

Understanding Media Literacy

A Guide for Parents



Media Literacy

Managing Media – Know the medium, the audience, the creators, publishers and the intended purpose of your media. Control your consumption of media and make positive media choices.

Examining Media – Question the creation and construction of media. Ask questions concerning the choice of camera angles, effects, sound, editing, and the commercial implications and context in which it is presented.

Decoding Media – Become familiar with conventions and symbols that are used to transmit ideas, information, thoughts, feelings, opinions, or messages. Students should then consider the authenticity and possible biases.

Identifying Issues and Influences – You should be able to identify what beliefs or values are being represented in the media and become aware of the powerful influence the media has on individuals, the economy, politics, and society in general. You should then also identify the consequential issues that arise from these effects.

Acting – You cannot be passive observers of media but become engaged and involved in affecting positive change. Audiences must attempt to prevent and combat negative images, messages, and ideas which are transmitted via the media.



Generation M: Media-Saturated, Multi-Tasking, Multi-Media

- Youth are engaged daily in many forms of media, including the Internet, television, movies, music, magazines, wireless media, and videogames. Often they use multiple forms of media at once.
- The average student spends 7.5 hours per day using media. This can be compared to the 1.5 hours of physical activity, 1 hour of homework and 1/2 hour of chores.
- On average, youth multitask for 1 hour and 35 minutes each day. During that time, they could be using two or more forms of media at one time. When each form of media was calculated separately and added together, youth are actually using 11 hours worth of media during their 7:38 hours of media use.
- Media consumption is being noted as a contributing factor to a variety of health concerns such as poor nutrition, obesity, unhealthy body image, poor self-esteem, risky sexual behaviours, and poor lifestyle choices.

“No matter what the source, information is only powerful if students know what to do with it...”

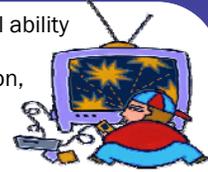
Key Concepts of Media Literacy

1. What is **Constructed**? What elements of design (e.g., colour, layout, models) are used and why?
2. What is the **Creed**? What messages or values are being reinforced? What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented or omitted? How might different people understand this message?
3. Are there any **Codes**? What do these symbols represent?
4. What is the **Commercial**? Who is the publisher or author? What are they selling? Who is the target market? Who profits?



Media Violence

Although media can positively inform and entertain, it also has the powerful ability to persuade. Violent messages are frequently presented via Internet, video games, television, film, and music. Research indicates that violent television, films, video games and music increase the likelihood of aggressive violent behaviour. Other effects of media violence on children include:



- Increase in anti-social and aggressive behaviour
- Become less sensitive to violence and those who suffer from violence
- View the world as violent and mean, becoming more fearful of being a victim of violence
- Desire to see more violence in entertainment and real life
- View violence as an acceptable way to settle conflicts

Impacts of Media Violence

- Scares or traumatizes
- Promotes stereotypes
- Promotes high-risk behaviours (sexual behaviour and attitudes, alcohol use)
- Encourages imitation
- Alters brain development
- Models negative relationships
- Causes emotional desensitization
- Stimulates violent or aggressive behaviour
- Encourages and normalizes unhealthy behaviours such as
 - Violence: (bullying, dating, peer, group, financial, emotional/psychological, sexual, physical)
 - Substance use and abuse
 - Sexual behaviour



“To be media literate in this new environment, young people need to develop knowledge, values and a range of critical thinking, communication and information management skills. Media education is an essential tool in helping them acquire these skills.”

The average child who watches 2 hours of cartoons a day may see nearly 10,000 violent incidents each year—this poses a risk for learning and intimidating aggression, becoming desensitized to violence.

Talking to Children about Media Violence

1. What is Violence?
2. How is violence used in different media?
3. What are the consequences of media violence?
4. Why is there violence in media?
5. What is the difference between psychological suspense and gratuitous violence?
6. What are some creative solutions to conflict in the media?
7. What are examples of media violence, stereotyping, and violence in the news?



