



UNDERSTANDING THE TV RATINGS AND PARENTAL CONTROLS



ABOUT THE TV RATINGS AND PARENTAL CONTROLS

With an increasing number of TV channels and programs coming into our homes each day, it can be hard for parents to monitor what their children are watching. Many parents are concerned about their young children watching programs with content that's more suitable for older children or adults.

TV RATINGS

The television industry designed a TV ratings system to give parents more information about the content and age-appropriateness of TV programs. These ratings, called the TV Parental Guidelines, are modeled after the familiar movie ratings, which parents have known and valued for decades. They are designed to be easily recognizable and simple to use. The Guidelines apply to most television programs, including those directed specifically to young children. However, sports and news shows do not carry the Guidelines.

The Guidelines appear in the upper left corner of the TV screen at the beginning of TV shows, and often again after commercial breaks.

THE V-CHIP AND PARENTAL CONTROLS

The TV Parental Guidelines can be used in conjunction with the V-Chip — a device built into most television sets since 2000 — to allow parents to block out programs they don't want their children to see. The V-Chip electronically reads television program ratings and allows parents to block programs they believe are unsuitable for their children. Parental control technology in cable and satellite set-top boxes can also be used with the TV Parental Guidelines to block programs based on their rating.

TV RATINGS OVERSIGHT

The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board is responsible for ensuring there is as much uniformity and consistency in applying the Parental Guidelines as possible and is comprised of experts from the television industry and public interest advocates. The Board also reviews complaints about specific program ratings to help ensure accuracy. Individuals can contact the Board via mail, phone or e-mail to voice complaints.

UNDERSTANDING THE TV RATINGS

Audience: indicates the audience for which a television program is appropriate. →

Content Label: indicates a show may contain violence, sex, adult language, or suggestive dialogue. →



The Content Labels

TV Parental Guidelines may have one or more letters added to the basic rating to let parents know when a show may contain violence, sex, adult language, or suggestive dialogue.

D – suggestive dialogue (usually means talks about sex)

L – coarse or crude language

S – sexual situations

V – violence

FV – fantasy violence (children’s programming only)



All Children

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



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.



Directed to Older Children – Fantasy Violence

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.



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.



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 may contain one or more of the following: some suggestive dialogue (D), infrequent coarse language (L), some sexual situations (S), or moderate violence (V).



Parents Strongly Cautioned

This program contains some 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 may contain one or more of the following: intensely suggestive dialogue (D), strong coarse language (L), intense sexual situations (S), or intense violence (V).



Mature Audience Only

This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17. This program may contain one or more of the following: crude indecent language (L), explicit sexual activity (S), or graphic violence (V).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE TV RATINGS

What are the TV Ratings?

The TV Ratings, also called the TV Parental Guidelines, provide information about the content and age-appropriateness of TV programs. The TV Parental Guidelines include two elements: an age-based rating that provides guidance about the age group for which a program is appropriate, and content descriptors indicating that a program may contain suggestive dialogue (D), coarse or crude language (L), sexual situations (S), or violence (V).

Do ratings exist that are specifically designed for children?

Yes. Children's programming is rated according to two categories: TV-Y and TV-Y7. A TV-Y rating means that programming is appropriate for children of all ages. TV-Y7 indicates that programming is designed for children ages 7 and older. An additional rating, TV-Y7-FV, is used to indicate that a program contains "fantasy violence" that may be more intense or combative than other TV-Y7 programs.

Are all TV programs rated?

The Guidelines apply to most television programs. However, news and sports are exempt from the TV ratings system. In addition, some categories of programming, such as religious and home shopping programs, do not typically carry a rating.

Are movies that air on TV rated?

Made-for-TV movies are rated using the TV Parental Guidelines. Theatrical movies are typically edited when they air on broadcast or basic cable channels. The broadcast or cable network cuts content from the movie according to the channel's standards. After the movie has been modified, it is given a TV Parental Guideline rating. Premium cable networks like HBO and Showtime run uncut theatrical movies. These movies carry the original MPAA movie rating, in addition to supplemental content advisories provided by the network.

Who decides how a program is rated?

Programs are voluntarily rated by broadcast and cable television networks, or program producers.

I am a program producer and/or represent a television network; how do I rate my programming?

The descriptions of the ratings categories serve as the basis for applying ratings. E-mail the Monitoring Board with additional questions.

How is the rating displayed on the TV?

A ratings icon appears in the upper left corner of the TV screen during the first 15 seconds of the program. If the program is more than one hour, the icon will reappear at the beginning of the second hour. Many broadcast and cable television networks also display the rating after each commercial break.

Where else can you find a program's rating?

Other places to find program ratings are: 1) local newspaper listings; 2) TV Guide (either paper copy or online); 3) local cable guides; and 4) on-screen cable program guides. Additionally, some television broadcast and cable networks list the program ratings on their web sites.

