

# **PARENTS AND THE V-CHIP, 2001**

## **A KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION SURVEY**

**JULY 2001**

## **Methodology**

*Parents and the V-Chip 2001* is a nationally representative, random sample survey of 800 parents of children ages 2-17. The survey was designed by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA), and analyzed by staff at the Foundation. Fieldwork was conducted by PSRA by telephone between May 7 and June 6, 2001. The margin of error for the total sample is plus or minus 4 percentage points, and plus or minus 6 percentage points for parents of children ages 2-6.

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## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### **MANY PARENTS OWN A V-CHIP, BUT FEW ARE USING IT.**

- ❑ Seven percent of all parents have used a V-Chip to monitor their children's television viewing.
  
- ❑ Forty percent of all parents now have a V-Chip-equipped TV in their home.
  
- ❑ Of all parents *who have a V-Chip*, half (53%) don't know it, about a third (30%) choose not to use it and one in six (17%) have used it to block shows they don't want their children to watch.
  
- ❑ Of all parents *who know they have a V-Chip*, about a third (36%) have chosen to use it.

### **FAR MORE PARENTS HAVE USED THE TV RATINGS SYSTEM THAN THE V-CHIP.**

- ❑ About half (56%) of all parents say they have used the TV ratings to make decisions about what shows their children will watch. This is similar to the percent of parents who have used the advisories on music (50%) or video and computer games (59%). A much larger proportion of parents (84%) have used the movie ratings.
  
- ❑ About a quarter of all parents (28%) say they use the TV ratings "often."

### **PARENTS WHO HAVE TRIED THE TV RATINGS FIND THEM HELPFUL.**

- ❑ Ninety-two percent of parents *who have used the ratings* find them useful. About half (48%) say they are "very" useful, and 44% say "somewhat." This is similar to how parents assess the usefulness of the movie ratings (53% say "very" useful) and the advisories for CDs (52% "very" useful) and video games (52%).

**PARENTS HAVE MIXED VIEWS AS TO WHETHER THE TV RATINGS ACCURATELY REFLECT THE CONTENT OF SHOWS.**

- **Of all parents (who have used the TV ratings), half (51%) say that from what they've seen, most shows are being rated in a way that accurately reflects their content; but four in ten (40%) say most shows are *not* being rated accurately.**

**PARENTS ARE DIVIDED OVER PROPOSALS FOR GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF TV CONTENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIFORM RATING SYSTEM FOR ALL MEDIA.**

- **Two out of five parents (40%) say that a uniform ratings system for all forms of media would be more useful than the current approach. But about the same proportion (38%) say a uniform system wouldn't make much difference, and 17% say it would be less useful.**
- **About half of all parents (48%) favor and half (47%) oppose "new government regulations to limit the amount of violence and sexual content in TV shows during the early evening hours."**

**PARENTS ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT SEX AND VIOLENCE ON TV.**

- **More than four out of five parents are concerned that their children are being exposed to too much sex and violence on TV. Sixty-three percent are "a great deal" concerned and 18% are "somewhat" concerned about too much sexual content; 59% are "a great deal" and 23% "somewhat" concerned about violent content.**
- **Many parents believe TV affects children's behavior. Nearly half (48%) of parents say exposure to sexual content on TV contributes "a lot" to kids becoming involved in sexual situations before they're ready. Similarly, 47% say exposure to violence on TV contributes "a lot" to violent behavior in children.**

### **WHY SOME PARENTS DON'T USE THE V-CHIP.**

- ❑ **Of all parents *who know they have a V-Chip*, two-thirds (64%) have not used it.**

Half (51%) of these parents say the reason they haven't programmed their V-Chip is because an adult is usually nearby when their children watch TV; a quarter (25%) say it's because they trust their children to make their own decisions. Just two percent say it's because they think their children would find a way around it, and just one percent say it's because they see the V-Chip as a form of censorship.

### **MANY PARENTS DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THE TV RATINGS MEAN.**

- ❑ **Most parents of children aged 2-6 cannot say what the ratings for young children mean.** Just 43% can define the rating TV-Y7, 31% can define TV-Y, and only 14% can say what FV – fantasy violence – stands for.

