# WATCHING THE WATCHERS

**WHAT CHILDREN WATCH ON TV AND HOW THEY RESPOND: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY**

# TE MĀTAI I TE HUNGA MĀTAKI

**NGĀ KAI E MĀ TAKINA ANA E TE TAMARIKI I TE POUAKA WHAKAATA, ME Ō RĀ TOU URUPARENGA: HE MĀ TAINGA TIROTIRO**

**BSA**

**BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY**
**TE MANA WHANONGA KAIPĀHO**

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**FINDINGS OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY
COLMAR BRUNTON**

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# FOREWORD

In 2008 the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) published *Seen and Heard: Children's Media Use, Exposure and Response*. This was the result of a nationwide, quantitative survey conducted with 604 children aged six to 13 years and one of their primary caregivers. In *Seen and Heard* we asked questions about how children interacted with media and how it affected them. The findings gave us a rich image of what children and their caregivers reported they were doing.

We then asked ourselves this question: did people actually do what they said they did? Some children reported walking away when they saw unsettling content. Did they do this? Some parents said they had rigid rules around television viewing. Were these enforced?

In order to get a clearer picture of actual, rather than reported, behaviour, we decided to observe behaviour in some of the households included in our original study.

This report, *Watching the Watchers*, details the findings of our observational study.

We had not only hoped to get a clearer picture of actual behaviour, we had also hoped to be able to gain a better understanding of the reasoning behind the findings in the original study. For example, children and their caregivers noted that 'violence' or 'sex' in the media concerned them. But did 'violence' mean seeing actual harm or just the threat of harm? Did there need to be blood? Did 'sex' mean kissing, hugging, nudity, something else? Were rules actually enforced?

We chose to focus on television as it remains the central media device in the home. We also chose to focus on the dinnertime to bedtime period as that is when children are potentially most likely to view challenging content.

On the whole the findings in this report appear to back up what we learned in *Seen and Heard*. The report notes areas where there may be divergence between actual and reported behaviour.

What this study has made clear is that the monitoring and control of viewership by children is a complex area, handled in a variety of ways by both parents and the children themselves. It also provides further support to our belief that children are not passive sponges who simply absorb media content, but savvy media users who have their own opinions and reactions to the media they encounter.

The protection of children is a key part of the work we do and so above all, we hope that this report will help continue the discussion around how children use and react to media.

**Broadcasting Standards Authority**

**May 2010**

## Acknowledgements

# The Big Picture – an overview of Watching the Watchers

We present the findings of qualitative research carried out for the Broadcasting Standards Authority from December 2008 to April 2009 with 14 children and their families. The project sought an in-depth understanding of what youngsters watch on TV, and how they understand and react to various content, particularly bad/offensive language, violence, and sexual material/nudity.

The project is part of wider research on New Zealanders' viewing habits. In 2007, Colmar Brunton conducted a quantitative study of programme content, *Seen and Heard: Children's Media Use, Exposure and Response*. This focused on various media – radio, internet, TV and cell phones. The current project constitutes a second stage of the 2007 study. It has focused on:

- how decisions are made about what TV programmes children watch and who makes them;
- what, if any, rules and restrictions apply to children's viewing;
- what content is considered appropriate/acceptable and otherwise;
- how children's evening viewing and bedtimes are influenced by the Adults Only (AO) timeband (i.e. the change to AO programming at 8:30pm).

## Key findings

### TV's place in family life

- TV is an essential part of family life and all children watch it.
- Although some families own several TVs, children and parents mostly watch the main TV, which is in the lounge.
- Parenting styles of participating families were either strict or flexible, each having implications for what children watch and how much.
  - » Children with strict routines watch TV at certain times, supervised by their parents. These families spend time with the TV off, and younger children are supervised more than older.
  - » Children with flexible routines watch TV at any time of day until their bedtime. The TV is on most of the day, although no one may be watching it. Activities in these families revolve around TV, and although parental supervision is minimal, younger children tend to receive more.

### Rules about TV watching

- Families have few viewing rules.
- Children are taught the rules when they are young, and are expected to know and apply them as they grow up.
- Parents trust children and want them to become responsible and self-sufficient.
- Children's maturity determines how parents supervise them and how much guidance they need applying the rules. The more mature the child, the less supervision they need.
- Children are allowed to watch TV during the day – before and after school – because parents are confident that programmes screened then are suitable. Parents supervise children very little at these times.
- Parents want to communicate openly and honestly with their children so they would rather discuss problem situations rather than punish or restrict. Children are expected to ask their parents questions or discuss things with them.
- Parents devise strategies to ensure rules are applied – ensuring the volume is turned up if they are in another room, watching with their children, keeping the remote handy, and glancing at the TV from time to time.

- Children tend to watch what they enjoy and understand. On the whole they appear not to watch inappropriate programmes.

- Parents and children do sometimes watch inappropriate programmes. Reasons for this disjunction between theory and practice are when:

  » viewers have an interest in a particular topic;

  » parents have some knowledge about a programme and assume subsequent episodes are suitable;

  » parents perceive that children need to know about their environment and the world in general;

  » children have no other activities to keep them occupied/are bored.

## Deciding what to watch

- When children are alone, they choose their favourite programmes – mainly children's cartoons and series.

- When children watch with older siblings, the older siblings tend to decide what they all watch, and it's usually aimed at an older audience – series, soaps, movies and game shows.

- Guests may be allowed to make the final decision and choose what everyone watches.

- Families displayed two kinds of decision making.

  » In more collectivist families, the process is autocratic: older siblings take precedence over younger.

  » In more individualistic families, older and younger siblings discuss and negotiate. Older siblings may win, but younger ones get a chance to voice their opinion.

- When parents watch with children, usually the parent will choose, typically something like the evening news and adult-targeted programming. Children may stay and watch, but for the parent, the news is non-negotiable. After that, parents may take children's opinion into account and watch something they all enjoy.

- *Shortland Street* isn't young children's first choice, but they will watch it if older siblings or parents do. Parents say children don't really understand its adult themes but are unconcerned by their children watching such programmes for older audiences.

- Even if children don't like what their siblings or parents watch, most of the time they stay to watch with the rest of the family, and develop a taste for more mature content.

## Inappropriate content

- Perceptions of inappropriate contents are highly subjective. The type of inappropriate content, and the level at which it becomes so, varies between parents and children, and between families.

- Parents and children agree that programmes containing bad/offensive language, violence and/or sexual references are inappropriate.

- Parents are adamant that children shouldn't see this kind of content, but, in fact, both parents and children do watch programmes featuring it.

- Genre blurring confuses perceptions of content and makes it difficult to evaluate. Cartoons are traditionally seen as children's programmes, but *The Simpsons, South Park* and *Family Guy* have adult themes that parents believe are inappropriate for children. The same applies to some children's movies, where the violence is graphic and can upset viewers – *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, for instance, and to programmes with obvious sexual references, which are aimed at various audiences, such as *Shortland Street.*

*Bad language*

- "Bad language" (i.e. unacceptable talk other than swear words, such as demeaning put-downs or sexually euphemistic chat) is thought to be inappropriate content, yet is the most easily tolerated. When such bad language is only intermittent, children watch the programme but know they mustn't imitate it.

- Swear words aren't tolerated at all and, if they can, viewers change the channel before hearing the words.

- Some viewers have difficulty interpreting unacceptable language that doesn't rely on swear words. Children can find it difficult to understand verbal abuse if it's unaccompanied by physical violence or swear words. How much they take from dialogue as opposed to images depends on how mature they are.

*Violence*

- Parents and children think violence is inappropriate, but choose to watch it anyway. Real violence – as featured on the news and in documentaries – tends to have a bigger impact on children because they understand that human beings have suffered from it.

- Contemporary violence upsets children more than historical violence.

- Fictional movie violence impacts on children because some scenes seem to be real rather than acted out, leaving children confused about how authentic it is.

- All children know animated violence isn't real, and downplay its effects.

- Children and parents are more upset by violence directed at people and animals than property.

- Parents disagree on whether witnessed violence or reported violence affects children more. Some parents consider that violence "close to home" – as in a New Zealand programme – has a more profound effect on children than violence in an overseas programme.

*Sexual content and nudity*

- Sexual material is considered inappropriate for children.

- What sexual material children can tolerate depends on their maturity, although overall tolerance of sexual content is low.

  » Young and mid-aged children (aged six to 12) tolerate hand holding, kissing on the cheek, platonic love and dressed people in bed (not touching).

  » Older children (aged 13 and 14) tolerate a quick kiss on the lips and undressed people in bed with the duvet pulled up (not touching).

- Parents find it difficult to assess what's 'suitable' – they don't push children to view content that is beyond them but equally want to avoid puritanism.

## How children react to inappropriate content

- Children tend not to react physically when watching TV – they stare expressionlessly at the screen.

- The level of observable reaction depends on the child's personality – whether they are quiet or extroverted – as well as on their maturity level and how much they've been exposed to inappropriate content.

- When watching something that upsets them or makes them uncomfortable, children look away, hide their face behind their hands or a pillow, change channel, or stare at the screen and become tense. If the programme is really upsetting, children leave the room, switch off the TV, clutch a soft blanket/toy, snuggle up to their parents, suck their thumb and adopt the foetal position.

## How the shift to 8:30pm 'Adults Only' affects children's viewing

- Parents assume programmes shown before 8:30pm are suitable for children, so don't check ratings or classification. They monitor children's pre-8:30pm viewing less.

- Parents assume programmes shown from 8:30pm onwards are unsuitable for children. They make themselves aware of ratings and classification, but don't seek further information.

- In some families with strict routines, the 8:30pm shift in programming determines bedtime, although children may be asked to switch off the TV at 8pm.

- In families with more flexible routines, bedtime is after 8:30pm – usually 9pm or later. Children are allowed to watch TV until they go to bed.

- During weekends and holidays, all children are allowed to stay up later than usual and watch TV with their parents.

- No families in the study recorded TV programmes so they could watch them at other than the original screening time.

## Classifications and warnings

- Parents don't necessarily let classification and/or warnings guide their actions – they make the final decision themselves.

- Some parents would like to see more obvious warnings throughout a programme if its content is inappropriate for children.

- In some families, AO-rated programmes are considered suitable for children, but only under parental supervision.

# 1. ABOUT THE STUDY

## Why the study was done

We set out to explore and understand children's TV watching in the context of their family life. The study focuses on the type and content of programmes they watch, in particular those containing bad/offensive language, sexual material/nudity and/or violence.

The study also focuses on factors influencing viewers' decision making on TV watching, such as their family environment, and viewing rules and restrictions.

## How the study was done

The study involved 14 families from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The child focus of the study was observed over three non-consecutive evenings (from about 5:15pm until 9:15pm, or the child's bedtime, if that was earlier) as he or she watched TV (ethnographic observation). Families were asked not to alter their normal routine during these three evenings. On the fourth evening, the researcher could again observe the child before leading a family discussion (in-depth interviewing).

The entire study covered all seven days of the week, although for most families observation and discussion occurred on four different weekday evenings. It took five months, beginning in December 2008 with a pilot of two families (one in Auckland, the other in Wellington). The main part of the study ran from January to April 2009 with the other 12 families (eight in Auckland, four in Wellington).

We used a range of tools and techniques with each child to help build rapport and encourage discussion between them and the researcher.

Younger children (six to 11) were given a small soft toy as a companion while they watched TV and answered questions (the toy being used as a safe third party for the child to engage with). Older children (12 to 14 years) were given a video camera to make a video diary that would help them discuss their thoughts and feelings.

All 14 children also used an "emotion bear puzzle" with six faces, and 15 "emotion bear cards" during observation evenings. These helped them articulate thoughts and feelings on what they had viewed.

## Who took part

This was a follow-up to a 2007 quantitative study on children and TV (published as *Seen and Heard: Children's Media Use, Exposure and Response*); it was, therefore, imperative that the same children took part. Of the 604 families who participated in the 2007 study, 252 lived in the Auckland and Wellington regions. Two hundred and twenty-eight families from that initial sample had agreed to be contacted for further research. Families were recruited over the course of five months.

Some families selected for the original study could not take part in this one. Firstly, children ideally had to be between six and 13 for the 2009 study, thereby eliminating some who were now too old. Secondly, the 2009 study required that children watch TV every day, including after dinner; this excluded children who did not watch TV. Thirdly, some families did not want to participate because they would have had to commit four evenings to the study. Note that for the purposes of broadcasting standards a child is defined as being up to 13 years old. However, because of the follow-up nature of the study and the constraints on recruitment, two of the children involved were 14 years old.

Appendix I has more detail on methodology; Appendix II has more information on participating children and families.

# Reading this report

Where appropriate, comparisons are made with findings in the 2007 qualitative study (referenced in this report as "the wider survey").

Children's names attached to verbatim comments throughout the report are not real, only gender-appropriate. The ages given are, however, accurate. The same applies to boxed examples: only children's names have been changed, not their age or gender.

The word "lounge", used throughout the report, means the family living area where the main TV is. For some families, this was also the dining room, while for others, these two were separate.

"Young" means children six to nine years old.

"Mid-aged" means 10 to 12; "older" means 13 and 14.

"Afternoon" means the period up to the news/current affairs programmes (5:30pm or 6pm, depending on the channel); "evening" means from the news/current affairs programmes onwards.

"Daytime" TV means from when children wake up until the evening news/current affairs programmes.