Does a program carry the same rating week after week?

Programs are rated by episode and, therefore, may carry a different rating based on the content.

Why would a program be rated differently when being aired on different channels?

Programs are often edited for content when being aired on different channels and would be rated accordingly.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE TV RATINGS (continued)

What is syndicated programming, and how is it rated?

Syndicated programs are those programs such as talk shows, game shows, and reruns of dramas and sitcoms first run by broadcast or cable networks, which are then licensed and aired by secondary outlets, such as local television stations. The distributor of such programs is usually responsible for rating them.

Are commercials rated? Can commercials be blocked?

Television advertising is not rated, and therefore, cannot be blocked.

Are network promotions rated?

Network promotions are advertisements for a specific daily or weekly program or block of programs. Many promotions display the rating that the program will carry.

Do newspapers carry the TV Parental Guidelines?

A number of newspapers print the rating next to the program name and scheduled time in the listing guide. If your local newspaper does not list the TV ratings, call and ask that it do so.

Will the February 17, 2009 transition to digital-only broadcasts from local stations impact the ratings system?

The ratings system and your ability to use parental control tools will not be affected by the transition to digital television. However, in order to ensure that your television service is uninterrupted, you may need to take steps to prepare your household to receive a digital signal. For more information, please visit <http://www.dtvtransition.org>.

Where do I send complaints about a program's rating?

The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board is responsible for ensuring that the ratings are applied accurately and consistently. Individuals can contact the Board via mail, phone, or e-mail to voice complaints.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE V-CHIP

Is there a V-Chip in every television?

The V-Chip is in every television set 13 inches or larger manufactured after January 2000 and some sets sold after July 1, 1999. This means if you bought a new television set after July 1, 1999, it is most likely equipped with a V-Chip.

How do I program and activate the V-Chip?

Each television set's V-Chip works a little differently. Once you understand the definition of each rating and content label, programming and activating the V-Chip is as simple as following the set-up procedure, which can be found in one of two places: 1) the television on-screen menu options or 2) the written instruction guide included in the owner's manual. The V-Chip will only be activated if you select the option to do so.

How do I ensure that my child will not de-activate the V-Chip?

To activate the V-Chip, a password is required. This identification number acts as the password to activate, de-activate, and change the settings of the V-Chip.

Does the V-Chip turn off when I turn my television off?

Turning the television off will not turn off the V-Chip. It will continue to block programs when the television is turned on again.

What if I forget my V-Chip password?

Your TV's operating manual should have instructions on reprogramming your password. Most will offer two options: a customer service number to call or instructions in the operating manual that explain how to create a new password.

What type of programming does the V-Chip block?

The V-Chip can block programming by age-based category or content label. For instance, if you want to block all TV-14 programs, you can do so by selecting TV-14. If you only want to block TV-14 programs with intense violence (i.e., the program carries a "V" content label), you can select TV-14-V. You should also know that when you block a particular age-based rating, all categories above that will be blocked. For example, if you block TV-14 programs, all TV-MA programs will also be blocked.

Can the V-Chip block out motion pictures that carry the MPAA rating?

Yes. The V-Chip also allows you to block uncut motion pictures that carry the original MPAA rating. Motion pictures that are uncut and unedited typically run on premium channels (e.g. HBO and Showtime).

Can I override the V-Chip settings if I want to watch a program?

Yes, you can turn the V-Chip off by entering the password and following the directions provided on your TV set. You can reactivate the V-Chip the same way.

How do I change the settings on my V-Chip?

Your settings can be changed at any time by entering in the password and following the directions provided on your TV set.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT OTHER PARENTAL CONTROLS

Do other parental control tools exist in addition to the V-Chip?

Additional parental control tools are also available through cable set-top boxes and satellite services, which will often allow you to block programs by channel, title, rating, or time/date. For more information, please visit the Using Parental Control Tools page or the Resources page on www.tvguidelines.org.

Are additional tools available through cable set-top boxes?

Yes, most set-top boxes allow parents to block programs by channel, title, rating, time and date. You can also block pay-per-view and video on demand purchases. The "Menu" or "Settings" options will often provide instructions for blocking programs, or visit www.thetvboss.org or the Resources page on www.tvguidelines.org for more detailed instructions.

Do satellite services offer additional parental control tools?

Yes, satellite services also offer the option to limit programming based on rating and channel, as well as options to limit television viewing hours and establish spending limits on pay-per-view services. For instructions for specific satellite services, please visit www.thetvboss.org or the Resources page on www.tvguidelines.org.

CONTACT US

The television industry is pleased to provide the TV Parental Guidelines as a public service and welcomes your feedback. The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board handles public comments and information on the rating system.

For further information about the Guidelines, write, call, or e-mail:

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