YOUTH & MEDIA

Youth (age 8-18) spend an average of 7 hours 38 minutes on one screen or another which adds up to more than 53 hours per week. Multitasking accounts for 1.5 hours, therefore youth would be receiving 11 hours of media if they were not multitasking. These figures do not take into account texting. In 2004, youth spent 6 hours 21 minutes, which was a total of 8.5 hours if they were not multitasking.



Girls favourite media uses include visiting social networking sites, listening to music, and reading. Boys favourite media uses include playing video games and computer games, or visiting sites like YouTube.

Of youth age 8-18, 66% have their own cell phone, 76% have an iPod or MP3 player, 71% have a TV in their bedroom, and 50% have a gaming console in their bedroom.

Perspectives: Youth vs. Parent

- 16% of youth say their parents know a great deal about their surfing habits, compared to 71% of parents who believe they know a great deal.



- 50% of youth admitted to being alone when they go online, but 55% agreed that parents “check in” while they are surfing.
- 71% of youth have their own email accounts, but only 38% of parents know their children have email accounts.
- 70% of youth say that their parents rarely talk to them about Internet use; 78% of parents believe they talk a lot with their children about the Internet.
- 36% of youth admit to erasing the Internet history (12% always do, 24% sometimes do); 67% of parents check bookmarks/history to see sites that have been visited.
- Only 50% of families have rules for media use:
 - 30% said they have rules for watching TV, playing video games, and using the computer
 - 64% leave the TV on during meals
 - 45% allow youth to be using media while doing homework.

“Children whose parents set media usage limits and rules, on average consume three hours less media per week than their peers who have no rules...”

TOP 5

The top five activities youth are engaged in daily:

1. 4:29 hours watching television
2. 2:31 hours listening to music
3. 1:29 hours using the computer
4. 1:13 hours playing video games
5. 38 minutes reading print materials



Internet 101

Parents need to be involved in their children's online lives, even if it is intimidating or daunting. Become familiar with how the Internet is being used and help youth develop good judgment and critical thinking skills.



Web Sites:

- Movies, web sites, music, blogs, online diaries, e-zines, and more can be created by anyone. It is difficult to find accurate online information. Sometimes postings do not follow copyright laws, and may contain information stolen from other sites.
- **Dangers:** Many sites contain pornography, violence, illegal content / activities, and hate. Privacy and safety issues arise when pictures or contact information are posted.



Email:

- Email is electronic mail. It is a fast and efficient way to stay in touch around the world. Internet Service Providers (ISP) can set up shared email accounts with your children for parents to monitor. Teach children not to give out their email address to anyone they do not know. Set up filters to prevent junk mail and spam. 40% of emails sent each day are spam or junk mail.
- **Dangers:** You are exposed to junk, spam and other types of offensive or obscene mail.



Instant Messaging / Chat Rooms / Social Networking:

- With instant messaging, contact lists are created and users choose to accept or block people. In chat rooms, users can talk to anyone in the world. Social networking is the term used to describe the way that users build online networks of contacts and interact with these personal or business friends in a secure environment. Some of the most popular social networking sites include Facebook and MySpace.
- **Dangers:** Youth feel safer sharing and disclosing information online (anonymity) than in person, which makes them targets for predators. Rumours and gossip spread quickly and more frequently.



Blogging:

- Blog stands for "weblog" and is a web application that contains journal or diary posts. Profiles are created (can include pictures and videos) on sites like Nexopia, Pico, and LiveJournal. A new blog is created every 5.8 seconds and more than 3 blogs are updated per second.
- **Dangers:** (Dangers are similar to the section on IM, chat rooms, and social networking). Anything that is put on the Internet can be seen by over 65 million viewers and is never really removed.



File-Sharing:

- This enables searching and downloading files from other computers. 65% of youth download music, movies, games and TV shows.
- **Dangers:** Viruses or spyware attached to downloaded material infect the computer. Consider the ethics of downloading pirated information (software, music, videos).



Cell Phones:

- **Cell Phones:**
- New cell phones can have Internet capabilities, text messaging, digital photos and videos, apps, music (MP3) and more. Cell phones are private, connected and always accessible. SMS (short message system) is a new language used by texters: how wzd pRT last nyt?
- **Dangers:** Text messaging/camera phones are used to bully and harass any time of the day.