# 2. TV WATCHING AND DECISION MAKING

This chapter discusses the place of TV in contemporary New Zealand family life: its importance as an audio-visual medium; its prominence in the lives of children and families; factors and processes influencing programme choice; and the types of programmes children watch.

## TV as essential audio-visual equipment

Some families have a good deal of audio-visual equipment – iPods, game consoles, video cameras, cell phones and video games – while others have very little. All, however, have a TV, even families with very little other audio-visual equipment. Although some households deliberately choose not to own many audio-visual items, TV is considered a basic household appliance. Some parents, for instance, who want their children to socialise face-to-face with friends rather than electronically, are unwilling to own much equipment. Parents like this see TV as a compromise, and consider that without it their children might feel deprived and likely to watch at friends' homes. TV is here to stay: not one family in the study would consider getting rid of theirs.

The extent of other audio-visual equipment owned by households is slightly different from the wider survey findings where the majority of households contained a wide range of media devices. The survey results show that the vast majority contained at least one cell phone (96%), a DVD player (92%), and computer (88%). Three out of every four (75%) contained a digital camera, two-thirds (66%) contained a TV games console, and over half (56%) contained an MP3 player. The reasons for the differences among the families taking part in the 2009 study may be due to the fact that it was a requirement that the children in these families watched TV every night. This may have resulted in a slight skew towards families that were less likely to have alternative media devices available for children to use.

TVs are mainly bought by parents. Although they might consult children about, for instance, colour or size, the final decision is theirs. Some older children bought their own TV with their own money so they could have more freedom and independence in what to watch. These TVs were usually in their bedrooms, and they would sometimes let siblings watch with them.

Generally, the whole family watches the main TV which is in the lounge. This is consistent with the wider survey findings, where 90% of children said that they mainly watched TV in a lounge, living room or family room. When an old TV is replaced, it tends to go to a child's bedroom, although it is hardly ever watched. The old set is usually smaller and less attractive than the new one, and children like watching TV in the lounge with the rest of the family. This is somewhat inconsistent with the wider survey findings however. Despite a preference for watching TV in the lounge, 28% of all children taking part in the wider survey also watched TV in their bedroom. The extent of watching TV in their bedrooms increases depending on the age of the child, with 35% of older children, 27% of mid-aged children and 24% of younger children also watching TV programmes in their bedrooms.

### Natasha and her family's six TVs

Natasha, 10, lives with her parents and six siblings in a house that has six TVs. One is in the lounge, the rest are in the children's and parents' bedrooms. The oldest child is 17, the youngest seven, so they enjoy different programmes. Natasha likes children's shows, while her older brothers watch sports.

Having several TVs means everyone in the family can watch what they want to watch at the scheduled time. This keeps fights – and, potentially, social interaction – to a minimum, although children and parents usually come to the lounge to watch TV together.

## Where TVs are in the house

Single household TVs are usually in the lounge, where the whole family can enjoy watching. Families who own several TVs still have the main one in a prominent place in the lounge. Its central role in family life means it needs to be where everyone can access it, where they can all watch together and share the experience.

The lounge is traditionally the centre of the house and of family life, so this is where families tend to watch, rather than in the isolation of their bedrooms. Together in the lounge, families can talk and socialise, sometimes making TV watching a peripheral activity, and meaning family life doesn't revolve around it.

Younger children are more likely than teenagers to watch TV in the lounge, enjoying the comfort of their parents nearby. They also need more parental supervision than older children. There is some consistency between this finding and the wider survey findings in that, as already mentioned, the older the child, the more likely they were to also watch TV in their bedroom.

Secondary TVs are usually in the children's bedrooms and sometimes in the parents', but these are old, spare sets that have been replaced by the larger, more modern one now in the lounge. Secondary TVs are less likely to be watched as children tend to play in their bedrooms rather than watch TV there.

However, and again as already mentioned, despite this need for more parental supervision and enjoying the comfort of their parents nearby, around one-quarter of mid-aged (27%) and younger (24%) children in the wider survey claimed to be watching TV in their bedrooms, potentially alone or with a sibling or friend. This raises some issues regarding the impact of observation on behaviour, with both the parents and children. Note that in the wider survey, one in five children also said that they mostly watch TV or recorded TV programmes alone.

## How TV fits into family life

TV serves a variety of family purposes: as an education tool (e.g. documentaries and current affairs programmes), and as fun and entertainment (e.g. game shows and movies). A majority of children (73%) taking part in the wider survey said that they like watching TV for entertainment, while a lesser (51%) said that they watch it for education purposes. Mid-age children were more likely than younger or older children to identify education as a reason for watching TV, and younger children were significantly less likely to watch TV for education purposes (35%).

Regardless of their age, young children are mesmerised by moving pictures, even though they don't understand what's going on; older children can focus for an entire programme. Sometimes TV is used as a children's baby-sitter. TV is convenient because it occupies them. This is especially so for busy parents who work full-time outside the home and also have housework to do. This appears to support the findings in the wider survey where one in five children said that they watched TV or recorded TV programmes alone.

TV allows viewers to retreat into themselves when they don't want to interact with others, even when surrounded by family members. When a viewer is genuinely watching, they concentrate on the screen, thereby decreasing any emotional connection to others in the room.

### Baby-sitting Amy

Amy, 6, enjoys interacting with her family. At home after school, she likes her siblings and parents around. But her older sisters usually have homework or sport, her mum is busy with housework and her father is still at work.

Amy can get restless without anyone to listen to her and play with her. When she needs more attention than anyone can give her, she gets loud and irritates people, until they put her in front of cartoons or children's programmes. Then she calms down and watches.

### Educating Brooke

Brooke, 9, and her family came to New Zealand a few years ago. To find out about local culture and lifestyle, Brooke's mum watched New Zealand-made TV programmes. Brooke did the same and has learned a lot from watching *Shortland Street*.

Sometimes Brooke's mum has to ask her what the characters are saying, because she doesn't understand their accent. Brooke explains in English or, sometimes, in her mother tongue.

# TV viewing in everyday life

## Children's daily routines

Some parents strictly regulate children's daily routines, including their TV viewing. They let them watch only at certain times for a certain duration. Their children may, for example, be allowed to watch after school when children's programmes are on. They then have to switch the TV off to do their homework. When they are finished they can either watch more TV or go outside and play with friends until dinner. In some households, the TV is switched off during dinner and switched back on again afterwards so the family can watch together before the children go to bed.

This is consistent with the findings of the wider survey in that two-thirds (66%) of parents say that they restrict TV watching at certain times of the day or the amount of time their child spends watching TV. The main types of restrictions were to do with restricting the number of hours (39%) and not allowing children to watch TV after a certain time (28%). Fifteen percent restricted TV watching until after homework had been completed.

In other families, children follow a more flexible routine, which is less regulated by parents and more by children themselves. In these families, for example, children may watch TV in the morning before school; then, after school, they are allowed to watch before doing their homework as "chill out time". They may be allowed to watch while doing their homework, if they want to. The TV may not be switched off during dinner and the whole family may eat in front of it.

The wider survey results identified that the majority of children do other things while watching TV. Talking with others was the most common activity mentioned by children (between 55% and 68% depending on age). One in five children (21%) who watch TV on a school day afternoon does their homework at the same time, and nearly half (47%) of all New Zealand 6-13 year-olds watch TV while eating dinner.

### Molly's evening viewing

Molly, 14, and the older sister who looks after her often watch TV together because they like the same programmes. The sisters are well versed in what's on every night and plan their evening accordingly. They try to have dinner before *Shortland Street* starts. This means dinner is prepared in the late afternoon so they can all eat and the two younger children are bathed and put to bed before the programme begins.

## Strict and flexible routines

Children's bedtimes depend on whether they follow a strict or flexible routine.

In households where parents strictly regulate their children's viewing, bedtime also tends to be regulated. These children go to bed at a specific time on weekdays and weekends. Weekdays, children aged six to nine go to bed between 8pm and 9pm, while older children go to bed from 9pm onwards.

Parents who less strictly regulate both bedtimes and viewing explain that their children theoretically go to bed at a specific time but that their actual bedtime varies, if, for instance, they are watching something interesting and keep watching until the end.

The day of the week affects children's bedtimes, whether they follow a strict or a flexible routine and whether they are younger or older. All the children go to bed earlier during weekdays in term time (because of school the next day) than in the weekend and holidays (they can usually sleep longer the next day, unless they have sports activities). This is consistent with the wider survey findings in that children tend to stay up later on a Friday or Saturday night. Regardless of whether they are actively watching or passively exposed to TV, 98% of 12-13 year-olds, 93% of 9-11 year-olds and 67% of 6-8 year-olds are still up on a Friday night after the 8.30pm change to AO programming.

We observed to varying degrees these two routines – strict and flexible – in all families taking part in the study. Neither is strongly related to children's ages, but rather to how parents want to bring up their children, the values they want to teach them, and the children's maturity level.

Some parents emphasise autonomy, freedom of choice and self-sufficiency more than others, although both types have the best interests of their children at heart. Relatively young children, though, whether they follow a strict or flexible routine, are more highly supervised by their parents and older siblings than older children, meaning younger children's daily routines are more structured.

## Tayla's strict routine

Tayla, 11, likes reading, practising the piano and playing outside with her siblings. Her parents have had stringent rules about TV from the time the children were very young, and have taught them that only children's programmes are suitable viewing. The children know this and are careful what they watch.

The household routine is firmly defined, and dinner and bedtime routines don't vary. The children get ready for bed at 8pm every night without question, and are all in bed by 8.30pm.

TV rules are similar, and the children know them. When, for example, they're called for dinner, all three sit down at the dining room table. The TV is turned off, and not turned on again until after dinner.

## Ana's flexible routine

Ana, 12, is an independent girl. Her parents are busy with jobs and church commitments and not home much. If she wakes up early enough, Ana watches TV before school. If not, she watches programmes later in the afternoon. She switches on as soon as she gets in from school, sitting in the most comfortable chair and keeping the remote handy.

She watches her favourite programmes on SKY. Whenever she's hungry, she gets snack food from the kitchen (her family doesn't eat an evening meal). When her mum comes in from work, they both watch TV until Ana goes to bed.

Sometimes Ana watches a whole movie before bed, but at other times she is bored or tired and goes to bed before the end. Some evenings she forgets to do her homework and has to do it before she falls asleep.

## TV and activities away from home

Once or twice a week, most boys and girls of all ages are busy after school or in the evening, mostly with sports activities, and especially team sports like netball, cricket, soccer and rugby. They may also have competitions and matches in the weekend. Very few children participate in these activities more than three evenings a week. The extent of their involvement depends less on their age than on what activities are available in their neighbourhood or school. Parents encourage and support children in being active, and when they are, they don't watch much TV. Children who don't play sport tend to meet neighbourhood friends and play outside or in each other's gardens.

A few children from different families, young and old, said they watch TV if they have nothing else planned. Indeed, when children are home because they can't play sport or be with their friends, they tend to spend a lot of time watching TV – even if they don't like what's on. This is generally supported by the wider survey findings in that 21% of children claim to watch TV for something to do or to reduce boredom. The extent of TV watching for something to do or to reduce boredom increases with the age of the child, from 10% of younger children to 21% and 34% of mid-aged and older children respectively.

For children who, for instance, live in unsafe neighbourhoods or whose parents can't afford enrolment fees for extra-curricular activities, watching after-school TV is more than the fall-back option, it is the main activity.

## Carlos plays sport after school

Like his older sister, Carlos is a black belt in karate. He practises regularly and competes. He trains in the evenings, after school and during the weekend. When he comes home from school or training, he has to do his homework for the next day.

Because of all his activities, his bedtime is flexible. Still, Carlos manages to watch TV whenever he has a chance – from children's programmes to soaps, series and game shows. As he often goes to bed late, he can watch the start of some movies, including – although unintentionally – those rated AO.

Regardless of the flexibility or otherwise of bedtime routines, however, the wider survey found that 24% of younger, 68% of mid-aged and 92% of older children are still up at the 8.30pm watershed on a weekday night (Sunday to Thursday). At 9.00pm, 8% of younger, 26% of mid-aged and 55% of older children are still up and may be exposed to AO programmes in the same way that Carlos is.

## TV as a constant presence

In most households, TV is switched on when somebody comes home and switched off when the last person goes to bed. Between times, it is constantly on, even though no one may actually be watching it. It's a constant background presence.

Children talk with their parents and play with their friends or siblings. If this is impossible, TV watching is always an option. TV becomes a substitute activity for family members, especially children who have less housework to do than parents. Because the TV is on most or all of the time, children have a lot of flexibility about what they can watch. In this situation, both younger and older children tend to be less selective in their choice of programme and watch indiscriminately.

Young children are likely to watch more TV than older children because they don't have as much homework to do (if any). Young children are relatively free to watch a lot of TV between coming home and bedtime, so it is an important aspect of their lives. In some cases – near the end of the academic year, say, or in the holidays – older children don't have much homework, so they have more free time and can watch more TV.

## Cameron enjoys *The Simpsons* but not the news

Cameron, 9, loves the outdoors, but when he's inside he likes watching TV, especially his favourite programmes – *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Simpsons* and *Futurama*. He watches with his siblings. He likes these shows because they're funny, entertaining and educational, and he understands their humour. When he watches *The Simpsons*, though, his expression is relaxed and he doesn't react to the humour, neither laughing nor smiling.

Sometimes, Cameron watches the news with his parents, but he doesn't enjoy it because some stories are disturbing – when there's a murder or a fight, or even when the news reader only refers to such stories. Cameron doesn't pay attention to these.