- ❑ **Parents understand the age-based ratings better than the content-based ratings.**

Sixty-two percent know what TV-14 means, 63% what TV-G means, and 74% what TV-PG means. Just under half (47%) know what TV-MA means.

Sixty-two percent know what the rating V means ("violence"), half know the meaning of the ratings S (52%; "sex") or L (50%; "language") and only 5% know what the rating D stands for ("suggestive dialogue").

- ❑ **However, more parents say the content-based ratings provide the most useful information.**

Half (55%) of parents say the part of the rating that tells about a show's content – such as S for sexual content or V for violent content – provides the most useful information for parents. One in five (18%) say the part of the rating that tells what ages a show is appropriate for is the most useful. Eight percent say they are both equally useful.

## TOPLINE RESULTS

Princeton Survey Research Associates for the Kaiser Family Foundation

N = 800 parents of children aged 2-17

Margin of error: plus or minus 4 percentage points for total sample

plus or minus 6 percentage points for parents of children aged 2-6

Dates of interviewing: May 7 to June 6, 2001

\*Note: Not all results will add to 100% due to rounding.

1. About three years ago, the television industry introduced a ratings system designed to help parents decide whether a TV show is appropriate for their family to watch. Some of the ratings used are TV-G, TV-PG and TV-14. Before this interview, had you ever heard of this TV ratings system, or not?

	Current	3/00 <sup>1</sup>	4/99	9/98	4/98
Yes, heard of	85	85	80	79	82
No, have not	14	14	19	20	18
Don't know/Refused	* <sup>2</sup>	1	*	1	*

2. The TV ratings system is designed to work with a device called a "V-Chip" you can use to block shows with certain ratings from your television. Before this interview, had you ever heard of the "V-Chip," or not?

	Current	3/00
Yes, heard of	64	61
No, have not	35	39
Don't know/Refused	1	*

3. In addition to TV, other entertainment media like movies and the recording industry also have ratings systems or parental advisory labels to help people decide whether material is appropriate for their family. In general, do you think the ratings and parental advisories used by television and other media are a good idea or a bad idea?

	Current	4/98
Good idea	92	90
Bad idea	2	3
(VOL.) Mixed view/Good and bad	5	5
Don't know/Refused	1	2

<sup>1</sup> All trends are Princeton Survey Research Associates for the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> An asterisk indicates values less than .5%.

4. I'm going to name some different ratings systems and parental advisories and ask whether you have EVER used them to help guide YOUR OWN family's choices. (First,) have you ever used...(INSERT) to help guide your family's choices?

	Yes	No	DK/Refused
a. The ratings for TV shows			
Current	56	44	0
4/99	52	48	*
4/98	54	46	*
b. The ratings for movies			
Current	84	16	*
4/99	82	18	*
4/98	86	14	*
c. The parental advisories on CD's and music tapes			
Current	50	49	1
4/99	42	57	1
4/98	41	58	1
d. The parental advisories on video and computer games			
Current	59	39	1
4/99	53	46	1
4/98	54	46	*

5. How USEFUL have each of the following been in helping to guide your family's choices? Have they been very useful, somewhat useful, not too useful, or not at all useful?

**Based on parents who have ever used each rating device.**

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not too useful	Not at all useful	DK/Refused
a. The ratings for TV shows					
Current (n=446)	48	44	6	1	1
4/99 (n=527)	40	50	7	3	*
4/98 (n=728)	42	51	5	2	*
b. The ratings for movies					
Current (n=673)	53	40	5	2	1
4/99 (n=828)	54	40	4	1	*
4/98 (n=1,111)	55	40	3	2	*
c. The parental advisories on CDs and music tapes					
Current (n=408)	52	38	6	3	1
4/99 (n=437)	51	37	7	4	1
4/98 (n=538)	45	42	7	4	2
d. The parental advisories on video and computer games					
Current (n=480)	52	41	3	3	2
4/99 (n=539)	42	44	8	4	2
4/98 (n=704)	43	46	6	3	2

6. Some people say the current ratings systems and parental advisories should be replaced by a SINGLE ratings system for ALL entertainment media including TV shows, movies, video games, and music. Would a single ratings system be more useful or less useful to you as a parent – OR wouldn't it make much difference?