Analysis of Risky Behaviour: Top Five Areas of Concern

1. **Risky behaviour by children and youth in adult-only chat rooms:** 30% of 9-10 year olds visit these chat rooms; this increases to 72% between the ages of 15 and 17.
2. **In-Person meetings with Internet acquaintances:** youth often email (45%) and IM (57%) people they have only met online; 15% of youth met face-to-face with someone they met online and of them, 15% went to the meeting alone and didn't tell anyone.
3. **Exposure to sexually explicit material and sexual comments:** 53% of young Internet users have received pornographic junk mail; 22% told their parents.
4. **Online bullying and exposure to hate:** 25% of youth have received email that said hateful things about others; 35% did nothing about it.
5. **Divulging personal and private information:** 71% of youth have personal email accounts and many have provided real information during set-up: 81% real names, 29% real addresses, 20% real phone numbers.





Internet Users: What Are They Doing?

Canadian youth are active Internet users.

- 79% of youth have access to the Internet in their home and 48% use the Internet for at least an hour every day. Almost all youth (94%) say they often email friends. Only 50% of parents set limits on their children's computer use. 74% of 7th-12th graders have a social networking profile.



- 1/3 have been cyber bullied.

Grade 4-7 (age 9-12)

- 25% have their own computer with an Internet connection, and half of those (14%) have a webcam. 45% are downloading music.



- Most youth this age are on the Internet playing games (88%) and doing homework (75%). 51% use the Internet to explore personal interests, and over one-quarter (27%) have their own web site.

- Social networking is popular with 36% of youth instant messaging. In grade 4, youth are spending 26 minutes per day on networking sites, whereas by grade 7, youth are spending 47 minutes per day.

Grade 8-11 (age 13-17)

- 43% have their own computer with an Internet connection, and 25% have their own webcam. It is important to note that youth with their own computer spend twice as much time using a computer than youth who share a computer with their family.
- Each day, 84% are instant messaging, 78% are downloading music, and 72% are playing online games.

70% of youth are visiting chat rooms



54% are "adult-oriented" or private chat rooms

WEB 2.0 and 3.0

Web 2.0 is the second generation of web-based communities and hosted services — social networking sites, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, and more.

Young surfers are *creating* content: updating, posting, blogging, watching, listening.

Web 3.0 is an extension of this. It involves the evolution of Web usage and interaction along several separate paths, including transforming the Web into a database and a move towards making content accessible by multiple non-browser applications.

- **Social Networking:** *MySpace, MOG, Facebook, and TakingITGlobal* are designed for online interactions with friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Users create profiles and meet others with similar interests.
- **Personal Broadcasting:** *Revver, Flickr, and YouTube* are used for viewing, creating and uploading media. They use blog entries, homemade video clips and music playlists to express opinions and their quest for identity, updating often to reflect the "ever-changing" self.
- **Remixing / Mashing / Sampling:** Creativity and digitization is a big part of the web. Youth are able to combine media bits or elements into their own unique multimedia creation (mash-up) using items such as melodies, scenes from films or text authored by others (*MashupTown*).
- **Feeds and Streaming:** Information now can be delivered. Youth subscribe to sites (*Google Alerts, Pageflakes*) and select news, photos, music, bookmarks, blogs, weather and much more to be posted on personal pages.
- **Mobile Networks:** Mobile phones, global positioning systems technology, text messages, digital images and videos are giving youth more tools to stay connected.



MOVIES



Special Considerations for Young Children:



- Most children's entertainment is fast-paced and action-packed.
- Movies often contain stereotypes (male/female roles, cultures).
- Merchandise (toys, clothing, fast food) is marketed in films and the campaigns are designed to attract young consumers.
- Young children need to be protected from frightening and violent images. Children might be scared by "monsters" (even if they are friendly). Scared children often need comforting, rather than being told that the character or movie isn't real.