His parents try to have their children stick to a daily routine, and they provide a stable environment. They are present in their children's lives and to some extent influence how the children watch TV.

Cameron watches after school, then before and after dinner. The TV is switched off at other times, such as when he does his homework. He always goes to bed at a fixed time, although an hour later at the weekend (8:30pm). He watches some programmes on his own in the evenings while his parents get the younger children ready for bed. When that's done, they join Cameron in the lounge and watch together for about an hour until his bedtime.

# Deciding what to watch

Factors influencing how families decide what to watch include who's watching, who has the remote control, what people are interested in and whether they have anything else interesting to do, and what time of the day and week it is.

## Who's watching

The types of programmes children watch depend strongly on other potential viewers. Children watching alone, regardless of their age, choose a programme they like (unless one is unavailable). Parents usually supervise this choice from a distance to ensure it's appropriate (for more on what's appropriate, see What makes content child-appropriate).

Children watch their chosen programme attentively from beginning to end, or may intermittently change channel if, for instance, they are bored or there are too many commercial breaks. They are free to do whatever they want (so long as the parents approve) because they are watching alone.

### Ana chooses what to watch

Ana, 12, watches *Hannah Montana* and *H2O Just Add Water* nearly every afternoon after school. She loves them and watches new or repeat episodes with the same interest. Both programmes feature harmless adventures that are happily resolved by the end of the episode.

Ana sits comfortably in her armchair right in front of the screen. She half-watches while texting her friends. Sometime she's more focused on her mobile than on the TV. But she doesn't miss the stories' key points and watches attentively when the main characters try to solve their problems. Her face is usually expressionless.

When children watch with their siblings, several things can happen. Age is a key factor in deciding who's in charge of the TV. If children are joined by younger siblings, they stay in control of the remote and in charge of what everyone watches. The younger siblings can either stay and watch or go away.

If children are joined by older siblings, they usually have to relinquish the remote, and the older ones take charge of what they watch. Sometimes, this doesn't go smoothly and children argue with their older siblings about what they all watch. If no compromise is reached, parents may intervene to stop the argument (and may also decide to switch off the TV). This tends to happen more in families with an individualistic ethos, such as Pakeha families. In other cases, children automatically back down when older siblings come into the lounge to watch, and hand over the remote.

### Natasha loses the remote and leaves the room

Natasha, 10 is in the lounge watching a cartoon. She's very active: climbing on chairs, playing on the carpet, interacting with her siblings and walking up and down. Her older brother comes into the lounge to watch sport – he loves rugby. He takes the remote and changes channel.

Natasha doesn't like watching sport. She can't say anything to her brother because he's much older and she's been watching TV for a while so now it's his turn. She goes to her bedroom and watches her programme on the TV there.

### Ana loses the remote but stays put

Ana, 12, watches a lot of TV every day and keeps the remote nearby. When her older siblings come into the lounge and take the remote, she doesn't try to get it back or change channel by going to the set. She keeps quiet, but looks bored.

She stays in the lounge and keeps watching, even if what's on doesn't interest her. When her siblings leave the room, she takes the remote and changes back to Disney Channel.

### Justin negotiates with his brothers about what to watch

Justin, 12, is the youngest of three boys. When his brothers visit, they spend time together in the lounge watching TV or DVDs. Justin has learned that his opinion counts and, when it comes to watching a movie, he says what he wants. His older brothers don't always agree but they usually back down. They don't want their younger brother to get upset or have nightmares. Tonight they're going to watch *The Incredible Hulk* together. Justin cuddles up to his mum and watches with great interest.

When parents watch TV with children, they are usually in charge and decide, for several reasons, what to watch. They tend not to see as much TV as their children, and when they do, it is their turn to watch what they like. Children mainly watch during the day, and adult programmes (news, sports and weather forecasts) screen mainly in the evening, so there's unlikely to be a clash of interests. Finally, of course, parents are parents, and get the last word on the matter. Outside their usual viewing hours, though, parents give in to children, letting them decide, for instance, what weekend movie to watch.

### Brooke's parents choose what to watch

Brooke, 9, watches *Hannah Montana* until dinner time. Then her father takes the remote and changes from SKY to TV3 to watch the news. Brooke says nothing and comes to the dinner table with the rest of the family. When she was watching her programme, she was focused, although her face was inert. As soon as her father puts the news on, she loses interest in TV and eats with barely a glance at it. She would rather talk to her mum while eating, though trying not to disturb her father's focus on the news.

### Ana's parents listen to what she wants

Ana, 12, and her mum like watching TV together in the evening. Her father works long shifts and isn't often home in the evenings. Ana knows that tonight she can't watch the entire movie because there is school tomorrow, but she asks her mum if she can watch *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.*

Her mum agrees and they watch, sitting comfortably next to each other. Ana is intent on the action scenes, where Harry and his team play quidditch.

"We [parents] make a point, we always win." (Brooke's mum on who has the last word on programme choice)

"I call the shots ... and [name of husband]." (Amy's mum on how their children must obey if they choose a programme their parents don't want them to watch)

"You're still a child, we know what's good for you." (Brooke's mum explaining her authority to decide what programme is suitable for Brooke, 9, to watch)

## Who has the remote

Channels can be changed on the TV set itself, but most viewers don't do it that way. They almost always use the remote, whether it's on a chair or the coffee table, or on another viewer's lap. The effort of going to the set is probably not worth it since the viewer with the remote can so easily switch back again. If, for instance, two siblings are watching together and the younger has the remote, he or she can decide what they watch. But the younger sibling has to strike a balance between what he or she likes and what the older sibling likes, otherwise the older sibling may get irritated, grab the remote and change to a programme for older audiences.

Usually, younger siblings don't keep the remote for long, unless the older sibling enjoys the programme too. The older sibling may exercise their power by changing channel without asking the younger and despite the younger's protestations. If they argue, parents may intervene and take sides. Mostly, siblings manage to compromise and agree, and parents don't have to step in.

### Henry watches TV with his older sister

Henry, 12, says when he changes channel, he settles for the programme he likes most, even though he may not really enjoy it – he'll watch anything. He likes a variety of programmes, even though he doesn't always understand the storylines.

Tonight, he's playing a card game with his family and everyone is settled around the table in the lounge. Henry has his back to the TV so he can't watch, but he can listen. When his older sister grabs the remote and changes channel to watch *Shortland Street*, he doesn't complain. He watches parts of the soap when his mum or sister turns to watch it first.

His mum asks him why one of the female characters is bald. He watches the screen without a change of expression, and says, "It's because she has cancer." Then he goes back the card game without taking any more interest.

Henry's older sister also refocuses on the game, but is still paying attention to the programme and watching whenever there's a new twist. Henry loses interest in the programme altogether because he seems to be winning at cards.

"Whoever has the remote ...." (Ana's older sister explains who chooses the programme)

"Just being the boss of the remote .... Telling them 'We are not watching this, because it's crap'." (Jasmine's mum talking about *Two and a Half Men*)

## What people are interested in and whether they have anything else interesting to do

If someone wants to watch something in particular, they take precedence over other viewers, especially if the family doesn't own a VCR or PVR. There tends to be no conflict of interest between younger children and older siblings or parents because their programmes are generally screened during the day, whereas programmes preferred by teenagers and parents usually screen in the evenings.

Viewing choice is also influenced by boredom. Sometimes, children (young and old alike) don't especially want to watch TV, but don't know what else to do – if their friends are away, for instance, or if they can't go outside because it's raining. Becoming impatient, irritated and fidgety, they flick through the channels in the hope of an exciting programme, but without wanting to settle on anything in particular. As already mentioned, this is consistent with the wider survey findings, where 21% of children across the three age segments say that they watch TV for something to do or to reduce boredom. The extent of this as a reason for watching TV increases with the age of the child.

This situation is aggravated by numerous disruptive commercial breaks. Children try to avoid breaks by flicking through the channels again. This is particularly so with younger children, who have a shorter attention span than older children. Children may end up watching several programmes across different channels ("channel surfing"). When children don't know what's on, they may channel surf for several minutes to find out, then settle on a programme that may or may not be what they like. If nothing enjoyable is on, they still keep watching, flicking through the channels until they find something they like.

### Brooke enjoys kids' shows but not *Shortland Street*

Brooke, 9, watches her favourites – *Hannah Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* – on SKY when she comes home from school. She likes these because they're funny, the stories are easy to follow, the characters' adventures are out of the ordinary and the costumes are colourful, fun and trendy.

She is quiet and reserved, and when she watches something funny, she smiles. She watches children's programmes intently. Her eyes follow the onscreen action.

After dinner, Brooke usually stays in the lounge with her parents to watch soaps and series, including *Shortland Street*. She admits she doesn't always understand the plot or like the characters, and when that happens she looks sullen: her eyes lose the sparkle they had when she was watching children's programmes.

When she gets too bored by the soaps, she draws or reads her book, but she stays in the lounge because she likes being with her parents.

### Brooke enjoys the wrestling

Brooke and her brother go to bed at 8:30pm during the week, except that sometimes on Wednesdays they're allowed to watch *Criss Angel Mindfreak* until 9pm. Brooke is only mildly interested because there's no spectacular magic, and leaves the room to brush her teeth.

Both children are allowed up until 10:30pm on Fridays to watch wrestling because they don't have school next day and their father likes watching it too. Brooke enjoys the wrestling, especially when women compete. She knows the wrestlers fake it, but likes watching how they fight.

She always asks before switching on the TV or computer. Her parents trust her and the programmes she chooses so they don't watch her all the time. They're more careful with the news, though, keeping the remote handy in case they need to change channel.

## What time of the day and week it is

Because programmes for younger to mid-aged children screen during the day, they are relatively free to choose a programme on their own. Parents or older siblings supervise their choice but tend not to interfere or impose another. Later in the day, children may have some input, but deciding what to watch is usually the prerogative of an adult or older sibling. In the evening, children also have to get ready for bed and know they won't be able to watch an entire programme. Being tired and bound for bed doesn't put them in a strong position to argue with parents or siblings about what to watch in the evenings.

# Types of programmes children watch

## How TV fits into children's lives

Daily activities such as school and what they do after it limit what children can watch – they're unlikely to watch lunchtime talk shows, for instance. During the week, families tend to watch programmes as they screen rather than recording them and watching later. In the weekends and school holidays, children can watch a lot more TV, and therefore a wider variety of programmes. Several families put more effort into choosing what to watch as a family at weekends: they rent DVDs.

Some families subscribe to SKY, which gives them and their children a broader choice (although note that only 1% of children in the wider study said they watch pay TV in their bedrooms). Children who only watch free-to-air TV have to choose from a more restricted range, and sometimes select a programme by default rather than one they actually like.

## Children watching TV alone

When young children watch TV by themselves, whether or not they have SKY, they choose programmes created for a young target audience. If they don't know how to use the remote, they ask a parent or a sibling to find a channel with cartoons or a children's series. These young children can watch the same programme repeatedly. They enjoy repeating key dialogue as it comes on, and sing along the jingles with the same excitement and interest.

> ### Amy is bored by her sisters' programmes
>
> Given the age gap between Amy, 6, and her older sisters (14 and 15), she likes different programmes. She watches a lot of cartoons and children's programmes. But when her sisters' programmes come on – *Home and Away, Shortland Street, American Idol* and *Desperate Housewives* – she watches these too.
> She has a short attention span and is easily bored by what her sisters watch, which she doesn't understand. But she watches the commercial breaks with interest, as they're short and she's captivated by the story and music. She can, for example, retell the story of a "drink-drive" advertisement quite accurately. Her bedtime is flexible, whether she has school the next day or not.

Young children like variety – different characters and distinct storylines, and fun – pranks in cartoons and humour. Some like cartoons – *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Simpsons*, *Drake and Josh*, *Jimmy Neutron* – because of the look of the characters and the funny stories, whereas others find cartoons too childish and prefer children's series – *Zoey 101, Hannah Montana, H2O Just Add Water* and *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*.

Children concentrate on what they watch, especially if the segments are brief. Sometimes they watch intermittently while doing something else, like drawing, or homework or chatting to family members. If what they like isn't on, they keep watching programmes not designed for young children – *Home and Away* and *Shortland Street* – even if they don't understand them. Their attention level drops, though.

Mid-age to older children are more ambivalent about cartoons and prefer children's series. If these are unavailable, they watch other programmes, such as a series for more mature audiences – *Home and Away*. Some children like documentaries on the natural world and natural disasters, such as *Man vs Wild*, as well as historical documentaries. Others like talk shows, reality shows, police series and soaps – *Police Ten 7, Top Chef, Project Runway, Shortland Street*.

How long children watch depends mainly on what else they have to do, such as homework and sports, but also on how much pent-up energy they have after a school day. Many children can't sit still through an entire programme – they move about the lounge, come back to the TV to change channel, watch for a few minutes, go out to the garden and come back into the lounge.

### Jasmine watching reality TV

Jasmine, 14, likes reality shows, such as *Neighbours at War*. In one, neighbours argue about noise. One of the people accused of being too noisy takes the camera crew for a ride to show off his loud car. A disgruntled neighbour yells, "F*** you, Noddy!" (beeped out). Jasmine doesn't respond to the aggression, but her older brother chuckles.

In the wider survey, 37% of all 12-13 year-olds felt it was inappropriate for them to hear swearing or bad language. However, those children that have previously been bothered or upset by bad language on TV were more likely than others to say that bad language is inappropriate (81% compared to 41% of all 9-13 year-olds).

