software Association.

ESRB ratings have 3 parts: rating categories, content descriptors, and interactive elements.

- *Rating Categories suggest age appropriateness (see chart).*
- *Content Descriptors indicate content that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern.*
- *Interactive Elements inform about interactive aspects of a product, including users' ability to interact, the sharing of users' location with other users, or the fact that personal information may be shared with third parties.*

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Online Safety

Internet companies are still in the process of creating a universal ratings system for online material. Until a system that everyone uses is created, the following tips can help parents create a safer online experience for their children:

- **Search the Web with your children. Keep in mind that anyone can** set up a Web site and post information on any topic. You might be surprised at how easy it is for your children to stumble across or find information that contains graphic sex, violence, or drug use.
- **Put the computer in a room where you can monitor your children.** Computers should never be placed in a room where a door can be closed or a parent left out of the activity.
- **Use tracking software to help you keep track of where your children** have been on the Web. But keep in mind that nothing can replace adult supervision.
- **Install software or services that can filter or block offensive Web** sites and material. Be aware, however, that many children are smart enough to find ways around the filters. Also, you may find that filters may be more restrictive than you want.
- **Find out what the Internet use policies are at the school your children** go to or at your library.

For more information visit the official AAP Web site for parents, HealthyChildren.org, or the Web site of the AAP Council on Communication and Media, www.aap.org/COCM.

Music

The Recording Industry Association of America has a Parental Advisory Label Program that is not required but often used. Each record company uses its own guidelines to decide which recordings will be labeled with a parental advisory.

If a record company decides to use the advisory, a standard black and white logo that says "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content" must be displayed on the front of the music packaging. The logo or a similar notice for parents may also be available on online and mobile products or services that allow users to download music for personal use.

Before allowing your children to listen to or purchase music, you may wish to listen to the lyrics first. Many music stores will allow you to listen to music before buying it. Also, most record companies and recording artists have their own Web sites that may post song lyrics or samples of the songs.

Coin-operated Video Games

All new coin-operated video games are labeled with a Parental Advisory Disclosure Message. This message appears in the artwork of the game or on a sticker on the machine. It comes in the following colors: Green (Suitable for All Ages), Yellow (Mild), and Red (Strong). The yellow and red messages also break down the content into 1 of 4 categories: animated violence, lifelike violence, sexual content, and language.