

School Holiday Parent Kit

TV, COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET



Watching television and playing on the home computer can keep children entertained for hours and offer some peace and quiet for parents and carers. TV and computers offer families a wealth of experiences that can be fun and rewarding. However, like the real world there are also risks. Close monitoring of both time and content will help you avoid the pitfalls. This fact sheet offers some suggestions to maximise the fun and minimise the risks.

WHAT ARE YOUR CHILDREN WATCHING – IS IT AGE APPROPRIATE?

Television can convey positive messages to children. Some research, however, suggests there is potential for television to also convey harmful messages. The best way to ensure your children get a positive television experience is to become actively involved in their choice of programs. This will ensure that the messages they are hearing are those most appropriate for them.

CHECK THE PROGRAM CLASSIFICATION

Programs on commercial television, ABC and SBS have to carry a classification indicating the age group they are likely to be suitable for.

In addition, the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice breaks the viewing day down into time zones, and requires that only programs classified up to, but no higher than a particular age level can be broadcast within that time zone.

Programs that are classified G (for General audiences) are suitable for children to watch without supervision. On school days and during the school holidays, only G programs can be shown between 6:00am and 8:30am and from 4:00pm to 7:00pm.

Programs that are classified PG (Parental Guidance recommended) are suitable for children to watch with adult supervision. The PG time zone is from 8:30am to 12:00pm, 3:00pm to 4:00pm and 7:00pm to 8:30pm on schooldays, and 8:30am to 4:00pm and 7:00pm to 8:30pm during school holidays.

G and PG programs may also be screened outside these time zones - check your program guide for classification information.

C AND P PROGRAMMING

Programs classified G and PG are not harmful to children, but they may not necessarily be made specifically for them. A great way to ensure your children are viewing programming which is intended especially for them is to look for C and P programming. Children's (C) and preschool (P) children's programs are made for children of primary and pre-school age. They are designed to entertain and enhance children's television viewing experiences by reflecting their lives and interests.

To qualify for C or P classification, programs must pass the 'quality test' set out in the Children's Television Standard (CTS2). Programs are assessed for suitability prior to broadcast by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

C and P programs must be broadcast in regular time slots when a majority of the child audience is available to watch. Check your local program guides to find out when these programs are scheduled.

Parents or carers can be confident that C and P programs are appropriate for children. However, bear in mind that programs intended for older children would not necessarily be interesting or appropriate for younger children (and vice versa).

PARENT TIPS

- Work out a TV viewing schedule with your children and become involved in their program choices.
- Check program classifications in your TV guide and choose age appropriate programs for your children to view.
- Watch TV with your children and seek feedback by talking to them about what they have seen.

If you're not sure what's on TV and you can't supervise your children's viewing, videotapes or DVDs of age appropriate programs can be good.

TV ADVERTISING

Children can be easily manipulated by powerful images in television advertisements. It is important that they know the purpose of advertisements is to sell products. It is useful to talk with children about messages such as 'good to eat' or 'bigger, better, stronger' that are designed to make the product seem more appealing.

When watching TV ads with children play 'spot the gimmick'.

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IMPACTS OF TIME SPENT IN FRONT OF THE TV

Time spent watching television reduces other learning and discovery time. It decreases time spent in social interaction and physical activity.

PARENT TIPS

- Don't make TV the centre of your life by placing it as the focal point of the lounge room. If possible, create a comfortable and friendly TV-free family area and use it.
- Set a good example as your child's viewing habits copy yours.
- Make a rule that the TV cannot be switched on until all jobs have been done. This will be helpful in getting homework completed once children return to school. If particular programs are important to your child, tape them so they can be watched at another time.

For further information on children's television, including information about how programs are classified, contact the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) on (02) 9334 7700 or Freecall 1800 22 6667.

You can also visit their website at www.acma.gov.au

REMEMBER

*Control the TV –
don't let it
control your family!*

COMPUTERS & THE INTERNET

The internet offers tremendous opportunities to make friends and exchange information across borders, time zones and cultures. But there are also risks such as stranger danger, credit card fraud and exposure to upsetting material.

Too much time spent on the computer can result in some physical side effects such as poor posture, eyesight deterioration, repetitive strain injury and sleep deprivation if use is extended into normal sleep time. It can also impact on the development of social skills.

It is important that children develop social skills by communicating in the real world with family and friends rather than with unknown people in cyber space.

While TV programs, movies and computer games are given classifications to help determine their suitability for young eyes, the content of information children access on the Internet can be more difficult to monitor. There is greater potential for children to be exposed to adult material which is not age appropriate, violent games, pornography or cyber paedophiles if they are not supervised.

CYBER SAFETY

We teach our children about the dangers of talking to strangers. This same message should be reinforced when children and teenagers are using the Internet – especially if they use chat rooms. Talk to your children about their online experiences and get to know who they are talking to. Set house rules about what information they can give out and where they can go online. Encourage them to tell you if anyone says anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or scared.

For more information on children and the Internet, including safety tips and fun activities for kids, visit www.cybersmartkids.com.au

PARENT TIPS

- Get cyber savvy by sitting down with your children as they use the computer. Make checking out cool sites a family activity.
- Consider using filters, labels and safe zones to restrict access to sites offering violent or sexual content.
- Set an agreed amount of time each day when children can access the internet.
- To monitor access, put the internet computer in a public area of the home, such as the living room, rather than a child's bedroom.

TV & COMPUTER ALTERNATIVES

Have a list on the fridge of alternatives to watching TV or playing on the computer.

These could include:

- getting involved in a local or backyard sport
- drawing and painting
- playing a board game or musical instrument.

For more ideas check out the Activities fact sheet in this series.

MOBILE PHONES

More and more kids are using mobile phones – they can be used to communicate with parents and friends and open up a world of great interaction and entertainment. But like the internet there are potential risks for kids using some mobile services, including the risk of people making inappropriate contact as well as kids accessing unsuitable content.

The 'always on' nature of these services means that the risk to kids is always present. The personal nature of mobile phones makes supervision more difficult. It is important to teach kids about the potential risks of mobile content services. To help identify potential concerns, ACMA has developed a checklist of questions that parents can ask their mobile provider. It is available at www.acma.gov.au/mobilesforkids

*Suggested reading for parents:
Raising Real People by Andrew Fuller
and Parenting Magazines - NSW Department of
Community Services*

DoCS thanks this organisation for its contribution to this fact sheet and invites you to visit its website for more information.



Australian Government
Australian Communications
and Media Authority

www.acma.gov.au