### Ana enjoys *Supernanny*

Ana's mum explains that Ana, 12, enjoys *Supernanny* because she adores children. Ana wants to have children when she gets married and thinks the series, which helps people be better parents, is very useful.

Her mum says Ana got really upset when a father slapped his child in one episode because the child was disobedient. Her mum had to comfort her because she was shocked that an adult could hit his own child. But apart from that episode, Ana enjoys the series.

"[We watch TV when] there is nothing else to do." (Ana's older sister)

"No, I don't watch everything, I watch anything, anything." (Henry, 12)

## Children watching TV with their siblings

Most of the children studied have older siblings, and when they watch TV with them, they tend to watch what the older children watch. The oldest in the family, though, can be the decision-maker and watch what they like. Children who aren't a lot younger than their siblings tend to like, or are "learning to like", the same programmes. So children's tastes evolve.

### Natasha's older brothers and sisters take over the TV

Natasha, 10, is third youngest in the family, and usually watches TV in the lounge with her five siblings and parents. Given such a large family, there's always somebody to watch with her. Natasha likes that because she can interact with them.

At 7pm, though, one of her older brothers comes into the lounge to watch sport. Natasha doesn't like watching rugby. She is much younger than her brother so she lets him decide what to watch without arguing. She goes to her bedroom to watch something else on her own TV.

With six sets in the house, the family can watch different programmes at the same time, although being in the lounge with everyone else is nicer. As Natasha has watched TV during the day, it's only fair that others can watch what they want on the lounge TV.

## Children watching TV with their parents

Children watching with their parents tend not to argue about what to watch – they know their parents have the final say in the evenings. From the news onwards, "it's parents' time". Parents don't push children to watch TV now, although they're encouraged to take an interest in world and domestic news.

Children eating dinner while the news is on can't get away from it and tend to lend an idle ear. Most of them, though, focus on their food. After dinner, most parents watch something they know their children appreciate. Parents like watching movies and series, as well as game shows and reality shows, such as *Wipeout Australia*, *American Idol* and *The Incredible Hulk*.

> **"If mum is at home then we can't fight [about choosing a programme]. Then mum watches what she wants to watch."** (Carlos, 10)

# 3. TV RULES AND RESTRICTIONS

This chapter outlines the few rules parents make about watching TV, factors influencing rule setting, and parents' rationale in setting them.

## Common rules

The 14 families have few rules on TV and those they have tend to be similar. Since parents tend to deal with TV viewing case-by-case, these rules are applied flexibly.

> **"[Our parents are] pretty cruisy about what we watch."** (Justin's older brother)

> **"Shortland Street is not so good for her [but she watches it]."** (Brooke's mum; Brooke is 9)

> **"I like [Shortland Street] a little bit .... I don't know, I just watch it, because mum is watching it .... I start liking it."** (Brooke, 9)

Children's parents or caregivers make the rules, although occasionally older siblings looking after young ones do too. These older siblings aren't in an easy position because, although they're officially in charge, they are also just a brother or sister. Youngsters are usually aware of older children's delicate position and tend to challenge their rules more than they do their parents'.

Rules common to the 14 families are:

- TV watching is allowed before school: what's on most channels is children's programmes – cartoons and series, which, according to parents, are what the children choose.

- TV watching is allowed if homework is finished: children may watch after school until bedtime so long as they've made enough time during the afternoon/evening to do their homework. In some households, TV is switched off while they do it, but in most cases, it stays on, so the child can hear and/or see it while they work. In the wider survey, 15% of children were not allowed to watch TV until after their homework had been done, while one in five children who do their homework on a school day afternoon watches TV at the same time.

- TV watching is allowed during dinner: in families where the TV is always on, children can eat in front of it with their parents. In families with a stricter routine, TV tends to be switched off while they eat together and switched on again later so children can watch before bed.

- TV watching is allowed if parents think the programme is suitable: programmes must be appropriate to age and conform to certain criteria, such as being free of excessive bad/offensive language, violence and/or sexual material/nudity. These criteria are subjective and vary between families. Families don't always implement their own rules here: practice differs from theory. Most parents, for instance, said they didn't want their children watching violence and sexual material, but actually watched programmes containing low levels of these with their children. For a more detailed discussion of what is meant by bad/offensive language, violence and sexual material/nudity, see What Makes Content Inappropriate.

- TV watching is allowed if parents think a programme is in some way educational: this education may be in the form of valuable knowledge or a life lesson, even in a programme they may initially have thought inappropriate. So Henry, 12, watches *Gridiron Gang*, and Brooke, 9, watches *America's Most Shocking Videos*.

> **"Their TV, their house, their rules."** (Justin's older brother summarising the family rules)

> **"My rule is respect, and then everything falls around that .... My children sometimes don't understand that I'm the parent and they're the children and that I make the rules. They can make rules as well, but everybody has to abide by them. There is no give or take, it's not like that."** (Henry's mum)

# Rules vs freedom

Parents tend to trust their children's choice of programme, so feel they don't need to set many rules on what children can and can't watch. They give children freedom to select what they want, but supervise from a distance. Parents may come into the lounge and glance at the screen from time to time, or leave the kitchen door open so they can hear what the children are watching. This is somewhat inconsistent with the wider survey in that only 18% of parents say that they actually do check on what their child is watching.

Parents also know that time of day shapes programme content, with cartoons and children's series on after school until the news/current affairs at 5:30pm or 6pm, so they are not too concerned what children watch then. Restrictions identified in the wider survey were more likely to be around the number of hours watched and the time of day (67%) than around a need for adult supervision during TV watching (31%).

Children know the rules and apply them. They learn from parental guidance and their own experience which programmes are fine to watch and which are not.

Generally, parents are flexible and don't want to set many rules: they tend to decide case by case, particularly if confronted with a new programme.

## Gemma's parents trust her to choose the right programmes

Gemma, 11, is the oldest of three. She takes seriously a degree of responsibility for the ten and the almost-one year old. She enjoys looking after them and making sure they're fine. When she watches TV, she chooses a programme she likes – usually a children's one – but checks that her siblings like it too.
Sometimes, her parents ask from the kitchen what she's watching, but they don't bother coming into the lounge. They keep an eye on all three children, but trust Gemma is mature and will find something appropriate for herself and the other two.
Sometimes her father comes to watch with them. When watching a children's programme with her siblings, Gemma is more active than when she's by herself, talking to them rather than keeping quiet.

# What influences rule setting and application

Factors influencing parental rules on TV watching are:

- their children's age and maturity;
- parents' cultural and/or religious background;
- parents' own experiences of TV;
- children's personal circumstances and the wider family situation.

In the wider survey, 63% of parents identified "culture" as an influence on their rules about children's wider media behaviour, followed by their own experience (31%) and their religious or spiritual beliefs (30%). There was no specific mention of their child's age and maturity or their child's personal circumstances and the wider family situation (although this may be encapsulated under "parents' own experiences of TV").

## Children's age and maturity

Parents consider a child's age an important factor in setting TV rules, believing younger children need more guidance and direction. Parents teach young children the few rules they have drawn up, and from then on trust children to apply them, which they do more or less successfully.

As children mature, they need less reinforcement because they've internalised the rules and know the consequences of breaking them. Children eventually become self-regulating, able to decide what they like and what's appropriate for them to watch. Also, parents trust children to understand, respect and apply rules.

Parents are available to explain, guide, comfort and reassure, if need be, but have high expectations of their children in the first instance.

Younger children try to emulate older siblings, who are considered role models, particularly when there is a wide age gap. Being so much more mature, these older siblings guide and direct the younger ones.

> **"[We] don't set down the rules but we just caught onto them when we were little."**
> (Carlos, 10, explaining how the rules became second nature)

> **"Because it starts from the beginning. [Molly, 14,] knows programmes that have bad language, nudity and sex and stuff, she knows that she should not watch those programmes [e.g. *Family Guy* and *Go Girls*]. So, she knows not to watch those programmes."** (Molly's caregiver)

> **"What we put into them [i.e. positive values, attitude and good manners], we expect them to give back and do well."** (Amy's mum)

> **"We are giving them the freedom to choose [the programme they want to watch]."** (Brooke's mum)

## Parents' cultural and/or religious background

Families from more collectivist cultures don't approach TV decision making exactly the same way as families from more individualistic societies. In the former, some viewers' opinions take precedence over others', according to gender, age and status in the family. In some collectivist families, for instance, younger viewers tend to give up the remote when older siblings come into the lounge to watch TV, while in some individualistic families, younger viewers don't automatically back down and are more likely to argue with older siblings.

In the wider survey, parents of Māori children who watch TV were more likely than the average to say that they have no rules (27% compared to 16% of all parents with a TV) and were less likely to restrict TV watching by programme content or to maintain close supervision or control over their child's TV watching. Parents of Pacific children who watch TV were less likely than the average to say that they maintain close supervision or control over their child's TV watching.

A religious background may mean certain areas, such as sex and intimacy, are avoided, and certain programmes considered unsuitable for children. In some religious families, programmes featuring these elements are shocking and watching them is forbidden, while in other religious families, such programmes are not approved of but tolerated.

### Kevin and culture clash

Kevin, 13, and his parents moved to New Zealand about seven years ago to give the children educational opportunities. Kevin's dad explains that some TV programme content clashes with his family value system – his own culture makes discussion of sexual matters inappropriate, whereas in New Zealand, sexual material appears in many contexts, including TV.

According to his dad, Kevin's TV exposure to sexual material contravenes his values. Dad cites *Shortland Street*'s homosexual characters and the recurring bedroom scenes on *Family Guy*, as well as a range of other sexual innuendos in other programmes. He tries to resolve his dilemma by saying his family is in New Zealand now and should adapt, especially the children, who should be "like any other Kiwi kids".

## Parents' experiences and perceptions

Parents make rules on the basis of their own experiences of TV, and their knowledge and understanding of programmes. Thirty-one percent of parents in the wider survey identified this as a key influence on decisions about their children's wider media behaviour. They take facts gleaned this way for granted, and don't feel the need to frequently reassess them. So rules tend to be set once, and occasionally checked.

> "I always say 'I don't like this, there is lots of violence' and then they [children] will say something like 'Oh we saw it over at Auntie's house', and so they always try and play it down with me and I am like 'Well, I don't care because I don't like it so you are not going to watch it'." (Michael's mum talking about war, kung fu and gangster movies)

> "I think *Shortland Street* is borderline. Lesbians, gangs, drug parties .... It's happening in society, but still, it's borderline. I think it should be on later or they should tone it down .... You don't need to see two people in bed naked talking. You could still have your clothes on ...." (Tayla's mum)

Parents will adjust rules in the light of new experience and/or knowledge. This study, for instance, raised some parents' awareness of what their children were watching. They discovered some children's cartoons were quite violent, prompting a rethink about whether these were appropriate. Nevertheless, parents also trust their children, expecting them to make the right decision in the first place, and discuss any concerns prompted by what the children see.

Parents raise their children to become self-sufficient and independent, and this is a way for children to achieve these goals. Most children who took part in this project are self-regulating about TV viewing, taking action, for example, if they see something they don't like or that makes them feel uncomfortable, by changing channel or leaving the room. This appears supported by the wider survey results in that the majority of children say that they will exit an uncomfortable or challenging viewing situation. Forty-three percent of all 9-13 year-olds say they will change the channel, 33% will turn the TV off and 16% will leave the room. Approximately one in seven will tell an adult. However, the child's behaviour under such circumstances can also be impacted on by such things as the length of the segment and whether or not inappropriate content is anticipated or not.

## Children's personal and family circumstances

Rules dependent on personal and family circumstances are usually occasional and/or temporary, although they may apply for a long time. In some families, TV is used as a compensation, if, for instance, a planned sports activity is cancelled or a child is sick.

Changing family circumstances also affect the rules. When parents get busier, rules are relaxed and children are allowed to watch more TV. Guests may be given the opportunity to decide what programmes the family watches.

### Gemma, 11, lets her aunty watch *Shortland Street*

Gemma's aunt recently came to live with the family, and now shares its daily routine and helps with housework. Gemma likes her aunt and is happy to have her around. Aunty feels comfortable with her new family, and watches the programmes she likes.

At 7pm, she automatically switches on TV or changes to TV2 to watch *Shortland Street*. She wouldn't dream of missing an episode! *Shortland Street* coincides with dinner time, but the TV stays on while they all eat.

Gemma's aunty knows the plot and loves the suspense. Gemma is more interested in her dinner than *Shortland Street* – sometimes she watches but doesn't pay much attention to what's happening. It's not her first choice, but because her aunty likes it so much, Gemma is fine with it.

# Making sure rules are obeyed

Parents devise various strategies to ensure children obey the rules.

Children mainly watch TV in the lounge rather than their bedrooms, if there is a set there. The lounge is generally the whole family's favourite viewing place because they like interacting. Parents are nearby when doing housework, such as getting dinner and setting the table. Because the kitchen is next to the lounge, they can eavesdrop on what children are watching, or glance at the screen from time to time. Note however, as already mentioned, the wider survey results indicate that approximately one-quarter to one-third of children also watch TV in their bedroom and/or in the bedroom of a sibling, presumably without parental supervision.

The TV volume is turned up so parents can hear from the next room what the programme is about. In some families, this also lets parents follow a programme they like while getting dinner or doing housework.

