



MEDIA VIOLENCE

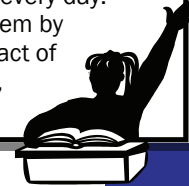
Understanding Media Literacy

A Guide for Parents



Media Literacy

Media literacy means understanding and using mass media objectively. It is the ability to sift through and analyze the messages that inform, entertain and are sold to us every day. Youth learn to make informed decisions about what is being presented to them by understanding the nature of mass media, the techniques used, and the impact of these techniques. They learn to decipher the strengths, weaknesses, biases, tricks, artistry, priorities, roles and impacts of mass media.



Key Concepts of Media Literacy



1. **All media is a construction:** Media is crafted with built-in attitudes, interpretations and conclusions.
2. **Each person interprets messages differently:** They are based on experiences, age, values, beliefs, and culture.
3. **The media has commercial interests:** Media is created for profit, so advertisers sell the messages.
4. **The media contain ideological and value messages:** Producers have their own beliefs, opinions, values and biases that are projected.
5. **Each medium has its own language, style, techniques, codes, conventions and aesthetics:** Different meanings are created by using these codes, conventions, vocabularies and styles.
6. **The media has social and political implications:** Media legitimizes societal values and attitudes while mediating global issues.
7. **The media has commercial implications:** The program content makes consumers targets for advertisers.
8. **Form and content are closely related in the media:** Special grammar and technological biases allow reality to be coded.

“The goal of Media Literacy is to help prevent the potentially harmful effects of violent media: to create active audiences not passive passengers.”

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 young person spends 6.5 hours per day engaged in activities such as watching television, playing video games, using the internet, and listening to music. This can be compared to the 1.5 hours of physical activity, 1 hour of homework and 1/2 hour of chores.
- 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.



Media Violence

Although media can positively inform and entertain, it also has the powerful ability to persuade. Mass media and specifically popular media influence the ideas and actions of the audience. Violent messages frequently are presented via Internet, video games, television, film, and music. These violent messages are increasing in number, and are becoming more graphic, sexual and even sadistic in nature. Violent behaviour and relationships commonly are unrealistic, glamorized and normalized.



Research indicates that violent television, films, video games and music increase the likelihood of aggressive violent behaviour. Short term exposure to video games increases the likelihood of physically and verbally aggressive behaviour, aggressive thoughts and aggressive emotions.

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



The three key effects of media violence are: aggression, desensitization, and fear.

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

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?



The Internet

TOP 5

The top five activities youth are engaged in:

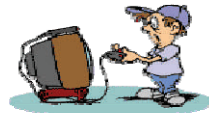
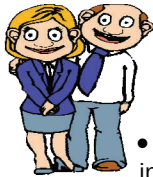
1. **57%** playing and downloading music
2. **56%** emailing
3. **50%** surfing for fun / downloading / playing games
4. **40%** instant messaging (IM) / chat rooms
5. **38%** homework



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.

Perspectives: Child Versus Parent

- 38% of youth admit that their parents know very little or nothing about the sites they visit; 28% of parents agree they know very little or nothing.
- 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.
- 36% of youth say the Internet is for communicating and 31% for information gathering, while 66% of parents believe the Internet is being used for educational purposes.
- 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.
- 56% of youth use Instant Messaging (27% daily); 28% of parents think their children are IMing
- 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.



“Monitoring our children’s use of emerging technologies is a huge task and the Internet remains the focus of many parent’s concerns.”

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



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, websites, 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 = electronic mail. It is a fast and efficient way to stay in touch around the world.
- Risks: You are exposed to junk mail, spam and other types of offensive or obscene mail.
 - 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.



Instant Messaging and Chat Rooms:

- 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
- 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. Home is no longer safe from bullying and peer pressure.



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, Piczo, Facebook, and LiveJournal. A new blog is created every 5.8 seconds and more than 3 blogs are updated per second.

File-Sharing:

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

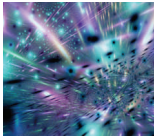
Cell Phones:

- New cell phones can have internet capabilities, text messaging, digital photos and videos, and music (MP3). Cell phones are private, connected and always accessible.
- SMS (short message system) is a new language used by texters: **how wz d pRT last nyt?**
- Text messaging/camera phones are used to bully and harass at 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?