More useful	40
Less useful	17
Wouldn't make much difference	38
Don't know/Refused	5

7. Now I have some more questions focusing on TELEVISION... Parents have different concerns about the content of the TV shows that their children watch. How concerned are YOU that your children are being exposed to too much...(INSERT — RANDOMIZE) in the TV shows they watch? Are you concerned a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all?

	Great deal	Somewhat	Not too much	Not at all	DK/Refused
a. Violent content					
Current	59	23	9	8	1
4/99	60	26	9	5	1
4/98	62	24	10	4	*
b. Sexual content					
Current	63	18	11	8	1
4/99	66	21	6	6	1
4/98	67	21	7	5	*
c. Adult language					
Current	58	21	13	8	1
4/99	59	25	9	7	*
4/98	59	26	10	5	*

QUESTIONS 8a AND 8b ROTATED

- 8a. How much, if at all, do you think exposure to VIOLENCE in TV shows contributes to violent behavior in children? Does it contribute...

A lot	47
Somewhat	32
Only a little	14
Not at all	6
Don't know/Refused	2

- 8b. How much, if at all, do you think exposure to SEXUAL CONTENT in TV shows contributes to children becoming involved in sexual situations before they're ready? Does it contribute...

A lot	48
Somewhat	32
Only a little	12
Not at all	6
Don't know/Refused	3

9. Some people say there should be new government regulations to limit the amount of violence and sexual content in TV shows during the early evening hours, when children are most likely to be watching. Others oppose new regulations, saying the government shouldn't play such a role in determining the content of TV shows and that parents should be responsible for monitoring what their children watch. Which comes CLOSER to your view – do you favor or oppose new government regulations?

Favor new government regulations	48
Oppose such regulation	47
Don't know/Refused	5

**READ:** Now I have some questions about the TV ratings system and how it works. We don't expect you to know all the answers. If you're not sure of something, just say so and I'll go to the next question...

10. The TV ratings system uses different numbers and letters to provide information about a show. Do you happen to know ANY of the specific ratings now being used in rating CHILDREN'S SHOWS, such as Sesame Street and Saturday morning cartoons?

**Based on parents of children aged 2-6 years**

	Current (n=334)	4/99 <sup>3</sup> (n=628)	4/98 (n=798)
Yes, correct response (TV-Y, TV-Y7, FV)	16	13	22
Yes, specific response "TV-G" or "G"	16	8	11
Yes, incorrect response	1	5	4
No, don't know any	51	55	46
Not aware of rating system	15	19	16
Refused	1	*	1

11. One of the specific ratings used for children's shows is "TV-Y." Can you tell me what this rating means?

**Based on parents of children aged 2-6 years**

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (suitable for all children/children of all ages)	31	40	38
Yes, incorrect response	10	4	7
No, don't know	42	37	39
Not aware of rating system	15	19	16
Refused	1	0	1

<sup>3</sup> 4/99 and 4/98 trend figures for questions 10 through 13 are based on parents of children aged 2 to 9.

12. Another specific rating used for children's shows is "TV-Y7." Can you tell me what this means?

**Based on parents of children aged 2-6 years**

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (directed to older children/children age 7 and older)	43	37	45
Yes, specific incorrect response "directed to children UNDER age 7"	10	13	7
Yes, other incorrect response	0	1	1
No, don't know	31	31	31
Not aware of rating system	15	19	16
Refused	1	0	*

13. The letters "FV" as in "Frank Victor" are used to provide information about the CONTENT of a children's show. Can you tell me what the letters "FV" stand for?