Parents watch TV with their children, usually later in the evening when they can supervise potentially riskier content. This is also the time for parents and children to connect, to talk about school and friends, say, and then TV takes second place. Parents keep the remote control handy, so they can change channel or switch off if a programme is unsuitable for children.

Children go to bed at a fixed time set by parents, although this may vary according to whether it's a school day or weekend. Bedtime depends on how much sleep a child needs and the kinds of programmes screened in the evenings. Children aren't usually allowed to watch those aimed at mature audiences. Although, as mentioned earlier in this report, 24% of younger, 68% of mid-aged and 92% of older children are still up at the 8.30pm watershed when programmes for mature audiences may be screened. Furthermore, at 9.00pm, 8% of younger, 26% of mid-aged and 55% of older children are still up.

Parents may also choose a programme on behalf of children, though they rarely do. It's more likely to happen when the family watches together in the lounge after dinner and until children go to bed. Parents choose on the basis of what the whole family will enjoy rather than to avoid a certain programme.

Parents know and trust their children, and are fairly unconcerned about programmes their children choose. However, in the wider survey, parents who do have rules for watching TV were more likely to be concerned about what their child is exposed to on TV, than parents who say they have no rules.

# Enforcing rules: theory vs practice

Parents' ability to set rules and consistently apply them highlights a conflict between their desire to let children experience the negative aspects of life – that is, teach them about the "real world" – and the need to protect them from those same negative aspects. Most families demonstrate an unresolved tension between openness and restriction, which partly explains why the application of rules differs somewhat from the theory.

On the one hand, parents want TV to be an educational and entertainment tool, and to let children watch a variety of programmes that will enrich their experience. On the other, parents realise TV caters to the needs of very different viewers and that, to some degree, they need control over what their children watch.

This is why parents set general rules but apply them case by case. All families are adamant that sex and violence are unacceptable viewing for children and adults, yet they all watch programmes containing sex and violence. Some programmes – *Man vs Wild* – only hint at these; others bluntly refer to and/or depict them – for instance, *Desperate Housewives* and *Shortland Street*.

**Jasmine sees a TV character naked**

Jasmine, 14, is watching *Go Girls* with her mum and brother. In one scene, the main female character sits naked on her bed wearing her fairy headdress. Her back is to the camera. Jasmine's older brother grabs the remote and changes channel without asking the others.

Jasmine hasn't reacted to the scene, but when her brother changes channel, she says she "shouldn't really be watching this". Her mum mutters and agrees. No further action is taken and the situation isn't discussed. They all watch the new channel.


**Carlos doesn't like *Hell's Kitchen***

Carlos, 10, and his mum and sister talk about programmes they think contain violence. The children agree that *Hell's Kitchen* is one because of the bad language and swearing.

Carlos explains, "[The chef] gets really angry and swears at them [his staff] and calls them bad names. He likes pressuring them." Later, Carlos' mum says *The Terminator* is a violent movie, and her daughter agrees. But when Carlos says, "Usually Will Smith's movies are quite violent," his mum confidently denies it.


Children watching their chosen programmes alone change channels during the commercial breaks and may end up watching something for a more mature audience. They don't stay on that other channel long, though, usually reverting to their own programme when the break is over.

Older children are different: they usually prefer series and soaps like *Home and Away* and *Shortland Street* because they have longer attention spans. Older children tend to watch a programme more consistently than younger ones, not changing channels so often. Some of these programmes deal with topics that make children uncomfortable or embarrassed, such as homosexuality and murder. Then, unless the scene is too quick for action to be taken, older children tend to change channel or leave the room. Parents, on the other hand, may not consider these topics uncomfortable or embarrassing, so don't feel the need to intervene or remind children of the rules. Most children taking part in the wider survey also said that they would exit the viewing situation either by changing the channel, turning the TV off or leaving the room.

When children watch TV with older siblings, they may make bolder decisions and watch programmes they normally wouldn't if they were alone. Older siblings go for programmes aimed at more mature audiences, and will choose soaps over cartoons.


**Amy watches a couple dressing on *Desperate Housewives***

Amy's older sisters occasionally watch *Desperate Housewives* when they've finished their homework and don't want to go straight to bed. Amy, 6, is still up and watches with them. By 8:30pm, though, she is tired and grumpy. She annoys her sisters, who ask her to be quiet. Amy finds a comfortable place on the couch and watches the summary of the previous episode.

She sees a car crash and a body on the road, as well as a couple getting dressed after having sex. She watches the car crash with some interest, but doesn't react to the couple dressing – it's unlikely she understands the scene's significance. While her older sisters watch with interest and smile, Amy half-watches before falling asleep on the couch.

Younger children feel supported by the presence of older siblings if anything makes them uncomfortable. It's also an opportunity for them to watch different programmes from those they usually choose. When children watch programmes for mature audiences and see things they shouldn't, such as an intimate or sexual scene, they usually take action and change the channel, unless the scene is over too fast to allow it.

Children don't seem to be sneaky about watching TV, and if they break the rules they usually don't mean to. They self-regulate – individually and collectively – and don't necessarily want to watch violent or sexual scenes.

### Molly, 14, watches sexual content on *Two and a Half Men*

Molly's caregiver is her older sister, and she says, "What I think is not suitable is nudity, people having sex, kids disrespecting parents – it's called *Brat Camp* – I don't let her watch that."

But they both enjoy *Home and Away* and *Shortland Street*. Some evenings, they see the main characters – teenage and adult couples – kissing for a long time on the lips. They keep watching and don't change channel.

One evening, though, they watch *Two and a Half Men*. Molly's caregiver changes channel because the main female character is embracing her boyfriend, wrapping her legs around him and kissing him on the neck. Molly doesn't respond to the scene nor does her relaxed body language alter. She doesn't argue about changing channel, either.

Until the evening news, parents are fairly confident about and aware of what kind of programmes screen, and leave children to themselves. After dinner, the family usually watches together, or parents supervise the children. It's now that parents apply the rules. Parents may watch the beginning of a programme that's unsuitable for their children yet not veto it, given the children will soon be going to bed and won't watch the entire thing.

### Ana watches *One Tree Hill*

Ana, 12, watches TV non-stop from when she gets home from school until she goes to bed. She likes children's series on SKY and doesn't mind watching the same episode several times if she catches a repeat.

But when her older sister comes into the lounge, Ana knows she can't watch her programmes. Her sister takes the remote and changes to TV One, TV2 or C4. Together they watch *One Tree Hill*, which is for mature audiences. There's a lot of sexual innuendo, and characters are cheeky and sometimes swear.

This shocks family members watching, and whoever is closest to the remote usually changes channel. The trouble is, one swear word is so fast that, by the time someone changes channel, nothing is inappropriate anymore. Both girls know, though, that they mustn't say these words or their parents will be upset and have a good chat with them. Since Ana didn't choose the programme in the first place, she's less concerned about any negative consequences.

## Breaking the rules and experiencing the consequences

The 14 families observed have so few rules that enforcing them should be easy. Yet because the rules are generic, there are many grey areas and parents tend to act on the merits of each case, if and when rules are broken. Parents usually need to see children breaking the rules to be sure they have disobeyed, and this means parents must be able to watch and/or hear the TV.

Parents are not naive – they know their children can break the rules if they really want to. But most say their children are not sneaky. They don't deliberately watch inappropriate programmes behind their parents' back or deliberately break the rules, although a few parents mention being unable to continually monitor children's viewing.

Parents trust their children and know they don't intend watching unsuitable programmes since these make children uncomfortable and/or upset. However, it is the children who have previously been bothered or upset by violence, sexual content or bad language on TV that are more likely to say that the content is inappropriate. Those who have been bothered or upset by violence on TV are more likely than others to say that violence is inappropriate (71% in the wider study, compared to 57% of all 9-13 year-olds). For those previously bothered by sexual content (74% compared to 45%) and for those previously bothered by bad language (81% compared to 41%).

Children are more likely to break the rules when viewing with siblings – then they all share responsibility for choosing something inappropriate and don't have to bear the consequences alone.

Parents explain that, should children break the rules, there's very little they can do. If they realise the rules have been broken, most parents talk about it with their children. They mostly choose to be open and transparent about the household rules and their purpose. Parents reiterate why the rules exist. They also talk about what the children saw and try to articulate why it is inappropriate.

When it comes to punishment, parents talk with children and weigh options. If they take immediate action, they switch off the TV, remove the aerial or send children to their bedroom. Children can also be grounded for several days or prevented from watching TV, although this would be for intentionally breaking the rules.

Parents don't usually punish their children, and, if they do, only mildly – by changing channel or switching off the set then talking with their children. Parents try to take an educational rather than punitive or repressive approach because they realise their children are growing up. They also know children are experimenting and making decisions, which is part of becoming an independent, self-sufficient adult.

In many families, rules are applied inconsistently, and it's difficult to know when they have been broken. Some families with younger children, for instance, frown on intimate scenes. But if parents are watching with children and an intimate scene comes on, parents can't punish themselves for watching it and don't feel they can punish the children either. Parents talk about the scene if the children are uncomfortable or upset, though they may not talk about it if they think the children aren't reacting to it.

In these cases, parents are applying rules flexibly. The same applies to violent content: most parents don't want their children to watch violence, but if they happen to be watching a violent scene with their children, they may not take any action. Parents may not even notice they break their own rules because they are used to this kind of content and don't constantly put themselves in their children's shoes.

> **No rules for Henry**
>
> Because it's Saturday night and Henry, 12, has no school tomorrow, he's allowed to watch TV for as long as he wants. On one condition: he must be awake. If his mum sees him asleep in front of the TV instead of in bed, he's not allowed to watch late TV the following Saturday.
>
> Usually, his mum goes to bed first, leaving Henry free to stay up until the movie's finished. Sometimes he even watches a second movie. If the movie is scary, though, or he's watching it alone, he goes to bed before the end.
>
> Some evenings he doesn't hesitate to watch AO movies. His mum is fine with this, because she normally stays with him and watches too. If Henry gets scared, he knows she is either next to him or in bed in the next room. Either way, they can talk about it. Henry usually grabs his soft blanket for comfort and reassurance when he's watching a late-night movies. And sometimes, he sucks his thumb.

Some children say what they watch isn't suitable for daytime TV, and should be broadcast later in the evening.

> **"Some scenes where people die and have fights, and stuff …. I think [it] should be on later."** (Cameron, 9, explaining that violence is unacceptable in his family and he isn't allowed to watch it)

"Some language is not good and should be on later." (Cameron, 9, talking about
*Shortland Street*)

# The rationale behind parental rules

Parents set TV rules on the basis of four main factors:

• what programme their children choose;

• wanting children to find out about the world;

• encouraging children to become responsible adults;

• what channels the family has access to.

## What programmes children choose

Daytime programmes, particularly those on before and after school, are for children – cartoons and series. Parents are confident these are appropriate and don't question it. Children are allowed to watch with minimal supervision. Parents know their children don't want to watch what would scare or upset them, such as horror or science fiction, so they don't need to impose extra rules to stop them doing so.

When children watch a soap with older siblings, parents keep an eye out to ensure they aren't uncomfortable or upset. They don't object to children watching, even though younger ones may not completely understand it, because they don't think daytime TV requires many rules.

### Gemma's parents leave her to watch TV with her younger sisters

Gemma, 11, is watching TV in the lounge with her younger sisters. Her parents don't know what they're watching and call out from the kitchen. They don't need to come into the lounge to check because they trust the children, and they can hear some of the programme. They check more out of curiosity rather than need.

### Brooke's mum leaves her to watch TV on her own

Brooke, 9, watches TV quietly and the volume is usually low. Her mum is in the kitchen, warming up dinner. From time to time, she looks at the screen to see what's on, but only because she's interested in her daughter's programmes and enjoys watching with Brooke, not because she's checking to see if Brooke sticks to the rules.

## Wanting children to find out about the "real world"

All parents believe children need to know about the world, but only when they are mature enough to process more negative information and learn from it. This has less to with a child's actual age than with their development and maturity.

Parents consider the news one way of children learning about the world. Although they don't push children to watch if they don't want to, they do give them the opportunity to sit with the adults when it's on. Despite not "pushing" children to watch the news, however, 67% of 6-13 year-olds regularly see the early evening news, and approximately two in every five parents (39%) are concerned about what their child sees.

"We usually watch the [news] updates and see what's interesting, when it is something local and cultural. I think it is sad but interesting, like when there are tornados in New Zealand, that's interesting, [but] bombs and drugs, that's not interesting. When it is local, it is more interesting." (Carlos' sister)

"[The news is] good. So we know what is happening in the world." (Molly, 14)

Parents see TV as a great medium of education and communication that enables children to learn safely about life. Children don't have to experience negative situations first-hand to learn, and can enrich their lives through vicarious experiences. Consequently, parents let children watch a variety of programmes, so long as the children can understand and analyse some of what they see. Not all parents are clear about how much children can understand, but they are willing to let children watch a programme if the children show an interest.

"Sometimes what happens in real life [in the news] is not good for the children to see, because we don't want them to be afraid, but it's real life, they should know." (Brooke's dad talking about interpersonal violence)

"All of their cousins watch it [wrestling] as well, and I can't shelter them from it. The cousins are all older than them. I'd be the over-protective mother if I said 'You can't go in the room because they are watching wrestling.' I tell their cousins to watch what is happening, and that it is not all real. I want to protect them from violence and sexual content. It's like swearing, I don't like them to listen to swearing. But they hear it at school anyway." (Tayla's mum)

Whether or not programmes depict "real life" isn't necessarily important to parents, as children can still think about what they see and apply the lessons in their own life. For instance, children can learn about morals and ethical conduct through movies and documentaries.

