

# KEY FACTS

Summer 2003

## Parents and Media

Today's children live in a media environment with choices unlike anything their parents ever experienced. Parents' responses range from deep concern about the possible harmful effects of media to embracing the creativity and potential of the new media world. Some closely monitor their family's media habits and set limits for their children, while others simply surrender to their children's desires. There is evidence that parents' choices do matter: parental mediation makes a real difference in the role media play in their children's lives.

### Parent Concerns

- According to a recent survey by Common Sense Media, approximately 9 out of 10 American parents believe today's media contribute to children becoming too materialistic (90%), using more coarse and vulgar language (90%), engaging in sexual activity at younger ages (89%), experiencing a loss of innocence too early (88%), and behaving in violent or anti-social ways (85%).<sup>1</sup> The majority of parents believe that media negatively affect *their own* children in these ways.<sup>2</sup>
- More parents cite television (37%) as having the most negative impact and rank video games (19%) and music (17%) second and third.<sup>3</sup> Almost half of all parents believe that viewing violence and sex on TV contributes "a lot" to children adopting violent behavior (47%) or becoming involved in sexual situations (48%) before they are ready.<sup>4</sup>
- At the same time, parents do not perceive media as monolithically bad: almost as many parents think that media can have a positive effect (58%) on their children as they do a negative effect (61%).<sup>5</sup>
- What generally concerns parents about their children's media use is the content rather than the amount of time: more parents are concerned about TV content than time spent watching, video game content than time spent playing, Internet sites than time spent online, and music lyrics than time spent listening.<sup>6</sup>
- The medium that evokes the most mixed response from parents is the Internet. An Annenberg Public Policy study on the Internet and the family identified two main types of parents: parents who recognize the benefits of the Internet but are concerned about its harmful social effects, and parents who only see the positive qualities.<sup>7</sup>
- A recent study by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting found that more than 8 in 10 parents (83%) are pleased with their children's online activities, including more than half (54%) who are "very" satisfied. Parents overwhelmingly cite the Internet's educational value for their children (81%).<sup>8</sup>
- At the same time, the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that a majority of parents are worried that young people will displace more important activities by spending time online (72%), see and read inappropriate content online (62%), encounter advertisers who will exploit them (58%), and meet strangers who will contact them (57%).<sup>9</sup> Parents who are more Web savvy are less concerned about their children's online experience.<sup>10</sup>

### KEY SOURCES

Several groups offer guidance to parents about the appropriateness of various media products for children. The following groups represent a range of ideological perspectives:

- Coalition for Quality Children's media, [www.cqcm.org](http://www.cqcm.org)
- Common Sense Media, [www.common Sense Media.org](http://www.common Sense Media.org)
- The Lion & Lamb Project, [www.lionlamb.org](http://www.lionlamb.org)
- National Institute on Media and the Family, [www.mediafamily.org](http://www.mediafamily.org)
- Parents Television Council, [www.parentstv.org](http://www.parentstv.org)

The Federal Communications Commission has a Web site to help parents monitor their children's media use at [www.fcc.gov/parents](http://www.fcc.gov/parents).

  
  
  
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## Parent Actions

Despite concerns about media's influence, most parents provide a media-rich environment for their children, often with little supervision. In a recent poll, the majority of parents (65%) say they could do a better job supervising their children's media use.<sup>11</sup>

- Four in ten children (42%) live in a home where the TV set is on in the background most of the time even when no one is watching. More than half (58%) live in homes where the TV is usually on during mealtimes.<sup>12</sup>
- Among children age 8 and older, two-thirds (65%) have a TV in their bedroom, nearly half (45%) have a video game player there, and a third (36%) have a VCR.<sup>13</sup>

## Media Rules

Rules about media use are difficult to enforce in homes with multiple TV sets, media in kids' bedrooms, children of different ages and interests, and parents who are usually not in the same room when kids are using media.

