



Young people are captivated by the magic of the television set. They spend hours viewing, learning and being entertained by this powerful medium. Television, however, is aimed at all age groups and all audiences, and some of the programming is simply not suitable for young children. The answer to this dilemma is to teach children to become "critical viewers" and to help them develop healthy television viewing habits.

#### TIPS FOR PARENTS:

## WATCHING TELEVISION WITH YOUR CHILDREN

- Help children to understand that all media is constructed – advertisements as well as regular programming.
- Know what your children are watching on TV and watch with them! You are your child's best TV guide!
- Ask questions about your children's viewing and encourage them to ask questions as well.
- Share the remote control. Point out the 'off' button.
- Discuss plots, story lines, feelings and emotions that viewing may bring forward.
- Take turns selecting your favourite program and ask the whole family to watch it with you. Discuss why it is your favourite.
- Help children to make good age-appropriate television decisions. Ask children of different ages what their favourite program is and why. Discuss why the opinions change with age.
- Suggest healthy alternatives to television – and support them.

## ALSO

- Make yourself and your children aware of 'responsible' programming initiatives.
- Become familiar with the guidelines for television viewing and the process to express your concerns. (See page 26)
- Encourage your child to become an advocate for responsible viewing. Write letters to broadcasters, advertisers or television stations that demonstrate responsible programming. (See page 19).
- Network with other parents and reach an agreement on what is 'suitable' entertainment for your children.
- Know the curriculum objectives or outcomes that relate to media literacy and discuss classroom activities with your child.
- Ask your child's principal what he or she is doing to promote critical viewing skills and media literacy in the school. Suggest **TV&ME!**



# STARTING POINTS FOR FAMILY DISCUSSIONS ABOUT TELEVISION

Talking to your children about television makes a difference. Here are some starters...

- **The World of 'Make Believe'.**  
Always remember that everything you see on television is constructed or 'made up' by many people who work behind the cameras. What is real on TV and what is not?
- **Watch with others.**  
Make an effort to watch programs with others. Discuss your thoughts, feelings and what you have learned from the experience. Why do you think different people interpret the same message in different ways?
- **What's new?**  
Watch the news on several networks. Do you notice any differences in the broadcasting styles and information presented from one network to another? Talk about it.
- **Speak up.**  
If you are confused, upset or excited about something you see on television, talk to your parent or guardian. Consider contacting the local broadcaster to express your comments.
- **Be in control.**  
Know what the buttons on your remote control do. Experiment with all the functions. Why do you think all these buttons are there?
- **Listen up.**  
Try to focus on what the television message is saying. If the picture was not there, would you still get the same message?
- **Picture perfect.**  
Turn off the sound and just watch the picture portion of the program or commercial. What is the message? Is it as clear as it would be with sound?
- **Guess who?**  
Can you guess who the program or commercial has been made for? What are the clues to help you make this choice? Why do you think the producers are trying to get this group to watch?
- **Music, please.**  
How has the music influenced the message of the program or commercial? How might different music or sound effects alter the message?
- **Keep an open mind.**  
You can expose yourself to many points of view. Gather lots of information and then make up your own mind.
- **Lead the way.**  
Identify programs which represent the values you believe in. Encourage your friends and brothers and sisters to watch more of these kinds of programs. What are the reasons for your choices?

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

## FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN WATCHING TV WITH YOUR KIDS

Try asking these questions when watching a drama or comedy with your kids to get them thinking and talking about TV.

- **Do you like it?**
  - Encourage children to form opinions about what they watch and then ask them to support their opinions with reasons.
  - Respect their ideas and feelings about a show, but give your own as well.
  - Start a conversation about what makes some shows better than others.
- **How is this going to end?**
  - Get the kids to think about what they see, to predict and problem solve. They will become more aware of television conventions and have fun guessing what will happen next.
- **How does it make you feel?**
  - Television engages your emotions.
  - Help kids to become more aware of their own emotional reactions to what they see on the screen. Their answers might give you some insight into their interests, fears and feelings.
- **Could that really happen?**
  - Draw children's attention to the difference between TV's world and the real one.
  - Get them to think about whether problems can really be solved so quickly, whether real people act and look that way and so on.
  - Start helping them find the line between fantasy and reality.
- **How would you solve that problem?**
  - This is another reality check, but it is also an opening to talk about some values, violence and human relationships. Some solutions presented in TV programs may be workable, but others may be too violent, dangerous or easy.
  - Listen to your children's ideas and then present your own.

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**Taken from:**

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[www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/home/hand/ptpkit3.htm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/home/hand/ptpkit3.htm)

HAVING A VOICE IN YOUR  
CHILD'S VIEWING EXPERIENCE:

# ETHICS IN ADVERTISING AND BROADCASTING TO CHILDREN IN CANADA

You'll be pleased to know that several industry codes and standards of practice have been developed and are in place, to help all members of the media stay focused on their collective and individual responsibilities to the public and, in particular, to children.

▶ **BROADCAST CODE FOR ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN  
(APPLIES TO TELEVISION AND RADIO ADVERTISING)**

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**[www.cab-acr.ca](http://www.cab-acr.ca)**

The Purpose of the Children's Code is to guide and mandate companies in preparing commercial messages to adequately recognize the special characteristics of children. Children, especially the very young, live in a world that is part imaginary, part real and they sometimes do not distinguish clearly between the two. The Broadcast Code ensures and lays out clearly how and what advertisers can present as they provide services and products to children via television.

Advertising Standards Canada's Kids Committee consisting of parents, educators, regulators and industry convenes bi-weekly to review all Canadian commercials for children before they are televised, to ensure that they adhere to the Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children.

▶ **CANADIAN CODE OF ADVERTISING STANDARDS  
(APPLIES TO ALL ADVERTISING)**

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**[www.adstandards.com](http://www.adstandards.com)**

The Canadian Code of Advertising Standards has been in place to promote the professional and responsible practice of all advertising since 1963. The Code sets the criteria for acceptable advertising and forms the basis upon which advertising is evaluated in response to consumer or trade complaints. It is widely endorsed by advertisers, advertising agencies, media that exhibit advertising, and suppliers to the advertising process.

▶ CANADIAN CODE OF ADVERTISING STANDARDS Cont.

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Clause 13 and 14 of the Code apply specifically to advertising to children.

- Excerpts of Clause 13 state, “advertising which is directed to children must not exploit their lack of credulity, experience or sense of loyalty, and must not present information or illustrations which might result in their physical, emotional or moral harm.”
- Excerpts of Clause 14 state, “products prohibited from sale to minors must not be advertised in such a way as to appeal particularly to persons under legal age and people featured in advertisements for such products must be, and clearly seen to be, adults under the law.”

▶ VOLUNTARY CODE REGARDING VIOLENCE IN TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

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**[www.cab-acr.ca/english/joint/societal/violence.html](http://www.cab-acr.ca/english/joint/societal/violence.html)**

The issue of violence in our society is one of concern to the public, and by extension, to Canadian broadcasters who are involved with and committed to the communities which they serve. Private broadcasters recognized and responded to this concern in 1987 when the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) developed its first Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming, in consultation with a wide range of public interest groups and industry-related associations.

The guidelines set out in this Voluntary Code are provided to Canadian Broadcasters to assist them in the creation, scheduling, purchase, broadcast and distribution of their programs, as they carry out their responsibilities as licensed television programming undertakings under the provisions of the Broadcasting Act. The guidelines are also designed to complement the general principles set out in the CAB Code of Ethics.

For further information, visit the CAB website at **[www.cab-acr.ca](http://www.cab-acr.ca)**.