

MEDIA SAFETY

A Guide for Parents from Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton

With school out for the summer, we hope that our children have lots of time to play outside. However, a long summer day also leaves plenty of time for children to surf the internet, to play video games, and to watch TV. Many of these activities are fun and may even



be educational, but some products may be age-inappropriate, offensive, or even dangerous. This brochure reviews how you can make your home a safer media environment.

Common Sense Media, a leading children and media organization, recently released a new guide to help you keep your kids safe online. Additionally, leading **technology and media companies** have stepped up to provide new tools to help you keep up with video games and TV.

THE INTERNET

Common Sense Media's guide, **Keeping Your Kids Internet Safe and Smart**, is available at www.commonsense.com.

The guide describes challenges faced by parents online and survival tips for both kids and parents. It also guides you through different parts of the Internet – like instant messaging, blogging, and social networking sites like myspace.com – so you know what is available to your child online, and how you can keep him or her safe from inappropriate material and contacts.

You can find additional information about Internet safety at other high-quality websites, including www.internetchildsafety.net, kids.getnetwise.org, netsmartz.org, and www.safekids.com.

VIDEO GAMES

To make sure that games you buy are appropriate for your child, be sure to check the game's **rating**. The industry rating for each game is printed on the box. There are six ratings.

EC = Early Childhood (3 and up)

E = Everyone (6 and up)

E10+ = Everyone (10 and up)

T = Teen (13 and up)

M = Mature (17 and up)

AO = Adults Only (18 and up)

Games that have particular content are labeled (e.g., *Violence; Blood*). To learn more, see www.esrb.org or write to ESRB at 317 Madison Avenue, 22nd Fl., New York, NY 10017.

The industry ratings provide important information about games. But they tell only part of the story. Research at **Harvard University** shows that even *Teen*-rated games have lots of violence – 90 percent reward players for injuring or killing characters. The same research shows that most *Mature*-rated games (81 percent of them) include content that is not labeled.

So I encourage you to also check out **independent ratings** of video games by **Common Sense Media** (www.commonsensemedia.org) and by the **National Institute of Media and the Family** (www.mediafamily.org).

But even when you are careful about what games you buy, you can not completely control what games come into your home. One of your child's friends might bring over an inappropriate game, or your child could rent one. You may want to check the games yourself and, when possible, monitor your child's gaming.

Microsoft's Xbox 360 Family Settings gives you a password to control what games can be played on the Xbox based on its rating. You can also control when games can be played (e.g., no games after 9 PM), and who your child interacts with in online games. To learn more, see www.xbox.com/en-US/support/familysettings or call 1-800-469-9269.

The upcoming **Sony PlayStation 3** and **Nintendo Wii** consoles will include similar parental controls.

TELEVISION

Unlike video games, television programs come into your home constantly, without your consent. So it's harder to make sure your child is watching appropriate programs.

You can check the **rating** for each TV program. Ratings are available in **TV Guide** and other publications, and they are broadcasted as each program begins. There are seven ratings.

Y = All Children (2 and up)

Y7 = Older Children (7 and up)

Y7FV = Older Children, Fantasy Violence (7 and up)

G = General Audience

PG = Parental Guidance Suggested

14 = Parents Strongly Cautioned (15 and up)

MA = Mature Audience Only (18 and up)

Shows that have particular content are labeled (e.g., V for Violence, S for Sexual Situations). To learn more, see www.tvguidelines.org or call 202-879-9364.

You can also use **TV Guide's Family Viewing Guide** (online.tvguide.com/special/familyguide) and independent ratings to decide what is appropriate for your child.

When you are busy or when you aren't home, you can use **parental controls**. The television industry has created a website, theTVboss.org, that summarizes the TV ratings and shows how to block programs with cable television, satellite television, and the V-Chip.

If you have cable, you can use your cable box to create a password to **block channels** or even specific programs based on TV and movie ratings. To learn more, see www.controlyourtv.org or call your cable company. In addition, your cable company may offer a Family Package with channels appropriate for kids.

If you bought your TV after July 1999, it probably has a **V-Chip**, which lets you block programs based on TV ratings. To learn more, see www.v-chip.org or www.tvguidelines.org/faqs.asp or look at your TV manual or call the manufacturer of your TV.

If you have TiVo, you can use **TiVo KidZone** to control, with a password, what programs your child can view based on industry ratings, your own preferences, and independent ratings. To learn more, see www.tivo.com/kidzone or call 1-877-367-8486.