Special Considerations for Pre-Teens and Teens:

- A new trend is to release an unedited version of a film under the "director's cut" or "unedited" title. These typically include raunchier scenes than theatre versions.
- Young teens are most disturbed by films that show realistic physical violence, molestation, sexual assault, and threats from alien or occult forces.
- Risky activities are portrayed as exciting and cool, so often teens feel that engaging in activities such as smoking, reckless driving, casual sex, and substance use (alcohol & drugs) is the way to be popular.
- Stereotypes frequently are present. Often young females are presented with unrealistic standards of female beauty and behaviour.

A jolt can be a violent act, motivating language, quick film cuts, flashes of colour, and/or exciting music that will generate audience excitement!



*Through media literacy, students learn to ask questions.
Who produced this example of media and why? Who is the audience?*

VIRAL VIDEOS

Viral videos are videos that have been passed around so many times and so quickly they are like a virus. The problem is that once they are online and posted, they are spread so quickly that there is no control over getting them back or removing them from the Internet. Videos often are found at these sites: *YouTube, VideoVat, MSN video, Google video, and MySpace.*

Examples of Violent Viral Videos:

- Videos of people beating up each other, bullies making others fight, beating up homeless people or tourists, and doing outrageous stunts such as setting themselves on fire or jumping off buildings
- *Bum Fights, Happy Slapping, Jackass, Fight Clubs*



Good resources for movie and film reviews and information include *National Film Board (www.nib.ca), Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com), Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), and the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (www.crtc.gc.ca)*

Video Games

Things to Consider When Young Children are Exposed to Video Games:

- Children often have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy.
- Children can become aggressive and fearful when exposed to high levels of violence in video games.
- There are no consequences for the violence portrayed in video games. Violence often is perceived as humorous.



- Stereotypes of males and females are portrayed. Often there is very little female representation. When there is, the female is seen as victim and the male is the aggressor, or the female is sexualized and abused by a male.



INTERESTING VIDEO GAME FACTS

- Teens who play violent video games do worse in school than those who don't game.
- At-risk teenage boys spend 60% more time playing games, and they prefer to play violent games
- *Grand Theft Auto* holds the top three out of four spots for best selling video games of all time for the titles *Grand Theft Auto 3*, *Grand Theft Auto Vice City*, and *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas*. All three are violent videogames.
- Teens who prefer violent games are more likely to get into arguments and even physical fights with authority figures, adults, and their peers.
- One out of every four teens who plays video games feels addicted.
- Video game marketers often market M-rated games to children under age 8.

Viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behaviour—particularly in children. Its effects are measurable and long lasting.

Teen Gamers:

- Playing video games should be a recreational activity for most teens, but it can become an addictive / isolating activity. Teens who play a lot tend to neglect school work and other activities.
- Many teens are heavy users of online role-playing games (RPG) where they can assume new identities and interact with other players in real time. Examples of popular online games include *Super Columbine Massacre*, *War Craft*, *Guild Wars*, *A Tale in the Desert*, *The Saga of Ryzom*, and *Lord of the Rings Online*.
- Various possible death sequences used in violent video games include shooting, beating, eviscerating, severing parts of the body (including genitalia), hacking, stabbing, sexual assault, and murder. Players can choose from a variety of weapons, such as crowbars, guns, knives, machetes and glass.



Music & Music Videos



Popular Types of Music

- EMO (emotionally charged music)
- Rap
- Soundtracks
- Pop /Hip Hop
- Alternative Rock
- Punk
- R&B

Issues:

- Spreading hate
- Misogynistic lyrics
- Offensive language
- Pornographic videos
- Objectification of women
- Gangsta violence
- Drug & alcohol use / abuse
- Violence and crime



A study addressing violence in music videos shows the following things:



- Out of 518 videos, 15% (76 videos) showed acts of interpersonal violence.
- 6 acts of violence were committed during each 2-3 minute-long segment, with a total of 462 assaults (shooting, stabbing, punching, and kicking).
- Males and females were equally victimized, but males were three times more likely to be the aggressors.
- Exposure to sexual violence desensitizes male viewers to violence against women, and heightens a sense of disempowerment among female viewers.
- 75% of youth report watching MTV for a weekly average of 6.2-6.6 hours



TELEVISION

Effects on Healthy Child Development:

- **Increased fear** (“mean and scary” world)—Children, especially girls, often are shown as victims of violence on television, making children more afraid of their surroundings.
- **Desensitization to real-life violence**— Violence often is seen as humorous in children’s cartoons. Realistic consequences are rarely shown.
- **Increased aggressive behaviour**— After watching violent television shows, children often imitate the aggressive behavior viewed.

