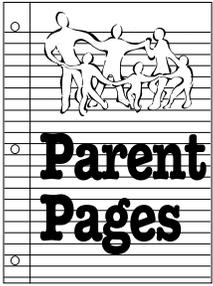


# V-Chips Can't Replace Parental Guidance



All new television sets are equipped with a V-chip, an electronic device that allows parents to block offensive programs. Now our nation's children will be watching much less sex and violence on television, right? Not necessarily. Many parents are not even aware of V-chip technology and most are not utilizing it.

Mandated by federal legislation, the V-chip is designed to screen programs with graphic violence, strong language and inappropriate sexual content. Parents must program the V-chip to block television shows that are rated according to the television industry's voluntary rating system. The industry established the following code to help parents interpret program content and its appropriateness for children.

- TV-Y All children: this program is designed to be appropriate for all children, including young children 2-6.
- TV-G General audience: most parents would find this program suitable for all ages.
- TV-Y7 Directed to older children: this program is designed for children age 7 and above.
- TV-PG Parental guidance suggested: this program may contain some materials many parents would find unsuitable for younger children.
- TV-14 Parents strongly cautioned: this program may contain some materials many parents would find unsuitable for children under age 14.
- TV-M Mature audience only: this program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under age 17.

While young children tend to believe what they see on television, not all television programming is negative. Children 'learn' what they see on television, the good and the bad. Television does affect their beliefs on things they do



not have experience with, like sex and violence. They can learn to be aggressive from watching violence, just as they learn to want to eat sugared cereal and play with certain toys from watching commercials. However, good television programming can also help children learn about cooperation, social skills and good health.

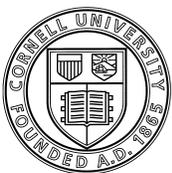
One parental role is to monitor television viewing. But in a family with working parents, who has the time or energy to monitor what their children are watching on television?

Enter the V chip, which allows parents to decide in advance which television shows the children will not be allowed to watch by blocking out programs that have a particular rating. Sounds like a great idea. But will it do what parents want it to do, which is prevent their children from learning negative values and instead teach them positive values?

No technology can be as fine tuned as a parent's mind when it comes to instilling values in children. Television programming can help families pass some values on to the next generation. To help define and promote those values, selecting what to watch is as important as selecting what not to watch on television.

Rather than relying on technology like the V chip, parents need to take a more active role in their children's television viewing. Here are some suggestions for guiding children's television viewing.

~Continued~



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension  
Orange County

Community Campus  
18 Seward Avenue, Suite 300  
Middletown, NY 10940-1919  
845-344-1234  
[www.cce.cornell.edu/orange](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/orange)  
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- ◆ Select television programs that reflect your family's values.
- ◆ Watch television with your child and observe how he responds to a television program.
- ◆ Talk with your child and ask questions to clarify their understanding of the program.
- ◆ Explain how television works, what kinds of techniques and tricks television producers use, and how time is used on television.
- ◆ Begin to teach media literacy by examining plots, predicting endings, looking for stereotypes and analyzing the truthfulness of commercials.
- ◆ Limit children's television time and encourage them to pursue active play and creative activities.

The problem with relying on the V chip is that, while it may block out sex and violence, it won't necessarily help children find programs that are beneficial, that is, help them learn the values their parents wish them to have. Then, too, the V chip must be programmed. Those of us still shaking our

heads over the directions for programming the videocassette recorder may decide to ignore the V chip rather than program yet another computerized gadget. In fact, those parents who already lack time to monitor their children's television viewing may well lack the time, or the ability, to program the V chip.

Even those parents who use the V chip may discover that it doesn't cure the television blues. While the V-chip may prevent children from viewing excessive violence or graphic sex, it won't teach children what's right and good. Only parents can do this. In both the short and long run, parental companionship and discussions of what is viewed may be more important than controlling children's behavior with the V-chip.

*Source: Michael Shapiro, Department of Communication, New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.*