Parent Guide:

Children and Media

Cornell University Cooperative Extension Jefferson County

New York State Parental Information & Resource Center
Families and Communities Together with Schools
(315) 788-8450
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What is Media?

Media provides both information and entertainment for the public. It comes in many forms, such as:

- Television and movies
- Internet
- Music
- Radio
- Newspapers and magazines
- Computer software
- Video games

Technology is changing the way media is delivered. People today are spending more time than ever before using electronic media, like TV, video games, and computers.

**Did you know…**

- Almost 75% of children live in homes that have three or more TV sets.

- Children between ages 8—18 spend an average of 6.5 hours every day using TV, computers, & video games. *That adds up to 44.5 hours a week.*

- 8 in 10 children have a video game system; almost half play video games in their bedroom.

- 1 in 3 children from 6 months to 6 years have a TV in their bedroom.

(Data from Kaiser Family Foundation Studies, 2005 & 2006)
We all experience media in some way.

Research has shown that it has both positive and negative impacts on our lives.

Before making decisions about media use in your family, it’s helpful to have all the facts.

**In this guide, readers will learn:**

- How media affects children
- How to keep children safe from the negative effects
- How to help your child develop media literacy

**All the information in this guide is based on scientific research.**
Television and Movies

Research shows that...

- Children see almost 200,000 acts of violence on TV by the time they graduate high school.

- Children who see a lot of violence on TV are more likely to have aggressive behavior.

- The more hours of TV children watch, the more likely they are to be overweight.

- Children who watch a lot of TV score lower on reading tests than children who watch less TV.

- There may be a link between too much TV and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

- On average, children see more than 14,000 sexual references on TV every year.

What are your children watching on TV?
Tips for Families

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under age 2 do not watch any TV, including TV specifically designed for infants and toddlers.

- Try not to use TV as a way to occupy your child.

- Turn off the TV during meals. Instead, make meal time a family activity.

- Take the TV out of children’s bedrooms. It will be much easier to monitor what they are watching.

- Have your children make a list of activities to do other than watch TV, such as reading a book or doing an art project.

- Set rules about how much time and what shows children can watch. Pay attention to the TV rating system.

- Plan ahead to watch a specific show, then turn the TV off when it is over.

- Program your TV to block channels that you don’t want your children to watch.

Be a good role model. Show your children there are other things to do besides watching TV.
Video Games

Too much video game playing has many of the same negative effects as too much TV including:

- Aggressive behavior
- Less time spent in other activities, such as reading

Parents/Caregivers Need to Know:

- Just like TV, there are some games that are appropriate for children and some that are not.
- Many video games are based on violent themes that involve shooting, stabbing or beating an enemy.
- In some games, female characters wear very revealing clothing or are treated in a disrespectful way.

Tips for Families

- Limit game playing time just as you would TV.
- Do not put video game players in children’s bedrooms regardless of their age.
- Pay attention to the video game rating system. Look on the box to read why a game is rated a certain way.
- Before buying a game, rent it to make sure it is appropriate.
- Choose games that require creativity and critical thinking skills.
- Play the game with your child and talk about the content of the game.
Computers and the Internet

There’s no doubt about it—computers have changed the way we live our lives.

With the Internet we have access to more information and resources than ever before.

The Internet gives us the opportunity to communicate quickly with people around the world.

Unfortunately, the Internet also gives children access to materials and people that may be harmful.

**Parents/Caregivers Need to Know:**

- There are more than a half million pornographic sites on the web.
- A majority of teens have viewed pornography on the Internet, either purposely or by accident.
- Child predators are using Internet chat rooms to meet and harm children.
- There is a “cyber bullying” trend of children and teens using email, chat rooms, and peer-to-peer networks (like MySpace) to bully other children.
- There are many sites on the Internet for illegal downloading of videos and music.

Do you know what your children are doing online?
Tips for Families

- It is easier to monitor Internet use if children don’t have Internet access in their bedrooms.

- Set rules about Internet use. Talk about what sites are appropriate and what is inappropriate.

- Teach your children it is NEVER okay to post photos or personal information (like phone number and address) without talking to you first.

- Let your children know it is NEVER okay to meet a “friend” from the Internet in person without adult supervision.

- Tell children it is against the law to download music or movies without paying for them.

- If your child has a web page (like MySpace) look at it often.

- Consider checking the history on your browser to see what sites your child has visited.

  (You can also purchase web tracking software if you suspect your child isn’t following the rules. Contact your Internet Service Provider for more information.)

- Let children know they can talk to you if they see something on the web or receive an email that upsets them.

The Internet has a lot to offer, but it can also be dangerous. Help your child make safe decisions online.
Media Literacy

Media literacy is being able to understand and make decisions about how to use the information we see and hear.

**Why is media literacy important for children?**

- The media exposes children to information that may not support your family’s values.

- Advertisers target children to buy their products, and these products are often unhealthy.

- Children don’t always know the difference between what is real and what is fiction.

Just because it’s on TV or on the Internet doesn’t mean it is true or fair.

**Ask Questions!**

Parents can help children develop media literacy by asking questions about what they see and hear.

- Who created this message?
- Why does it catch your attention?
- What is this trying to sell?
- What point of view is being shown? Is there another point of view?
- Is this based on facts or opinions?
- Do you agree with this message? Why or why not?
- How can you learn more about this product or issue?
The Power of Media

Media is a large part of our everyday lives. There is no avoiding it.

Media allows us to keep track of what is going on in the world. It provides entertainment, information, and a way to communicate.

However, it can also have negative effects if parents don’t take an active role in monitoring media use.

The key is helping your children use media in positive ways and balance media use with other activities.
This guide was created with information from the following sources:


- Center for Media Literacy— [http://www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)
New York State PIRC

What is a PIRC?

Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC) are funded by the U.S. Department of Education and are located in every state.

PIRC programs help meet the academic needs of children by helping to implement parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that:

- strengthen partnerships between parents and schools.
- improve student academic achievement.
- help parents understand No Child Left Behind.

There are two PIRC programs in New York State. For more information, contact:

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Visit the New York State PIRC website at www.nyspirc.org