Most parents say they want their children to watch news and current affairs to learn about society and politics. But they add that none of their children are interested in these, which the children describe as "too boring". Some complex news items certainly put children off attentive viewing, and when the news coincides with dinner time, children tend to focus on their plate rather than the screen.

### Henry, 12, watches current affairs

One day Henry's uncle visits. Since no one is actively watching TV, Henry's uncle changes channel to watch current affairs. Later, halfway through an item, Henry sits next to his uncle and focuses on the screen as if he's deeply interested in what's on.
After a few minutes immobile, he suddenly gets up halfway through another item and leaves the lounge to see if his friend has finally arrived. Later on, he asks his uncle if he can change channel and watch something else.

Because parents want to raise children's awareness about "real life" and the world, if children happen to watch a news item parents think inappropriate and that upsets the children – such as a case of child abuse and neglect – parents don't necessarily change channel but, rather, talk about it with the children. They explain the item and discuss its context and implications. They justify this approach by saying they want to explain to their children what happens in other families; want to warn them of dangers they may face if they are not careful; and want to give them the tools to fight back in such situation, should they ever encounter it.

When parents think a programme has some educational value, they are again more flexible about the rules. Although if children are distressed by something they see, parents take action by, say, changing the channel and comforting the child.

"The programmes that are like *Coastguard*, that's totally different [from AO-rated programmes], and it's real and it's educational as well [so the children can watch]." (Michael's mum)

"We just always tell them: you are blessed, you are so lucky that you have very good parents, that you are well taken care of. So you should be grateful and thankful in everything. We always tell them not to fight, because sometimes they are fighting for some petty things .... Look how poor these children are compared to you, you are very lucky, you are in New Zealand, you are not like them begging for money or getting something from the garbage." (Brooke's mum)

## Encouraging children to become responsible adults

Most parents accept children may make mistakes and are ready to give them the chance to learn and reap a positive experience. These parents believe children have to take responsibility for their choices. Most parents, too, are in full-time employment and don't have time to constantly watch their children, so they delegate responsibility for TV viewing to their children.

## What channels the family has access to

One strategy for ensuring children watch only appropriate programmes is to deliberately restrict them to the free-to-air channels (e.g. TV One, TV2, TV3, C4 and Māori TV). These parents know pretty much what these channels
are like and what programmes they show. They believe pay TV offers too many choices that are too difficult to monitor.

Other parents take the opposing view. They subscribe to SKY so their children have as wide a selection of channels as possible and can always find something appropriate to watch, no matter the time of day or night. These parents believe this puts children in a better position to watch suitable programmes. They feel more comfortable with pay TV, as their children can choose a channel they like – such as Disney or Nickelodeon – rather than watching something "by default" due to lack of choice. Note in the wider study that SKY is almost always watched by children in the lounge, with only 1% of children watching pay TV in their bedrooms. Furthermore, 67% of parents of 6-13 year old children who own a decoder said they use parental control services.

### Ana, 12, watches SKY

Ana's parents decided that subscribing to cable TV gave their children more programme choice than free-to-air, and more opportunity to choose something appropriate. Ana enjoys this, as she mainly watches the Disney channel.
Sometimes in the late afternoon-early evening, she watches the Nickelodeon channel with her older sister. Her parents haven't subscribed to the movie channel, so they know their children have less chance of watching inappropriate movies with violence or bad language.

### Amy watches free-to-air TV

Amy, 6, and her parents feel they know most of the free-to-air programmes and are in a better position to supervise their children's viewing. But when Amy's mum is getting dinner in the kitchen, her father is at work and her older sisters are doing their homework, Amy can be left alone in the lounge with whatever's on. She doesn't know how to use the remote and can't change channel if she gets uncomfortable with what she sees.

On several occasions when children had a range of channels to choose from, they went automatically to those they liked, changing channel from time to time, but watching more attentively what was on the one they preferred. When children have fewer channels to choose from, it's more difficult for them to find something they enjoy and, sometimes, after comparing programmes on all the other channels, they end up watching something they dislike the least.

Whether or not parents opt for pay TV isn't related to their children's ages: subscriber and non-subscriber parents have both young and older children. Parents decide instead on the basis of the long-term benefits. They have their children's interests at heart and want to do the right thing, so subscribing to pay TV or not isn't a spontaneous, whimsical decision, but a measured, careful one.

# 4. WHAT'S ON TV AND HOW CHILDREN REACT TO IT

This chapter looks at what families think about appropriate and inappropriate content. The first section recaps the original 2007 study, the second looks at what makes content child-appropriate, the third section, the features of inappropriate content.

The next sections analyse three types of inappropriate content: bad or offensive language, violence, and sexual material and nudity. The last describes how children react to this kind of content.

## Recapping the 2007 study

Many parents in the original study were concerned about programme content, and, more specifically, about bad or offensive language, violence and sexual material and nudity. The children also mentioned they were sometimes scared and worried by what they saw, and didn't like bad language, violence and sexual references, either.

The findings of the current study are fairly consistent with the original. Parents and children don't enjoy programmes containing too much inappropriate material, although what is "too much" depends on the children's maturity and family background, and their wider environment.

A few parents' responses this time were inconsistent with those they gave in 2007. This is probably because their children are now two years older and better able to assess what's appropriate and what isn't. Parents in the 2007 study were quite worried about their children's viewing, whereas today these same parents seem more relaxed about it.

In 2007, some children said they felt uncomfortable or upset when watching violence, such as blood and people dying, and sexual material, such as people kissing. These findings haven't changed, although the children have grown up. They may be able to tolerate more today than two years ago, but this type of content is not what they most enjoy watching.

## What makes content child-appropriate

### What children enjoy and parents think appropriate

Parents approve of children's programmes – music, dancing, cartoons and series – and children enjoy watching them. This was observed, then discussed with parents and children. Children's tastes and personalities differ: some older children enjoy cartoons, while some youngsters do not. Some young children enjoy short, humorous series, while others find them boring. Age doesn't seem to count as much as personal preferences and cultural background.

There are, however, some non-negotiable ingredients for programmes children enjoy.

- Children need a story and/or characters they can relate to. Stories need to be simple enough to follow: that is, have two or three strands rather than many parallel ones. The story also needs some action, and to transport children into a reality different from everyday life.

- Characters need to display flaws and qualities that make them believably human. Characters also need to be special in some way – in their lifestyle, personality or environment. They might have superpowers, live in an exotic location, such as on a cruise ship, be physically different, like mermaids, or be children with adult responsibilities.

- The story needs to carry a positive message and have a happy ending – friendship, platonic love, learning life skills, living an adventure and developing moral judgment. Any pranks characters play on each other must be harmless and painless – children appreciate the fun side of pranks and like the humour.

Programmes with these ingredients are likely to appeal to children. Older ones require the same ingredients, but for a programme to keep their attention, the story needs more complexity and/or intensity.

"I like action, not shooting and stuff .... Cosmic powers are really cool." (Carlos, 10, talking about *Pokemon* and *Dragon Ball Z* cartoons)

## Amy enjoys children's movies

Amy, 6, watches children's movies and programmes whenever she can. Since she doesn't know how to use the remote, she asks her older sisters or parents for help. Sometimes they even put a movie on for her. She has seen *Shark Boy and Lava Girl* "hundreds of times", but never tires of it.

She explains with a big grin that the heroes' special powers can help a human boy save the world. The movie is full of weird and wonderful special effects with a lot of colourful background and a simple storyline. Amy is ecstatic when she watches it. She sings in tune and produces the dialogue right on cue. Her attention span is much longer than when she watches *Desperate Housewives* or *American Idol*.

## Justin relaxes after school with cartoons

Justin, 12, watches TV as soon as he's home from school – it's his "chill out" time before he does his homework. His parents agree he needs to relax, and they know the cartoons are suitable.

Justin lies on the couch, remote in hand, and watches cartoons. *SpongeBob SquarePants* is one of his favourites because of the pranks played on Patrick. The characters aren't mean to each other, just put each other in silly situations because they don't think of the consequences of their actions.

After a while Justin changes channel to watch *Drake and Josh*. Aliens are destroying nearby buildings because they are trying to kill the human beings. The aliens manage to injure one man, who is lying on the ground covered in blood. But thanks to his friend's magical powers, the injured man does not die: he grows old very fast. Justin watches motionless and expressionless, not reacting.

Watching TV is non-demanding and relaxing, and lets Jason escape his usual routine for a while.

When onscreen characters reflect on life or analyse a problematic situation, children mentally and emotionally disconnect. Contemplative scenes are slow, long and boring for children, who definitely prefer action. A party scene, in a show like *Hannah Montana*, where guests dance, sing and jump on the tables is very entertaining for young to mid-aged children, and is found mainly in programmes aimed at them. Action is multifaceted, though: it can include a positive message – organising a party, or a negative one – using violence. Action is found mainly in programmes for younger audiences, violence in those for older.

## Content suitability depends on purpose

Some parents believe a programme's positive message makes it more suitable for children. But, regardless of content, if children can learn some valuable lesson from a programme, their parents won't discourage children from watching it. Whether its lessons are applicable depends on how relevant the programme is to the child's life. Parents try, before the programme starts screening, to assess its content in relation to the child's age and emotional maturity, to ensure the child will benefit from watching without being negatively affected by, say, nightmares.

Parents walk a fine line in this trial-and-error process. Assessments are subjective: parents can disagree between themselves; parents and children can disagree, as can one family with another. When parents get a programme wrong and children are scared, parents re-evaluate it for the future.

**"We remind them it's not real action [wrestling], it's only entertainment, we tell them not to redo it …. If it's true there must be blood."** (Brooke's mum)

**"[You] can turn a leaf, become good …. You've got choices."** (Henry's mum explaining why she lets Henry, 12, watch violent AO-rated movies, such as *Gridiron Gang*)

News and current affairs are another area of tension between parents' desire to protect children from the world yet teach them about it. Some news items are distressing – a fatal hit and run; a murder; child abuse that results in death – yet children need to know. Parents believe they should arm children with knowledge, education and understanding against the dangers outside their own world, so they can survive and thrive.

Although negative news items permeate the family "cocoon", parents intend them to have a positive long-term effect. Most choose to be open, transparent and honest about such items and talk about them with their children. A few pessimistic parents mentioned sadly that no one can really fight TV and the negative programmes that screen – there will always be negative content.

**"I think the more you stop them from watching some TV, the more curious they become. So I decided that if they want to do something, I want them to explore, so that at least their learning would be very fast and then they will realise if that is bad or good. I think that is a good way of teaching them quickly. Practical. So, I think when we watch TV there is no set rules, but when we know that it's about something we don't want them to watch, that's the time we come to the scene and interrupt them from viewing."** (Brooke's mum)

# What makes content inappropriate

## How genre blurring and special effects make it hard to evaluate content

Traditionally, cartoons are aimed at children, and movies and series at more mature audiences. With the blurring of genres, however – adult cartoons and violent movies for children – it's trickier for parents and children to accurately gauge a programme's age-appropriateness. Increasingly sophisticated special effects also make it difficult to differentiate between a story that could happen in real life and one could only be fictitious.

> "I just don't think it has got some good messages in it, I mean, because it's a cartoon and the kids seem to think 'Oh it's for kids.' I don't really think it is suitable for kids, because there is a lot of content in it that I think is really dumb and it can actually influence kids. So, I don't like it." (Michael's mum talking about *The Simpsons*)

Some families are mostly concerned about their children watching *South Park*, *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, as these depict adult themes and negative messages. Children of all ages watch these cartoons and parents are unsure how much children understand. Most parents think their children (especially the young ones) take the cartoon at face value. They don't think children can stand back, understand the humour/irony and reflect on the message.

> "Violence is unacceptable anyway. [But] when the kids are talking about violence, the kids are talking about poking out tongues. [However] the fighting on cartoons …. Sometimes I find it disturbing …. So it should [also] be disturbing for the kids, although Carlos [10] says that the fighting on *SpongeBob* is OK, but on *The Simpsons* it's bad because he tries to strangle his own kids, like with animals, the [cruel] behaviour towards animals, it's not acceptable, it's not good." (Carlos' mum)

Parents, nevertheless, let their children watch these cartoons. Children explain that the characters are funny and that they enjoy the pranks they play on each other. Children tend not to dig deep into the meaning of such cartoons.

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### Justin watches *The Simpsons*

Justin, 12, likes *The Simpsons* because of the silly things that happen to Homer. Homer's children are smarter than him and help him out countless times. Justin finds the cartoon very funny, although he barely smiles when one character plays a prank on another.

Justin's mum doesn't like *The Simpsons* because Homer is a bad role model for children and she fears Justin may get ideas from watching it. Still, she doesn't stop him, justifying her decision by saying Justin probably doesn't understand the underlying adult themes and takes the cartoon at face value.

She also wants to give him the freedom to choose and make up his mind about programme quality and content. Justin knows his mum doesn't like it when he watches *The Simpsons*.