- At least two-thirds of children report having a "no use" rule for TV, the Internet, and video games until homework or chores are done.<sup>14</sup>
- About half of all kids have some rules about how much or what they can watch on TV.<sup>15</sup> About 7 in 10 kids say their parents set content restrictions for where they go online, and half report they may play only certain video games.<sup>16</sup>
- More children report time limits for going online (59%) than for playing video games (42%) or watching TV (39%).<sup>17</sup> More teens have limits for talking on the telephone (47%) than for watching TV (40%) or playing computer games (35%).<sup>18</sup>
- What *parents* say they do often does not match what *kids* say their parents do: roughly half of parents say they limit video game playing time and check ratings to select game purchases, but only 13% of kids report time limits and fewer (7%) say their parents did not allow them to purchase a game because of its rating.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, a majority of parents say they enforce time limits on Internet use, surf together, and check up on sites their children have visited, but most teens say they do not have time limits or go online with their parents, and less than one-third believe that their parents have ever checked where they have gone online.<sup>20</sup>

## Monitoring Media

Parents and children using media together and talking about it is the most effective strategy parents can use to help children become selective and critical media consumers.

- The best estimate is that parents watch TV with their younger children (ages 2–7) about one-fifth (19%) of the child's total TV time, and that they almost never watch with tweens (6%) and teens (2%).<sup>21</sup>
- The majority of children ages 6–12 (76%) say an adult is usually in the same room or nearby when they go online at home; for teens, that number drops to one-third (35%). Most parents (69%) and children (61%), including teens, believe that parents have a strong influence over which Web sites children visit.<sup>22</sup>

## Media Ratings

Media ratings and parental advisories were developed as guidelines to help parents select appropriate content for their children. Movie ratings have been used since 1968, music advisories since 1985, video game ratings since 1994, and TV ratings (TV Parental Guidelines) since 1997.

- While 9 out of 10 parents think that media ratings are a good idea and find them helpful when they use them, many are not aware of all the different ratings and are often confused about they mean.<sup>23</sup>
- According to a recent survey, almost 8 in 10 parents (78%) support the creation of a single, universal ratings system that would apply to all media, rather than the mix of ratings currently used. The majority of parents (70%) would also prefer that an independent group of parents, educators, and child development experts oversee the ratings.<sup>24</sup>

PARENTS AND MEDIA RATINGS	
Media ratings system	Parents who used ratings/advisories
Movie ratings	84%
TV ratings	56%
Video game ratings	59%
Music parental advisories on CDs and tapes	50%
Media ratings system	Parents who found ratings "very" useful
Movie ratings	53%
TV ratings	48%
Video game ratings	52%
Music parental advisories on CDs and tapes	52%

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, "Parents and the V-Chip 2001, 6."<sup>25</sup>

### V-Chip TV Sets

Parents who own a TV set manufactured after January 1, 2000 have a blocking technology called a V-chip that can be programmed to screen out shows with TV ratings they deem inappropriate.<sup>26</sup>

- By 2001, 2 out of 5 parents (40%) owned a V-Chip TV set and 7% had used it to monitor their children's TV viewing.<sup>27</sup> Of all parents who *have* a V-Chip TV set, more than half (53%) don't know it. Of all parents who *know* they have a V-Chip TV set, two-thirds (64%) have chosen not to use it and one-third (36%) have used it.<sup>28</sup>
- The two most common reasons parents give for not using the V-Chip are that an adult is usually nearby when their children watch TV, and that they trust their children to make their own decisions.<sup>29</sup>

### Internet Filters

- Approximately one-third of parents with home Internet connections have installed blocking technology such as filtering software or Internet Service Provider (ISP) controls to prevent children from accessing objectionable material.<sup>30</sup>

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates and American Viewpoint, *The 2003 Common Sense Media Poll of American Parents*, May 2003, 9, <<http://www.common sense media.org/about/press/ParentsPollMay212003.ppt>> (6 June 2003). For the purpose of this fact sheet, this study is cited as Common Sense Media.
- Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by The Annenberg Public Policy Center in which parents were asked their opinion about specific TV concerns; see Emory Woodard, *Media in the Home 2000: The Fifth Annual Survey of Parents and Children* (Philadelphia: The Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2000), 31, <<http://www.appcpenn.org/mediainhome/survey/survey7.pdf>> (15 October 2002). For the purpose of this fact sheet, this study is cited as Annenberg Public Policy Center.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. A study conducted by the National Institute on Media and the Family also found that a majority of parents believe that violence in TV, movies, and video games influenced their own children; see Douglas Gentile and David Walsh, "A Normative Study of Family Media Habits," *Applied Developmental Psychology* 23 (2002): 157–178. For the purpose of this fact sheet, this study is cited as National Institute on Media and the Family.
- <sup>3</sup> Common Sense Media, 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Parents and the V-Chip 2001*, 7.
- <sup>5</sup> National Institute on Media and the Family, 170.
- <sup>6</sup> Annenberg Public Policy Center, *Media in the Home 2000*, 29.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Turow and Lilach Nir, *The Internet and the Family 2000* (Philadelphia: The Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2000), 13–14, <[http://www.appcpenn.org/internet/family/finalrepor\\_fam.pdf](http://www.appcpenn.org/internet/family/finalrepor_fam.pdf)> (15 October 2002). Using a statistical technique called a cluster analysis, a nationwide cross section of 1,101 parents with home online access were grouped according to their attitudes about the Internet: 40% constituted *Online Worriers* who were concerned about harmful effects, and 43% were *Gung Ho* who rejected any assertions about its negative effects; a small percentage (16%) were identified as *Disenchanted*s who not only are concerned about the Internet's negative qualities but are skeptical about the Internet's educational values.

