



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



ARTICLE 8 - MAY 5, 2008 – MEDIA INFLUENCES

Parenting in a Media Driven World
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Parents fret the effects of the media on their children and I am asked questions such as, “How do I teach my kids morals and values when they are bombarded by so much sex and violence on TV?” or “How do I protect my child from inappropriate things on the Internet, yet let them stay connected to their friends?” or simply, “How do we, as parents, compete?!”

Children are growing up in a media culture far different than ours. Three TV channels is a foreign concept to our children who are immersed in the 200-channel, 24/7 offerings of today. Email has given way to instant-messaging, which is quickly being replaced by cell-phone text-messaging. Archaic computer chat rooms have evolved into sophisticated social media forums such as MySpace and Facebook. Kids of all ages are busy uploading home-made movies to YouTube and downloading songs from iTunes at warp speed. And across America, kids are spending more time than ever hooked up to a world of video games about which most parents remain clueless. So, what *is* a parent to do?!

Get educated and get engaged! A MediaWise survey found that 72% of parents know little or nothing about the ratings system for video games. Meanwhile, 50% of young players (under 12) and 80% of teens admit to playing M-rated games such as Grand Theft Auto, Halo 2, and Scarface. Such games are meant for mature/adult audiences due to significant amounts of foul language, sexual content, and violence. Use resources such as www.mediafamily.org and www.common sense media.org to become more aware. Then, do these things:

1. Set clear expectations for acceptable media, based on your family values. Explain why you feel this way. Expect that your child will complain. Acknowledge their feelings, but stick to your guns. Be very clear about not only the quality of TV or Internet allowed, but also the quantity. Set specific time limits per day (1 hour for children, 2 hours for teens). Kids should also ASK to turn on the TV or computer, and do so for a specific and positive purpose.
2. Monitor usage. Be sure to praise and reward appropriate use and promptly punish violations. Let your kids know you will be checking in on their behaviors – both in real life and by electronic tracking systems on the computer or phone. Remove the cell phones from them each night at bedtime and spot check the content. You are not tricking or spying on them. You are protecting them because you love them.
3. Participate in exploring the possibilities of our multi-media world with your children. After telling our children what they cannot do, we must show them what they can do – and there are still many options! Dance Dance Revolution, Guitar Hero, and The Sims series are recent examples of popular video games that don't involve sex or violence. Watch and discuss TV shows together. Send photos and text messages back and forth with your kids. Let your kids teach you how to use modern technology.

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