**Based on parents of children aged 2-6 years**

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (fantasy violence/cartoon violence) or partially correct response (violence with no mention of fantasy or cartoon)	14	11	13
Yes, incorrect response	2	10	5
No, don't know	68	60	65
Not aware of rating system	15	19	16
Refused	*	0	*

**READ:** Other ratings are used for shows NOT specifically designed for children...

14. I'm going to read you some different letters and numbers the TV ratings system uses to provide information about a show, and ask if you know what they mean. (First,) what about the rating...(RANDOMIZE)? Can you tell me what this means?

a. "TV-MA."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (for mature audiences/adults/not for children under 18)	47	38	41
Yes, incorrect response	*	1	*
No, don't know	38	42	40
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	*	0	1

b. "TV-14."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (directed to audiences aged 14 and older/inappropriate for children under age 14/may contain intense violence, sexual situations, or adult language)	62	60	63
Yes, specific incorrect response "directed to children UNDER age 14"	7	3	2
Yes, other incorrect response	1	1	2
No, don't know	15	17	15
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	*	0	*

c. "TV-PG."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (parental guidance suggested/may be inappropriate for younger children/may contain some violence, sex, or adult language)	74	68	70
Yes, incorrect response	2	5	3
No, don't know	10	8	9
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	*	0	*

d. "TV-G."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (appropriate for all ages/general audiences/family viewing)	63	59	62
Yes, incorrect response	4	5	4
No, don't know	18	17	16
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	*	0	*

15. Now I'm going to read you some different letters the TV ratings system uses to provide information about the CONTENT of a show and ask you if you know what they stand for. Again, if you're not sure of an answer, just say so and I'll go to the next item. One of these letters is...(INSERT – ROTATE)? Can you tell me what this letter stands for?

a. "D" as in "David."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (dialogue/suggestive dialogue/sexual dialogue)	5	2	2
Yes, incorrect response	1	5	4
No, don't know	79	73	76
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	*	0	*

b. "S" as in "Sam."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (sex/sexual content/sexual situations)	52	34	44
Yes, incorrect response	1	1	1
No, don't know	33	46	37
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	*	*	*

c. "L" as in "Larry."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (language/adult language/coarse language/bad language)	50	40	40
Yes, incorrect response	*	1	1
No, don't know	35	40	41
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	1	0	*

d. "V" as in "Victor."

	Current	4/99	4/98
Yes, correct response (violence/violent content)	62	54	55
Yes, incorrect response	*	*	1
No, don't know	23	27	25
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Refused	*	0	1

16. How frequently, if ever, do you use the TV ratings system to help make decisions about what shows YOUR CHILDREN will watch...

	Current	4/99	9/98	4/98
Often	28	22	25	31
Sometimes	25	22	15	23
Hardly ever	18	19	14	13
Never	13	17	26	14
Not aware of rating system	14	19	20	18
Don't know/Refused	1	*	0	1

17. Which part of the TV ratings system do you think provides the most useful information for PARENTS LIKE YOU – the part that tells you what AGES a show is appropriate for, such as “TV-Y7” and “TV-14,” or the part that tells you about a show’s CONTENT, such as “S” for sexual content and “V” for violent content?

	Current
Age-based ratings	18
Content-based ratings	55
(VOL.) Both equally useful	8
(VOL.) Neither are useful	2
Not aware of ratings system	14
Don’t know/Refused	2

18. We’re interested in parents’ opinions about the ACCURACY of the TV ratings system. From what you’ve seen on TV, do you think most shows are being rated in a way that accurately reflects their content, or not?

	Current	4/99	4/98 <sup>4</sup>
Yes, rated accurately	43	38	53
No, not rated accurately	31	27	20
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Don’t know/Refused	12	16	9

***Based on parents who have ever used the ratings***

Yes, rated accurately	51
No, not rated accurately	40
Don’t know/Refused	8

19. As far as you know, under the current system, who decides what a TV show’s rating should be...

	Current	4/99	4/98
The TV industry itself	24	25	26
A government agency	6	7	7
An independent review board	34	25	26
(VOL.) Other	2	2	1
Not aware of rating system	14	19	18
Don’t know/Refused	20	23	22

<sup>4</sup> Trend question in 1998 asked “Do you think the age- and content-based information the ratings provide about TV shows is reasonably accurate, or not?”