<sup>8</sup> Corporation for Public Broadcasting, *Connected to the Future: A Report on Children's Internet Use* (Washington, D.C.: Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2003), 7, <<http://www.cpb.org/ed/resources/connected>> (6 June 2003). Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project; see Amanda Lenhart, Lee Rainie, and Oliver Lewis, *Teenage Life Online: The Rise of the Instant-Message Generation and the Internet's Impact on Friendships and Family Relationships* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2001), 3, <[http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP\\_Teens\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Report.pdf)> (15 October 2002). For the purpose of this fact sheet, this study is cited as Pew Internet & American Life Project.

<sup>9</sup> National Institute on Media and the Family, 170.

<sup>10</sup> Pew Internet & American Life Project, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Common Sense Media, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kids & Media @ the New Millennium* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999), 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Annenberg Public Policy Center, *Media in the Home 2000*, 17–18.

<sup>15</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kids & Media @ the New Millennium*, 15; National Institute on Media and the Family, 169.

<sup>16</sup> Annenberg Public Policy Center, 17–18.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Pew Internet & American Life Project, 31–32.

<sup>19</sup> David Walsh, *6th Annual Video and Computer Report Card, 2001*, (Minneapolis: National Institute on Media and the Family, 2001), <<http://www.mediaandthefamily.org/research/vgrc/2001-2.shtml>> (30 November 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Pew Internet & American Life Project, 31–32.

<sup>21</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kids & Media @ the New Millennium*, 62. The Annenberg Public Policy Center reported that 9 out of 10 parents co-view some of the time and usually with a preschooler (*Media in the Home*, 38–39).

<sup>22</sup> Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Parents and the V-Chip 2001*, 5–6.

<sup>24</sup> Common Sense Media, 2.

<sup>25</sup> The Annenberg Public Policy Center conducted a study in Spring 2000 that found slightly lower percentages of parents of children ages 2–17 who used the different rating systems: 39% used TV ratings; 80% used movie ratings; 49% used video and computer game ratings; 45% used parental advisories on CDs and tapes (*Media in the Home 2000*, 36).

<sup>26</sup> The V-Chip is mandated by the Telecommunications Act of 1996; see [www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov).

<sup>27</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Parents and the V-Chip 2001*, 1; The Annenberg Public Policy Center found that 40% of parents reported having a V-chip TV set and 51% say they have programmed it at one time or another (*Media in the Home 2000*, 36). Another Annenberg study provided 110 families with a V-Chip TV set for one year and found that the majority of parents (70%) did not use the V-Chip, 30% tried it, and 8% were actively programming the V-Chip after one year; see Amy Jordan and Emory Woodard, *Parents' Use of the V-Chip to Supervise Children's Television Use* (Philadelphia: The Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2003), <<http://www.appcpenn.org/reports/2003/Parentsuseofvchip.pdf>> (6 June 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Parents and the V-Chip 2001*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Annenberg Public Policy Center, *Media in the Home 2000*, 37. It is difficult to determine the percentage of parents who have installed Internet filters because reports range from 26% of parents of kids ages 2–17 (National Institute on Media and the Family, *National Survey of Family Media Habits, Knowledge, and Attitudes, Executive Summary*, 1999, <[http://www.mediafamily.org/research/report\\_mqexecsum.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/research/report_mqexecsum.shtml)> [6 June 2003]) to 41% of parents of online teens (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 33).

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