

The V-Chip: Options to Restrict What Your Children Watch on TV

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The V-chip allows parents or other caregivers to block programming on their TVs that they don't want children to watch. Most programs are assigned a rating based on parental guidelines established by the TV industry. The ratings provide information about the content and age-appropriateness of most TV programs except news, sports and unedited movies on premium cable channels.

Parents can program the V-chip to block programs based on these ratings, which include two elements: an age-based rating that provides guidance about the a group for which a program is appropriate, and content descriptors indicating that a program may contain suggestive dialogue (D), coarse or crude language (L) sexual situations (S), or violence (V). The ratings are:

- **TV-Y** - programs aimed at a very young audience, including children from ages 2-6.
- **TV-Y7** - programs most appropriate for children age 7 and up.
- **TV-Y7-FV** - programming with fantasy violence that may be more intense or more combative than other programming in the TV-Y7 category.
- **TV-G** - programs suitable for all ages; these are not necessarily children's shows.
- **TV-PG** - parental guidance is recommended; these programs may be unsuitable for younger children.
- **TV-14** - these shows may be unsuitable for children under 14.
- **TV-MA** - these programs are intended to be viewed by mature, adult audiences and may be unsuitable for children under 17.

Ratings appear in the upper left corner of your television screen during the first 15 seconds of each program and often after commercial breaks. The ratings are listed in various publications that provide local TV listings.

How to program the V-chip

Since 2000, V-chips are required for all newly manufactured TV sets 13 inches or larger. Personal computers that include a television tuner and a monitor of 13 inches or more must also have a V-chip.

To set parental controls for the V-chip in your TV, digital-to-analog converter box, or set-top box using the remote control that came with the equipment, follow these general steps:

- Using the menu key on the remote control, locate the "main" or "setup" menu, then find an option that may be called "locks," "block," "parental controls" or "V-chip."
- You should get a prompt to create a password that will enable you to lock TV channels and types of programming.
- Using the "menu," "select," "number" and "arrow" keys, select the channels and specific ratings assigned to TV programs you want blocked.
- Save your settings by pressing the appropriate key, as prompted.

These steps may vary depending on the equipment you are using. If you have difficulty programming your V-chip, you should consult your equipment manual for specific instructions.

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