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> "*Family Guy* has scenes that are rude and stuff, like the way they talk, like SEX and the F word and the B word. [It's] like *South Park* too, a lot of swearing. [It's] like *Two and a Half Men*, it's disgusting, the lady jumping on the man and things like that." (Molly, 14)

> "I'm a bit torn about *Family Guy*…. It is a little bit more adult humour, and it goes over the kids' heads …. I don't want to make a deal about it because they will think 'what is wrong with that, it's a cartoon'…. They know if it's not OK…. They will either tell me or switch the channel." (Tayla's mum)

*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is theoretically aimed at children and teenagers, and the movie, which closely follows the book, was broadcast on TV2. It has numerous scenes of graphic violence, destruction and death, and the overall atmosphere is one of fear and suspense. Parents whose children had watched the movie that night were surprised and confused: they had thought it would have more peaceful themes. A movie like this can be confusing for a youngster, who may initially think it's aimed at a young audience.

> "I think they are both as bad [fictional violence and animated violence], because the animated one, the kids think this is for us, but this doesn't necessarily mean the content is suitable. I think any kind of violence in cartoons is bad." (Michael's mum)

## How parents evaluate programmes

Programmes none of the children like are those showing anger and meanness. When children watch cartoons or movies where characters get angry and/or are mean to others, they get uncomfortable. They find pranks funny because these aren't intended to hurt or injure.

Generally, the younger the child, the less they enjoy soaps or series with complicated themes – love, shooting, family disputes. These programmes are usually full of drama, making it more difficult for children to understand their meaning and implications. Young children don't really like frightening movies or frightening scenes, such as crime, science fiction and horror, because they can get scared and have nightmares. Sometimes, even older siblings are scared and need to be physically close to other viewers to be able to keep watching. Fifteen percent of 9-11 year-olds and 14% of 12-13 year-olds in the wider study said that they had previously been bothered or upset by scary themes in TV programmes.

### Tayla watches a mean episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants*

Tayla, 11, watches this cartoon because she likes the characters and the stories. Once, though, she felt Mr Crab was mean to SpongeBob and she resented it because SpongeBob ended up being fired from his job. She was upset and didn't like what happened. This probably resonated with Tayla's family circumstances – her dad couldn't find work in New Zealand and had to be posted overseas.

Parents have the final say on what is watched but children can influence the decision if they know how to negotiate. Parents decide on the basis of their knowledge and experience of the programme. If they've already seen it or the trailer, or heard positive comments from family and/or friends, they're more inclined to let children watch it, though programme type and purpose also count.

If parents have little or no knowledge of a programme, they have to find out about it before letting children watch. Generally, they don't inquire into or research a programme: they ask family and/or friends if the opportunity arises; they check the TV schedule; they watch the beginning of the programme to check its rating; they watch with their children if they're interested in it and also to monitor it.

> "Being a user of TV a lot, you know what's on TV." (Amy's dad)

When parents ask family and/or friends about a programme, how they apply this new knowledge depends on their cultural background. Families with a more collectivist background – e.g. Māori and Pacific Island – say they tend to think and analyse information the same way as their family and friends because they belong to the same culture, speak the same language/dialect, come from the same country, and have the same upbringing and traditions. Families from a more individualistic background – e.g. Pakeha – say they don't necessarily think and analyse information in the same way as family and friends: they take a more personal approach.

A Pacific Island family explained that when their children watch TV with friends, the adults there all implicitly agree on whether the programme is suitable. The parents decide and the children obey. However, the wider survey results also found that parents of Pacific children who watch TV are less likely than the average to say that they maintain close supervision or control over their child's TV watching (20% compared to the average of 31% across all parents with a TV).

A Pakeha mother said when children from several families were watching an episode of *Family Guy* at a friend's house, she had to turn off the TV because she was appalled by the cartoon's language and disrespectful themes. Some of the other adults felt the same. In this family, the child is allowed to watch *The Simpsons* "because it's funny", despite the mother disliking it and not watching it herself because Homer is a bad role model, and there are disrespectful children and sexual themes. So although a person's cultural background does influence their behaviour and thought, differences also exist within a cultural group. In some collectivist families, for instance, some children display more individualistic traits and are a lot more assertive than their siblings.

Parents and children can have more or less tolerance for inappropriate content. What is considered inappropriate is highly subjective. The type of inappropriate content and the level at which it becomes so vary between parents and children, and also between families. Both parents and children cope best with bad/offending language and then violence – they discuss what happened and take action. The wider survey results show that children are more likely to have been previously bothered or upset by violence, followed by sexual content/nudity and then bad or offending language. Bad language takes different forms, and its varying intensity makes it difficult to assess exactly when it becomes intolerable.

Violence is somewhat like bad/offending language in that it can take insidious forms – verbal abuse, for instance, may be less obvious than a punch – and it may be difficult to identify clearly. Both parents and children are least tolerant of sexual material and/or nudity: it is more embarrassing to talk about and explain. In the wider survey 51% of parents say they are concerned about their children watching violence on TV, with fewer (33%) having concerns about sexual content. However, children are less likely to have been previously bothered or upset by sexual content on TV, indicating that once again parent controls over this type of content may be more restrictive.

Observation showed that, overall, parents cope with it better than children; during family discussion, parents maintained violence and sexual material/nudity were unacceptable.

> "Nudity, lots of sexual references, language, drugs. In [home country] they have banned ads of hard drinks and tobacco, they don't show them on TV because of the bad influence …. [But] ads of wine are quite common." (Carlos' mum)

> "Big no-no to all of it [bad language, violence and sexual content] …. But we live in a rotten world." (Amy's dad explaining there's no choice but to watch programmes with inappropriate content)

> "Sexual life, they will know about it in the future, but violence is not good because of its influence." (Brooke's mum)

> "Violence is violence. The best we can do is educate them and tell them they've got choices …. They know what is right and wrong, but it's how they choose that makes a difference." (Amy's mum)

# Monitoring inappropriate content

## Parental inconsistency and child self-regulation

Although parents have few rules about TV watching and ensure children know those they do have, it isn't always easy and straightforward to monitor their application. Most of the parents work outside the house and have housework to do at home, so they are busy and can't continually check what children are watching. Moreover, when inappropriate content comes and goes quickly, it is more difficult to predict and monitor.

Inappropriate content also varies in form and intensity – swear words are unacceptable but the word "dork" is fine, for instance. Another factor influencing how parents monitor TV is viewer interest – if parents want to watch a particular programme, they do so, regardless of the level of inappropriate content. Theories on monitoring TV differ from their application.

Generally, children raised in a loving, caring and structured environment have the knowledge and information to understand and evaluate whether or not a programme is appropriate. They are cared for by their parents who try to maintain open and honest communication with their children, who can discuss, justify and form an opinion.

> "[If] you feel scared, you might want to tell your mum and dad." (Cameron, 9)

> "I don't like them watching wrestling. And I tell them about how stupid it is and it's not real and how it is all fake …. But their dad watches it. So I can't really turn around and tell them they can't watch it when he watches it. I do have concerns …. And I have to keep telling them about it. If I see them trying any wrestling moves outside, I growl at them and give them time out, because it says on the show 'You are not meant to do this at home because you can get injured'." (Tayla's mum)

Children learn to self-regulate from an early age, becoming more autonomous as they grow up. So when children (young and old) see inappropriate content, they are better able to cope: they know they can talk about it with older siblings and/or parents; they know they have supportive and involved parents; they get parental guidance and encouragement within that structured environment. However, in the wider survey only half (51%) of children aged between 6-13 years believed violent content to be inappropriate for children, and fewer believed bad language (36%) and sexual content (34%) to be inappropriate. This may suggest that children are not as good at judging the level of appropriateness of content as parents may think they are.

Children raised in a loving and caring but less structured environment tend to have more freedom and flexibility, and TV rules are more loosely applied. These children tend to have less formal parental guidance, and are more self-reliant when deciding if a programme is appropriate. When these children have older siblings, they follow their example and learn to tolerate more inappropriate content than children in a structured environment.

> "The kids [are] being exposed to too much …. They see kissing every now and then and they are like 'ooh ooh'. So, we don't like them being exposed to too much of that. But I mean nowadays, it's so different to how it was when we were younger. There wasn't really that much of it. There is just so much exposure now.

> "It's like some TV ads aren't suitable for kids to watch, and I think, oh my gosh, is that an ad? And when I think about what they are advertising, it really has nothing to do with what we have just seen. So, sometimes you have to really think about that. I know that I think about it a lot.

> "And then, they self-consciously say things to themselves. I hear them say: 'Oh, turn it over, they are kissing'. So, that is part of that trust, I think, that they will know: 'OK, that's not suitable to mum and dad so we shouldn't really watch it'." (Michael's mum)

## Expected vs unexpected scenes, and taking action

A new scene can come up unexpectedly in movies or series, such as when a new parallel story develops and a new scene showing cheerful people breaks from a previous tense scene. All children are "surprised" by the new scene and pay a lot of attention, needing to understand how the new scene links to the previous one and to the whole programme.

If it is an action scene, such as a party in progress or a fast car speeding up, they give it their full attention. Their attention varies between high and low, however, if the new scene opens after a "build-up"; in this situation, their attention level depends on their understanding of the new scene – is it a love scene, an introspective scene or a suspense scene? Also important are their level of comfort with, and their general interest in, the scene.

Understanding and comfort are strongly related to the children's age. If, for instance, onscreen characters are getting intimate and children realise what's coming up, such as a lesbian kiss at the end of a *Shortland Street* episode, they start feeling uncomfortable and try to occupy themselves with a side activity, like texting a friend or drawing, to avoid looking at the screen. Young children tend to feel uncomfortable about a much lower level of inappropriate content than older children – a man and woman kissing on the lips is fine with older children but not younger. Note, however, that the wider survey results show that similar (and small) numbers of children within the two different age segments (9-11 and 12-13) have been bothered or upset by kissing on TV – 6% and 3% respectively. This is within the margin of error for the wider study. There appear to be greater differences based on gender, with 8% of girls aged 9-13 claiming to have been bothered or upset by kissing on TV, compared with 2% of boys.

As well as reacting to how a scene begins – whether it's unexpected or preceded by a build-up – they are also affected by how long a scene lasts. When it's short, children watch it and don't have a chance to feel much before it shifts. Then they move on and don't dwell on what they've just seen. Their face usually remains expressionless. When the scene is longer, they have more time to try and understand and analyse it, and to react. If the scene embarrasses them or makes them uncomfortable, they try not to watch, although they glance at the screen from time to time. They do so out of curiosity but also to check if the scene is over so they can give the programme their full attention again.

Parents have to decide immediately what to do when inappropriate content appears. If it's short and unexpected – a spontaneous and passionate kiss, say – parents and children alike are "surprised", and the scene may already be over before parents can take action. If it's unexpected but longer – a drive-by shooting, say, where someone falls to the ground and later dies – parents are in a better position to decide what to do. A scene that opens after a build-up makes parents more aware of what's to come, and gives them more time to decide what to do. When watching TV alone, almost half the children in the wider survey said that they would exit the situation (change channel, turn off the TV, leave the room) when something inappropriate occurs on screen. However, it would appear that this behaviour is strongly influenced (as indicated by the observations) on the unexpectedness of the scene, and may not in fact be a true reflection of the behaviour of children in these situations.

Parents rarely take action but when they do, it tends to be retrospective – when the scene is over – rather than when it's in progress. This applies whatever the age of their children. If, for instance, parents believe a scene is inappropriate, they change channel, but not without confirming that it's indeed an inappropriate scene, thereby giving their children time to see all or part of it before it ends. Parents watch another channel for a few minutes before returning to the original channel once the scene is over. It's more difficult for parents to evaluate a scene and take timely action when they are in the kitchen cooking dinner and not in the lounge.

Generally, parents do not often change channel or switch off the TV. They prefer discussing the inappropriate scene with their children if they think it's upset them or made them uncomfortable. Some parents don't want to confront their children, and may forbid them to watch a programme, justify why, and then find their children disobey. Most parents, however, maintain that their children are effective at self-regulating their own TV viewing.

Parents of young and older children also leave it up to them to assess what they like on TV. By and large, parents are more relaxed when older children watch TV and tend to take even less action. There is no data in the wider survey to compare and contrast what parents say they will do when inappropriate content is screened, other than a general theme of placing rules and restrictions on viewing. Note however, that most of these rules and restrictions are to do with the number of hours watched and the time of day (66%) rather than specific content.

# Bad language and swear words

"Bad language" is language that is unacceptable, that contains demeaning put-downs or sexually euphemistic chat, but that does not contain actual "swear words". Parents and children of all ages agree swear words are unacceptable. When they hear them on TV, both are shocked. "The F word" (fuck) and "the B word" (bitch) are the main ones parents and children think unacceptable.

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### Ana hears a bad word on TV

Ana, 12, is watching the Disney Channel when her sister comes into the lounge, takes the remote and changes to the series *One Tree Hill*. Ana doesn't complain and goes back to texting her friend.

Her sister is engrossed in the programme, in which two women are arguing. One seems to have the upper hand and decides to leave. The other is upset and calls out, "Bitch!" Ana's sister is shocked – her mouth opens in a wide O and so do her eyes.

She stares at Ana, who has looked up at the screen on hearing the word. Ana stares back at her sister who takes the remote and changes channel. Ana goes back to texting and her sister settles back in her chair.

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### Molly hears a bad word on TV

Molly, 14, and her caregiver sister are shocked when they hear "the F word" or "the B word" on TV, and they change channel.

Molly's caregiver explains that her own child heard "the F word" on TV one day and kept repeating it to get attention. He obviously didn't know what he was saying, and she was deeply mortified.

