

Media Literacy Concepts for Children

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NOTE: When we say TV we mean to include by inference all electronic media, including radio, movies, and video or computer games - and print media as well.

1. All TV teaches (and movies too)

Children learn from every show and ad they see on television and movies because children are always learning, and because TV is a powerful teacher. Sometimes this results in learning things that are good to learn, and at other times it results in learning things that are not true, or to behave in ways that are not good.

2. Real or Not Real

Children have a tough time figuring out whether TV shows or clips are real or not. We can ask children, "Does that clip show real life or not? What are special effects? How can we tell?"

3. Making choices

Within the limits set by parents, children should think about the choices they will make:

- about what programs they will watch
- about what they want to learn from those programs



4. Four types of TV

There are four types of TV shows or clips within shows that we need to be able to recognize:

Friendly TV shows characters being friendly to others or helping others, rather than hurting others.

Hurting TV includes clips where characters hurt others, either by hurting their bodies or hurting their feelings.

Showing TV shows real life such as soccer games, concerts, nature shows, and news.

Selling TV includes all ads or clips intended to convince us to buy something.

Some programs include more than one type of TV clips.

5. Nutritious TV or Junk TV?

Even first-grade children can easily learn the concepts of nutritious foods and junk foods. Once they have learned the meaning of these terms for foods, and they understand the four types of TV, they are ready to learn about *nutritious* TV and *junk* TV. Ask children to classify specific types of TV shows or clips as either nutritious or junk or inbetween. Help them think about their *TV diet*.



6. Why so much violence?

Many children wonder why there is so much violence on TV when it is bad for children? It can help children to know that the producers of TV programs, movies, and electronic games often use violence because it reaches out and GRABS our attention (as do sexuality and humor). The TV producers need to GRAB our attention in order to get us to watch the program and the commercials, because that's how they make money. The producers of movies and games get us to buy their products and that's how they make money.

7. Talking back to the TV.

It can help children to become analytical about what they see if they hear you doing it. If you talk back to the TV, they will too. "We don't want to learn that!" "This is just wrong!" "You've got to be kidding!"



8. Glamourized violence and sanitized outcomes.

It is important for children to look for the ways in which violence is glamourized. Movie posters can provide interesting examples for discussion. Also, help children notice when they are old enough how the effects of violence are usually not shown or are shown in an unrealistic fashion. In Japan it is usually the good guys who get hurt and the opposite in the U.S.

9. Alternatives to violence.

Children will ask what the characters could do if they didn't use violence. A good answer is they could use their *good thinking skills* and try to solve the problem that way. What could the good guy do when the bank is being robbed? Perhaps try to keep the robber calm and avoid violence. Perhaps notice carefully all of the robber's characteristics to inform the police later. Children often have *false knowledge* about what police officers actually do.

10. Hidden lessons.

Many *hidden lessons* are contained in most TV programs and movies. Older children can become good *TV detectives* and look for them. First it's helpful if you point these lessons out as you become aware of them, and say if you agree with them or not. Do all powerful women have to look like models? Are fathers usually inept? It often takes work to avoid learning these hidden lessons and false knowledge.