20. Now I'd like you to think about the LAST time your family purchased a new television for ANY room in your home. Did your family buy a new television any time this year OR last year – that is, since January 1, 2000?

21. As far as you know, does your new television have a V-Chip – that is, does it allow you to use parental controls to block shows with certain ratings?

	Current	3/00
Total yes, purchased TV	40	26
Aware TV has a V-Chip	19	9
Not aware TV has a V-Chip/Don't know	21	17
No, did not purchase TV	59	74
Don't know/Refused	1	*

22. Have you or has another adult in your household ever programmed your V-Chip to block shows you don't want your children to watch?

	All parents	Current Have V-Chip	Aware have V-Chip	3/00 <sup>5</sup> All parents
Yes, one or more V-Chip TVs has been programmed	7	17	36	3
No, none have been programmed	12	30	64	6
Not aware that TV has V-Chip	21	53	n/a	17
Have not purchased new TV	60	n/a	n/a	74
Don't know/Refused	0	0	0	0

23. Did you program your V-Chip to block shows...

**Based on parents who have programmed their V-Chip; n = 53<sup>6</sup>**

On a TV in a child's bedroom	19
On a TV in some other room of your house or apartment	61
(VOL.) Both locations	17
Don't know/Refused	3

24. How USEFUL has the V-Chip been for you in blocking shows that you don't want your children to watch? Has it been...

**Based on parents who have programmed their V-Chip; n = 53**

Very useful	63
Somewhat useful	23
Not too useful	5
Not at all useful	6
Don't know/Refused	2

<sup>5</sup> Trend question asks "Have you ever programmed this V-Chip TV set to block shows that you don't want your children to watch, or not?"

<sup>6</sup> The low number of respondents answering these questions is insufficient for obtaining reliable results.

**READ:** As I mentioned earlier, a “V-Chip” is a device that allows parents to block shows with certain ratings from their television...

25. If you had a V-Chip in your home, do you think you would ever use it to block shows you don't want your children to watch?

**Based on parents who do not have a V-Chip; n = 655**

	Current	3/00	4/99 <sup>7</sup>	9/98	4/98
Yes	61	64	77	64	65
No	35	35	20	33	31
Don't know/Refused	4	1	3	3	4

26. Which of the following is the MOST important reason why you wouldn't use a V-Chip... (RANDOMIZE)?

**Based on parents who would not use a V-Chip to block shows; n = 225**

An adult is usually nearby when your children watch TV	41
You trust your children to make their own decisions	32
Your children would find ways around it	8
You see the V-Chip as a form of censorship	4
It would be too time-consuming to program	3
It would block shows YOU want to watch	2
(VOL.) Other reason	4
Don't know/Refused	4

27. Which of the following is the MOST important reason why you've never programmed your V-Chip... (RANDOMIZE)?

**Based on parents who have never programmed their V-Chip; n = 92**

An adult is usually nearby when your children watch TV	51
You trust your children to make their own decisions	25
It seems too time-consuming to program	7
It would block shows YOU want to watch	3
Your children would find ways around it	2
You see the V-Chip as a form of censorship	1
(VOL.) Other reason	8
Don't know/Refused	3

<sup>7</sup> Trend questions prior to 3/00 were asked before the V-Chip was available; therefore trend figures from 4/99 and earlier are based on total parents rather than just those who do not have a V-Chip.

28. Next, please tell me whether or not you have each of the following in your household. Do you have... (READ IN ORDER)?

	Yes	No	DK/Refused
a. Cable, satellite, or pay TV			
Current	81	19	1
4/99	80	19	*
4/98	79	21	*
b. Access to HBO, Showtime, or other premium movie channels			
Current	41	59	1
4/99	46	54	*
4/98	39	60	*
c. A personal computer with computer games			
Current	76	24	1
4/99	63	37	*
4/98	57	43	*
d. Access to the Internet			
Current	69	30	1
4/99	50	50	*
4/98	38	62	*
e. Video game equipment such as Sony Playstation or Nintendo			
Current	69	30	1
4/99	69	31	1
4/98	68	32	*

29. Some cable and satellite TV companies provide screening devices that can be used to block certain programming – this is different from the V-Chip. Have you EVER used a cable or satellite TV screening device to block programming that you don't want your children to watch?