Television: Violence and Sex

- 2 out of 3 programs contain violence, averaging about 6 violent acts per hour. 69% of children’s programming contains violence, averaging 14 violent acts per episode.
- Of television offenders, 45% went unpunished and 71% showed no remorse. 42% of violence was associated with humour. 54% of the violence shown was lethal.
- 77% of prime-time shows show sexual content, with almost 6 scenes per hour. 75% of teens (age 15-17) admit that sex on television influences their sexual decisions.
- 1 in 10 made reference to safe sex, and identified the sexual risks and responsibilities. 7% of shows with teens in sexual situations delivered messages about safe and responsible sex.

Television exposure during adolescence has been linked to subsequent aggression in young adulthood— teens who watched more than one hour of TV a day were 4x as likely to commit aggressive acts in adulthood (22% versus 6%) .

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Youth watch almost 4.5 hours of television per day. 51% is consumed from live TV. The other 49% is consumed via new technology (e.g., time-shifting, DVRs, DVDs, online episodes, YouTube, iPods, cell/smartphones)



Recommendations

Here are some positive ways to stay involved:

- **Participate:** Ask questions. Sit down and watch the program with your child. Ask if you can play the video game.
- **Share:** Share music build appreciation for the new music.
- **Rules / Restrictions:** Develop rules. Find family programming. Keep media in common areas of the home. Limit time/use. Encourage "unplugging".
- **Discussion / Awareness:** Encourage and allow time for discussion. Make children aware of the laws and consequences. Form committees and support groups. Raise awareness. Support media literacy instruction in the classroom by maintaining the strategies at home.



Use the 4 C's: Constructions, Commercials, Codes, Creeds

1. **Constructions:** How is media presented? (people, objects, lighting, props)
2. **Commercials:** How does media sell a product? (radio advertisements, billboards, product placement, television commercials, brand-name clothing)
3. **Codes:** What symbols are used by media to communicate ideas/impressions? (white versus black, darkness suggests evil, clenched fist signifies anger)
4. **Creeds:** What values, myths or beliefs are presented in media?



Remain Virus-Free!

- Spyware is a type of software that can install advertising, collect personal information, or change your computer's configuration without your consent (i.e. Adware, Malware). Remove these programs using Ad-aware or SpyBot.
- Set up a 'dummy' account to give out online so the real address is protected from junk mail.
- Enable prompting for software installation (Active X).
- Install a pop-up blocker and antivirus protection.
- Set your Web browser's history to one day.
- Don't run file-swapping software (eg. Limewire, Kazaa).
- Disable third party cookies and Java Script.



*Anything posted on the Internet can be retrieved by anyone (such as law enforcement, employers), even years after it has been posted .
Rude or inappropriate content can create problems with the law.*

Video Games

- Check the ESRB ratings when purchasing or renting video games.
- Search reviews on commonsensemedia.org based on platform, age, title.
- Choose family friendly games: www.familyfun.go.com/games
- Set rules about appropriate video game content and time spent gaming.

Music & Music Videos



- Introduce children to a variety of genres and songs from a variety of eras.
- Determine what is appropriate music for your home.
- **Explicit Content:** Parental Advisory Labels (PAL) are on most music that contains explicit language. For more information, you can go to www.riaa.com/issues/parents/advisory.asp. You also can download "Clean" or "Radio" versions of songs.



- iTunes: Restrict explicit content from displaying in the iTunes Store (music, movies, podcasts, radio content, tv shows, and music videos). Select Edit Preferences, click on Parental Control tab, and check the boxes according to your preferences. Lock your settings.
- Watch music videos with your child to discuss the content (i.e. stereotypes, sexual content, foul language, commercial advertising).
- Read reviews/lyrics available at www.absolutelyrics.com or www.common sense media.org

Online Social Networking

- Do not accept friends you do not know.
- Never use any real names.
- Create a password for invited friends.
- Do not post answers to surveys.
- Do not post your location (city, school, job).
- Do not post school, birthday or event information.
- Do not include email or instant messaging information.
- Use a non-descript URL (www.myspace.com/johnsmith).



TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUTH ABOUT ONLINE BEHAVIOUR:

- **Online communication and contact list:** Friends, strangers, or both?
- **Attention:** Consider kind of attention and the response they want.
- **Privacy:** Public profile and the type of information being released.



Television

- Ask questions.
- Determine what is right for your child.
- Set time limits.
- Plan ahead.
- Know the ratings.
- View programs together.
- Discuss what you have watched.
- Balance viewing with other activities.



V-chip:

TVs built after 2000 have a "v-chip (parental control, channel block) to block shows according to ratings. If you have analog cable, you have to turn on your V-chip. If you have digital cable or satellite, you can block shows by rating: Pay-Per View, time slot, MPAA rating, and individual program. Some even will allow you to limit the time spent watching television.

NOTE: A V-chip does not block music videos but can block channels (block MTV / MuchMusic)

- Guides for watching TV, reviewing programs and taking action: www.parentstv.org, www.TV.com, www.televisionwatch.org, and www.common sense media.org.
- Show ratings and V-chip instructions: www.vchipcanada.ca
- Complaints sent: www.crtc.gc.ca or www.adstandards.com

• **TV TURN-OFF WEEK:** www.tvturnoff.org •



Web Resources

Adbusters - www.adbusters.org/home
Be Web Aware - Gambling: www.bewebaware.ca/english/gambling.aspx
Blogsafety: www.blogsafety.com
Canada's National Tip Line Cybertip: www.cybertip.ca/en/cybertip
Chat Danger: www.chatdanger.com
Centre for Addiction Recovery: www.netaddiction.com
Centre for Media Literacy: www.medialit.org
Centre for Safe and Responsible Internet Use: www.csriu.org
Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children: www.crevawc.ca
Common Sense Media: www.common sense media.org
Crime Stoppers: www.londoncrimestoppers.com
Get Net Wise: www.kids.getnetwise.org
Get Safe Online: www.getsafeonline.org
International Centre for Youth Gambling: www.education.mcgill.ca/gambling/en/homepage.htm
Internet Safety Awareness in Europe: www.saferinternet.org/ww/en/pub/insafe/safety.htm
Internet Addiction: www.bewebaware.ca/english/internetaddiction.aspx
Look Up Lyrics: www.absolutelyrics.com
Media Awareness Network: www.media-awareness.ca
Media Education Foundation: www.mediaed.org
NetSmartz Online Workshop: www.netsmartz.org
Ontario Media Literacy: www.angelfire.com/ms/MediaLiteracy
Parents' Guide to Safe Social Networking: onguardonline.gov/socialnetworking
Protecting Kids from Pornography & Sexual Predators on the Internet: www.nap.edu/netsafekids
Safe Kids: www.safekids.com
Safe Teen: www.safeteens.com
Stop Spam Spyware and Phishing: www.stopspamhere.ca
The Association for Media Literacy: www.aml.ca
Web Wise: www.webwise.ie
Wired Kids: www.wiredkids.org



MEDIA LITERACY COALITION (2010)

- Association of Local Public Health Agencies
- CAMH Centre for Prevention Science
- Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness
- Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario
- Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
- Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association
- Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations
- Ontario Physical and Health Education Association
- Ontario Principals Council
- Ontario Provincial Police, Crime Prevention, GHQ Orillia
- Ontario Public School Boards' Association
- Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation
- Ontario Student Trustees Association – Public Board Council
- Ontario Teachers' Federation
- University of Western Ontario Faculty of Education

Brochure information provided by:

- Media Awareness Network:
- Common Sense Media
- Kaiser Family Foundation
- American Academy of Pediatricians
- Media Family
- Canadian Pediatric Society
- The Fourth R / Youth Relationships
- Centre for Addiction & Mental Health
- Media Wise
- Harris Interactive
- Girls, Women + Media Project
- Centre for Media Literacy



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