



NEWS RELEASE

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Media Literacy Is Important for Children

Most of us think of reading and writing when we hear the word “literacy.” While reading and writing is very important, today’s youth also need to be media literate. If your children’s holiday gifts included video games, CD’s, videos or a computer, be aware of the impact of media on children and teens.

Children are growing up in a media-dominated culture. They are an important part of our lives and have much to teach. While it may be possible to reduce your child’s media exposure, it is impossible to completely shut it out. Children need to become critical consumers of media products. They need to better understand the media messages they see and hear in print, over airwaves, on networks and on-line.

Media literacy is the ability to develop skills to question, analyze, and evaluate a variety of media forms. These forms include television, print, radio, CDs, the Internet, computers, videos and video games.

Parents need to set limits and be actively involved with the TV shows, computer games, magazines, and other media that their children use. After watching a television program or video or after listening to a music video with your child, ask them some of the following questions:

- What values or points of view were being promoted by this message?
- What visual effects were used to attract their attention? Also discuss the sounds (the words that are spoken, who says them, music, other special effects)
- What techniques were used to enhance the authenticity of the message?
- How might different people interpret this message differently? (these can include age, values and education)
- What was omitted from this message?
- What do they think about the message? (Do they agree with it or disagree with it and why? Discuss how the media message compares with the values you are teaching your child.)

Questions like these encourage children to build lifelong skills they will need to be critical media consumers. While making a special point to discuss such questions may seem awkward at first, thinking about such issues becomes automatic after a while.

Make better use of media by doing some of the following:

- Set family guidelines for media content. Help your children and teens choose shows, videos and video games that are appropriate for their ages and interests. Get into the habit of checking the content ratings and parental advisories for all media. Use these ratings to decide what media are suitable for your child. Be clear and consistent with children about media rules. If you do not approve of their media choice, explain why and help them choose something more appropriate.

- Keep TV sets, VCRs, video games, and computers out of children's bedrooms. If your teens are allowed to have a TV set or other media in their bedrooms, know what media they are using and supervise their media choices.

When you help your children understand how their media choices affect them, they actively control their media use rather than giving in to the influence of media without thinking about it.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, "Understanding the Impact of Media on Children and Teens", Retrieved November 9, 2001 from <http://www.aap.org/family/mediainpact.htm>