Yes, have	19
No, have not	61
Don't have cable/satellite TV	19
Don't know/Refused	1

30. How USEFUL has this screening device been in blocking programming that you don't want your children to watch? Has it been... (READ).

**Based on parents who have used a cable TV screening device; n = 158**

Very useful	69
Somewhat useful	21
Not too useful	4
Not at all useful	5
Don't know/Refused	2

## DEMOGRAPHICS

D1. Sex of Parent

Male (Father)	45
Female (Mother)	55

D2. Can you please tell me the EXACT age of your child who is between the ages of 2 to 17?  
 D3. Are any of your children now living with you...(READ FIRST ITEM)? Are any of them (READ ITEMS B AND C IN ORDER)?

### Summary of Children's Ages

All aged 2-6	21
All aged 7-13	27
All aged 14-17	17
Children in more than one age category	34
Refused	1
Any aged 2-6	42
Any aged 7-13	60
Any aged 14-17	35

D4. (Does your child/Do any of your children) have a television in their own bedroom, or not?

Yes	55
No	45
Don't know/Refused	*

D5. Are you NOW employed full-time, part-time, are you retired, or are you not employed for pay?

Full-time	61
Part-time	10
Retired	2
Not employed	15
(VOL.) Homemaker	8
(VOL.) Student	*
(VOL.) Disabled	1
Refused	1

D6. Are you married, LIVING as married, divorced, separated, widowed, or have you never been married?

Married	79
Living as married	5
Divorced	6
Separated	2
Widowed	1
Never married/Single	5
Refused	1

D7. Is your husband/wife or partner NOW employed full-time, part-time, retired, or not employed for pay?

**Based on those who are married/living as married; n=613**

Full-time	77
Part-time	7
Retired	2
Not employed	7
(VOL.) Homemaker	4
(VOL.) Student	1
(VOL.) Disabled	1
Refused	*

D8. What is the LAST grade or class that you COMPLETED in school?

None, or grade 1-8	2
High school incomplete (grades 9-11)	10
High school graduate (grade 12 or GED certificate)	32
Business, technical, or vocational school AFTER high school	5
Some college, no 4-year degree	23
College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)	21
Post-graduate training or professional schooling after college (e.g. toward a master's degree or Ph.D.; law or medical school)	7
Refused	1

D9. What is your age?

18-29	14
30-39	40
40+	45
Age unclassified	2

D10. What is your religion – are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, an Orthodox Church, or some other religion?

D11. Do you think of yourself as Christian or not?

D12. Would you describe yourself as a born-again or Evangelical Christian, or not?

Total Protestant	57
Evangelical	32
Non-Evangelical	21
Catholic	26
Jewish	1
Mormon	2
Orthodox Church	*
Other religion	5
No religion	7
Don't know/Refused	3

D13. Last year, in 2000, what was your TOTAL household income from all sources, BEFORE taxes?  
Just stop me when I get to the right category.

Less than \$10,000	2
\$10,000 to under \$20,000	5
\$20,000 to under \$30,000	12
\$30,000 to under \$50,000	25
\$50,000 to under \$75,000	21
\$75,000 to under \$100,000	10
\$100,000 or more	10
Don't know	3
Refused	11

D14. Are you, yourself, of Hispanic or Latino background, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or some other Spanish background?

Yes	13
No	85
Don't know	*
Refused	2

D15. What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or some other race?/Do you consider yourself a WHITE Hispanic/Latino or a BLACK Hispanic/Latino?

White	75
Black/African-American	12
Asian	3
Other or mixed race	7
Don't know	*
Refused	3

Region

Northeast	19
Midwest	25
South	34
West	21

Community Size

Urban	24
Suburban	49
Rural	27