Grade 4-7 (age 9-12)

- Search free games, music, software and sports on sites such as www.yahooligans.com, www.neopets.com, www.shockwave.com, www.hotmail.com, www.napster.com, www.ytv.com, www.foxxkids.com
- Search TV show, TV station, and commercial advertising websites. *81% of youth who play product-centered games say these games are "just games," not advertisements.*
- Girls socialize online (hotmail, ICQ, MSN), search music websites, and download music; boys play online games, search video game cheat codes, and are interested in gruesome/crude humour (www.ebaumsworld.com) and game sites that promote violence or adult content (www.stickdeath.com, www.newgrounds.com)
- 36% are chatting with friends online; 45% are downloading or listening to music online; 47 minutes a day are spent IMing; 30% have their own websites; 12% write a daily Weblog

70% of youth are visiting chat rooms



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

Grade 8-11 (age 13-17)

- Top three sites: hotmail.com, napster.com, and yahoo.com followed by www.msn.com, www.muchmusic.com, www.shockwave.com, www.wwf.com
- Girls email, IM and use chat rooms; boys visit sites to play games, look for cheat codes, download pirated video games (www.warez.com), and search gory, explicit, adult-oriented sites. Youth search the web for more interest-based websites: girls look at culturally-specific sites and boys look at sports sites.
- 49% of youth have their own computer connected to the internet; 41% have a cell phone; one third have their own Webcam; 47% have an MP3 player; and 69 minutes are spent each day on instant messaging



WEB 2.0

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.

- **Social Networking:** MySpace, MOG, Facebook, and Taking ITGlobal 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 to one site using a system that is called RSS (real simple syndication or rich site summary). 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.



- Children have easy access to violent computer and video games.
- 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.



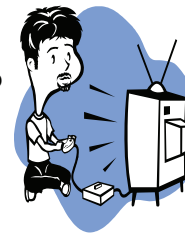
Interesting Facts:

- The video game Bully is #1 hit on Google.
- 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 is 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 and 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.
- 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:

- Television can affect learning and school performance. It can cut into the time required for activities crucial to healthy mental and physical development. Time is spent watching TV instead of reading, playing, exploring, or participating in sports.
- Television often bombards viewers with sexual messages and images. The potential for educating youth about safe and responsible sexual behaviour is present, but the issues usually are not dealt with in a meaningful way.



3 out of 4 prime time shows contain sexual references (84% of sitcoms). 1 in 10 made reference to safe sex, and identified the sexual risks and responsibilities. Only 17% of shows with teens in sexual situations delivered messages about safe and responsible sex.

Children's Potential Responses to Media Violence:

- 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 rarely are shown.
- Increased aggressive behaviour— After watching violent television shows, children often imitate the aggressive behavior viewed.

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 and TV programs. 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 other activities (unplug).
- **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

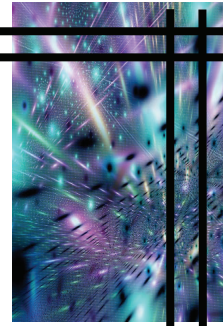
- Check the ESRB ratings when purchasing or renting video games.
- Search reviews on commonsensemedia.org based on platform, age, title.
- Choose family friendly games: www.familyfun.go.com/games
- Set rules about appropriate video game content and time spent gaming.

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



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.

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

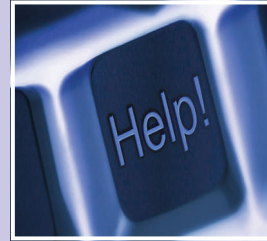


• TV TURN-OFF WEEK: www.tvturnoff.org •



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: <http://csriu.org>
Common Sense Media: www.common sense media.org
Get Net Wise: <http://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
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: <http://onguardonline.gov/socialnetworking>
Protecting Kids from Pornography & Sexual Predators on the Internet: www.nap.edu/netsafekids
Reporting Identity Fraud: www.recol.ca
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



This brochure was provided by:

- Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness
- Centre for Prevention Science, Fourth R. Project, University of Western Ontario
- Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
- Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Government of Ontario
- Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
- Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association
- Ontario Federation of Home & School Associations
- Ontario Principals' Council
- Ontario Provincial Police, Crime Prevention Section
- Ontario Public School Boards' Association
- Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO)
- Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
- Ontario Teachers' Federation
- Thames Valley District School Council
- Valerie Smith, Media Violence Activist

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- Association for Media Literacy : www.aml.ca
- Media Awareness Network: www.media-awareness.ca
- Common Sense Media www.common sense media.org
- Media Family www.mediafamily.org
- Canadian Pediatric Society www.cps.com
- The Fourth R www.thefourth.ca
- Centre for Addiction & Mental Health



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