



**tv watch**

[www.televisionwatch.org](http://www.televisionwatch.org)

**safe tv. easy as 1-2-3.**

**the tv watch guide to the tv ratings  
and parental controls**

Like most parents, you're probably concerned about what your kids are watching on TV.

Well there's good news. It's not hard to make your TV an ally in controlling what your family can see.

In fact, it is as easy as 1-2-3.

**step 1** is learning the TV ratings.

**step 2** is deciding which shows you want seen in your home based on what's right for you and your family.

**step 3** is using tools like the v-chip or cable and satellite parental controls to automatically block programs based on the TV ratings.

We hope this brochure helps you discover how simple it really is to manage what your children watch on TV. Of course, not all parents will decide to use all the tools we outline, and that's okay. Our goal is to help you decide which tools work best for you and your family.



**step 1**

**learn the ratings**

tv ratings 101  
children's programs  
regular programs

**step 2**

**decide what tv shows  
are right for your family**

**step 3**

**set the parental controls**

the v-chip in plain english  
cable and satellite controls

# step 1 learn the ratings

The TV rating system gives parents information about the age-appropriateness and content of TV programs. It applies to all programs except news, sports and commercials. By understanding what the different ratings mean, and finding out how different shows are rated, you can guide your children's TV viewing habits. Everyone should keep in mind, however, that what's right for one 10-year-old might not be right for another. It's ultimately up to you, the parent, to decide.

## tv ratings 101



**Audience:** Indicates the audience for which a TV program is intended.

**Content:** Warns about violence, fantasy violence, sexual situations, coarse language and suggestive dialogue. One or more letters may be added below the age-based audience label.

- D Suggestive Dialogue
- L Coarse Language
- S Sexual Situations
- V Violence
- FV Fantasy Violence

### Where to find TV ratings:

- 1 At the beginning of all rated programs and (on most channels) one or more additional times during the programs
- 2 Info or program guide that comes with your TV, cable or satellite service
- 3 Local newspaper listings
- 4 TV Guide
- 5 Broadcast and cable networks' websites



**All Children**

Designed for very young children including ages 2-6. Appropriate for all children.



**Directed to Children Age 7 and Older**

Appropriate for children who have the developmental skills to distinguish between make-believe and reality. May frighten children under the age of 7. Themes and elements in this program may include mild fantasy or comedic violence.



**Directed to Older Children Due to Fantasy Violence**

The extra FV designation for TV-Y7 programming indicates fantasy violence in the program may be more intense or combative than that in other TV-Y7 programs.

regular programs



**General Audience**

Although this program is not designed specifically for children, most parents would find it appropriate for all ages, and may let younger children watch this program unattended. It contains little or no violence, no strong language, and little or no sexual dialogue or situations.



**Parental Guidance Suggested**

Contains material that parents may find unsuitable for younger children. Parents may want to watch it with them. The theme itself may call for parental guidance.



**Parents Strongly Cautioned**

Contains some material that parents would find unsuitable for children under 14. Parents are strongly urged to exercise greater care in monitoring this program and are cautioned against letting children under the age of 14 watch unattended.



**Mature Audience Only**

This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under the age of 17.

## step 2

### decide what shows are right for your family

Since every family uses TV differently, only you are in a position to decide what shows are appropriate for your family.

Take the information you've learned about the TV ratings in Step 1 and make sure that you and your partner agree on what shows are right for your family.

Of course, TV ratings are not a replacement for your parenting and judgment. It's still a good idea to watch at least one episode of a new program that your child wants to watch to make sure that you approve of the show's content.

You might even want to create a checklist and post it on the refrigerator to remind you, your children and caregivers of the TV rules of the household.



## step 3

### set the parental controls

There are a variety of ways to place controls on your TV. The tools differ slightly depending on whether you have broadcast TV, analog cable, digital cable, or satellite TV service, etc. The good news is, virtually everyone has some level of control at their disposal to automatically control the TV content allowed in their home.



#### the v-chip in plain english

Most parents will use what's called the v-chip. (Digital Cable customers may prefer to use their own controls, explained on the next page.)

The v-chip (sometimes called the Smart Lock, Auto Lock, Parental Controls, etc.) is a tool that enables parents to automatically block programs by TV ratings. The v-chip is a standard feature in all TVs 13" and larger, built after January 2000.

To set the v-chip, simply press the menu button on your remote control, select v-chip (or parental controls, smart lock, etc.) and follow the on-screen prompts.

The v-chip works based on the TV ratings system that you learned about in Step 1. TV ratings work top down, so, for example, if you want to allow shows rated TV-PG and below, select TV-PG. Everything above this rating — TV-14 and TV-MA — will be blocked.

## Cable and Satellite Controls

**Analog Cable** To block by TV rating, you will still need to set and activate your TV's v-chip.

In addition to the parental controls of the v-chip, standard cable customers with a set-top box are able to block unwanted channels.

If you have a set-top box, you'll find parental controls in your cable settings menu. Typically you must set a PIN, select the ratings, channels and/or times you want blocked, and turn the parental controls on.

If you don't have a set-top box, you can ask your cable company to block a channel for you. For specific instructions, contact your cable or satellite provider, or [controlyourtv.org](http://controlyourtv.org).

**Digital Cable** If you have digital cable, you do not need to set and activate your TV's v-chip.

Under your menu options you can block and restrict content by channel, TV rating, MPAA movie rating, Pay-Per-View, time and individual program. Some options even allow you to control how long your kids can watch.

The steps for setting parental controls may vary from provider to provider. Most providers will walk you through the process with on-screen prompts.

To learn more about the steps specific to your service, contact your cable provider or [controlyourtv.org](http://controlyourtv.org).

**Satellite** To block by TV rating, you should turn on your TV's v-chip.

Satellite companies also let you block by channels, MPAA movie ratings and time. On the settings menu, you typically select profiles and then decide whether you want to block by MPAA rating, user or hours. Easy on-screen instructions will show you how to turn these parental controls on.