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"*South Park*, that cartoon, it's very bad. They do a lot of swearing because it's an American programme." (Molly's caregiver)

"Some movies they block out the swearing [so children should be allowed to watch them]. So it's sort of OK like that. Perhaps once a week they [children] could watch that." (Cameron, 9)

"Any swearing at all …. Even 'shut up' and stuff like that is barely passable. If there is a swear word on the show, you will hear them say, 'Oh, mum, they said shut up'." (Tayla's mum)

"They bleep most of the swearing out, but it's real life and within our own community backyard, and so it's like saying, 'That's what happens'." (Michael's mum talking about watching reality show *Police Ten 7* with her children)

"Bad language", on the other hand, is harder for parents and children to identify and, therefore, monitor. Some words and expressions children and parents don't like but will tolerate – "slut", for instance, and "shut

up!" These can be more offensive than they first seem, depending on the tone of voice in which they are said – they sound worse when uttered in an aggressive, demeaning way than light-heartedly and casually.

Here, children have to be able to decode the message's content and purpose. Depending on their emotional maturity, some children can differentiate between emotions and understand more subtle ways of expressing them. Young children tend to take such words and expressions at face value – *the character used a bad word and that's wrong*. Older children recognise the bad word but can understand it in the context of the programme and distance themselves from it.

> ### Jasmine watches *Friends*
> Jasmine, 14, is watching *Friends* on her own, motionless and absorbed. When one of the characters, Rachel, asks her friend Joey why Phoebe broke up with her boyfriend, Joey replies, "His penis was too big." Cue recorded laughter.
> Jasmine doesn't move or react. She remains absorbed in the show, her face expressionless – no sign of understanding, amusement, disgust or shock.

"'Shut up'. Our bible teacher said it once, but he was just using it to be funny for the word .... Some people use it to get attention." (Cameron, 9)

"My son repeats. Sometimes he forgets he's not watching a movie." (Jasmine's mum talking about Jasmine's older brother who watches *Rove*)

Parents and children watch programmes containing bad language as long as it only crops up occasionally and the programme isn't built around its use. They don't tolerate swear words, but it's difficult for them to take immediate action – by changing channel, for instance.

None of the children like swear words but they do tolerate "softer" forms of bad language – "crap" and "dickhead", for example. They recognise these as bad words and feel uncomfortable.

Children tend not to take action if these words are few and far between in a programme – they keep watching if they are enjoying it. It can be tricky for children to take action on bad language on TV if their parents use that language at home. Although children can identify bad language, as taught by their parents, they have to learn to make allowances for certain situations, such as parental swearing. This double standard can confuse them. Family discussion generally helps clarify the situation.

Parents and children avoid programmes that constantly use bad language, and many families cite *Hell's Kitchen* as a prime example of a programme they don't watch. Although the programme content – cooking – is harmless, parents and children are appalled by the way Gordon Ramsay treats his staff – the foul language, demeaning tone of voice and generally degrading behaviour. The language's only purpose is humiliating people, and it's irrelevant and pointless in a cooking show. It fails to set a good example about developing harmonious relationships and treating people respectfully.

"The children might develop their anger [if they watch *Hell's Kitchen*], because the chef is always shouting .... Anger is not good, control yourself." (Brooke's dad)

"[Gordon Ramsay is] evil to everyone, he doesn't deserve to be called that [a chef]." (Carlos, 10)

"To be talked to like that in some innocent programme like cooking ...." (Henry's mum)

A lot of parents talked about the music channel (C4) and derogatory song lyrics. They cited rap as music that wasn't positive or peaceful. The lyrics contain strong language (and sometimes swear words), and the message often revolves around sex and violence. One Māori mother explained that she feels strongly about promoting positive race relations and does not appreciate TV programmes that discriminate against people, especially women and children. She believes many lyrics, coupled with their video clips, are demeaning to women.

The language in some programmes is socially acceptable – that is, polite, and without swear words and bad language – however, the general message is debasing. In some episodes of *Friends*, for instance, female and male characters use sexist language to talk about the opposite sex. Even older children find it hard to grasp the meaning of individual words and the overall message and its implications in this situation. Children don't always understand sarcasm and black humour. They tend to take the message at face value and get confused.

> **"Some people cry and things like that, but if you are a white person and sometimes they say to the black person, 'You are shit', and stuff like that. But if you are black and proud of who you are, you don't get upset like that."** (Molly's caregiver)

# Violence

Although, as parents explained, they reject the idea of TV violence, they still watch programmes containing violence with their children, both younger and older. They watch obvious violence, such as a school fight and a helicopter shooting into a building, as well as more subtle violence, such as someone intimidating another. They justify this contradiction by arguing that their children know onscreen violence isn't real, that violence is everywhere and no one can escape it, and by saying they talk about it with their children and tell them not to imitate it, particularly the violence on the news.

Their children's comments and reactions, however, indicate otherwise. Regardless of their age, children don't always understand the difference between real and fictional violence. They watch various types and don't always accurately identify it, especially when it is more subtle. Note, however, that the wider survey found that 29% of children aged between 9-13 years claim to have been bothered or upset by violence on TV and 51% of children consider violence to be inappropriate for children.

> **"They don't understand [the news], they get fascinated by the pictures."** (Brooke's mum)

Most parents say TV violence becomes unacceptable when it shows blood, whether real or fictional. Paradoxically, these same parents watch programmes depicting blood with their children. Children say they feel uncomfortable seeing blood, but still keep watching. This would appear to contradict what children say they will do when they are uncomfortable about what is being screened, which is to exit the situation.

Establishing a scale running from acceptable to unacceptable violence isn't straightforward, since parental theories aren't consistently implemented and families vary widely. In some, for example, children are not allowed to watch AO-rated programmes; in others, children of the same age are allowed to watch these programmes, even though parents know from experience that the level of violence in them distresses their children and gives them nightmares.

> **"When it is real people getting killed, blood, guts, cruelty to animals, any form of extreme bullying .... Mediums talk to dead people [in *Sensing Murder*] .... Basically I don't like them watching anything that is not a kids' show."** (Tayla's mum)

> **"I'm quite into war .... So, I don't mind watching it."** (Justin, 12)

> **"Guns and stuff, lots of shows show them, but they don't use it."** (Cameron, 9)

**"We watch action, but it doesn't have bad stuff in it, like this little girl stares at you and you die."** (Molly, 14, talking about a rented DVD she watched recently)

### Brooke watches a violent reality show

Brooke watches *Most Shocking*, a show on SKY, with her parents. Its short videos are shot by amateurs who film unusual and violent scenes.

One depicts a man trying to escape the police. Despite police bursting his tyres, he keeps driving. Eventually he gets out of the car and runs away, before being caught by a police dog. He resists arrest and has to be handcuffed. Another scene shows a group of young people fighting. One of them gets a blow to the head and ends up on the ground.

Brooke is watching with her mum. Mum says they find these videos funny because people do "stupid" things. The family takes them light-heartedly, without much empathy for the people involved. Another time, though, they watched a fight between school students filmed with a cell phone and broadcast on the 6pm news. Brooke was shocked; so was her mum.

When programmes are violent, children put up with an amount of it before feeling it's too much, such as when it involves intense physical pain and sadistic/intentional harm. One child watched a rape investigation reported on *60 Minutes*. When he told his mum about it later, he showed no sign of distress. His mother was horrified, but didn't show it, since her parenting style involves not making an issue out of a bad situation.

**"The boys wanted to have sex with her daughter .... Split her legs apart and used different tools on her."** (Cameron, 9, explaining what he saw on *60 Minutes*)

## Real and fictional violence

Children of all ages watch real violence – mainly on the news when their parents watch (i.e. TV One and TV3 at 6pm or Prime at 5:30pm). They also see real violence on reality shows, such as *Police Ten 7*, *Neighbours at War* and *Most Shocking*. Children are mostly with their parents when they watch these programmes, having dinner or relaxing on the couch after dinner. Parents don't let their children watch these shows by themselves unless they are older – and even then parents stay nearby.

**"If it's the news, then you know that it is real."** (Cameron, 9)

**"In cartoons, I know that it's not real. But if it's real, like the [Australian] bush fires, I know it's real."** (Cameron, 9)

**"I don't really watch programmes that are violent, like *Police Ten* [7]. It's not good entertainment, it's all about criminals. Who wants to watch that?"** (Carlos, 10)

**"I don't really like it when people die, it depends on what it is. If it is cartoons, I think it is all right, but if it is real people, I don't like it."** (Cameron, 9)

**"I tell them this is not reality [wrestling], this is just like the guys in the movies, so we tell them this is not acceptable behaviour, but let's differentiate between having fun, give them an explanation first and apply accordingly."** (Michael's dad)

**"They hang the person, they tie their hands and arms, I don't like that."** (Molly, 14, talking about a rented DVD she watched recently)

**"Real violence is when it hurts people."** (Cameron, 9)

Children's reaction to violence depends on their maturity, their personal history and how much violence they have been exposed to, and how much support they get from their parents. Some children react well to it, apparently understanding the context and distancing themselves from it. Other children don't react so well and get scared. One mid-aged child saw a news item on a night robbery: a robber broke into a house and stole belongings without the tenants noticing. Since then, the child has worried this might happen to his family. He checks the doors and windows are locked before going to bed, even though he lives in a safe, relatively wealthy neighbourhood.

> "Some stuff is scary, sad. It should be on later." (Cameron, 9, talking about *Scary Movie 4*)

> "Monsters, spiders, razor-sharp things that can attack me .... I don't like that. Poison, snakes, slimy things, big dark forest that I might get lost in ...." (Carlos, 10)

> "Scary gives you a weird feeling in your body .... When I'm scared, my heart beats fast and I feel worried." (Cameron, 9)

Children worry when they see news items that suggest to them what happened to someone else could happen to them and their families, such as being attacked in the street. They are unable to stand back and differentiate between the circumstances onscreen and their own circumstances. They are more able to do so when they see news items about things that clearly can't happen in their own environment.

### Justin doesn't like the news

Justin, 12, eats fish and chips with his parents in front of the TV. He doesn't like watching or listening to news and current affairs, so he eats quickly without glancing much at the screen.
When he's finished, he asks if he can go and play video games. Tonight, though, there's a *Campbell Live* item on Christmas lights in houses and gardens, and his dad calls him. Justin runs back into the lounge. When the item is over, he goes back to his video game.

Children of all ages generally find the news boring and complicated. They only like watching it when there is a short and unusual item, such as domestic Christmas light displays or a town destroyed by a tornado.

Children often perceive historical violence on TV differently to contemporary violence. What happens in today's world is closer to their lives than what happened a long time ago. Contemporary violence can seem more "real", and have a greater impact than historical violence.

### Justin watches historical violence

Justin, 12, watches a National Geographic documentary on World War II. He sits on the couch next to his father. He pays avid attention, sometimes asking questions. He sees what life in the trenches was like for soldiers fighting in Europe.

Fictional violence also powerfully impacts on children. With ever more sophisticated special effects, violence can be depicted very realistically. Children are drawn into programmes containing violence and don't always manage to differentiate between a realistic scene, such as wrestlers tending not to bleed when competing, and a fictional one, such as bloodied characters in a movie still on their feet and fighting bare-handed.

Fictional violence blurs the features of real violence. This can make it difficult for viewers of all ages to identify how much of the violence is "real", since sometimes fictional violence is very realistic and at others over the top. This is particularly so for young children who have less experience of the world, can't analyse what they see and take it at face value.

> "I think, really, honestly, he doesn't get the storyline to *Shortland Street* and a lot of the things, unless it's the latest one of the killings .... [He's] trying to find out who did what. That gets to him. So, he'll try and figure .... That is what is keeping him to the screen, the suspense of ... who did it? Am I right? What I'm thinking is right? So I think that is what keeps him tuned in to that. I've seen him, going past. When it's something he doesn't relate to, he's not focused, he can easily walk in the kitchen or do something else."
> (Henry's mum; Henry is 12)

> "If it's a cartoon, I'm OK with it. If it's real and has blood in it, I'm not OK with it."
> (Cameron, 9)

> "Reality. I don't have a problem with [the news]. If it was on the news, because I think the kids need to know about the stuff that is happening in the world and I don't want them to live a sheltered life .... But, if they were watching a movie and someone was shot, I don't like that. And if someone on the news and someone has been shot and they are showing that, that's reality then, that's all right. So long as it's not something hanging off [i.e. a body part], then that's OK." (Tayla's mum)

> "[Wrestling] is boring .... It's fake, I don't watch it any more, because it's not real violence." (Justin, 12)

Children sometimes confuse reality with fiction and become completely lost. In one episode of *Shortland Street*, Nurse Maia Jeffries (Anna Julienne) killed Dr Ethan Pierce (Owen Black). The murderer was not revealed until much later, which kept viewers guessing. One mid-age child regularly watches *Shortland Street* (though not every night); he knows the doctor was killed (fictional violence), but also believes an actor was murdered (real violence). He doesn't clearly distinguish between the two.

> "[The characters in *Shortland Street* are] actors. But they're real people! [The actors] they're not real. Except the killer. Ethan, Ethan got killed .... He was on the news. The real guy. But he was on *Shortland Street* too .... Someone shot him [the real guy], *boom boom*." (Henry, 12)

"Fake violence is based on real .... Fake violence is more real than real .... If you see real [violence] you get more shocked than fake .... The difference is the cause of violence, but it's still violence." (Brooke's dad)

Children view fictional movie violence slightly differently to fictional cartoon violence. Movie violence looks real because the characters are human beings, and children identify with human heroes more easily than with animations. But in terms of qualities and personality traits, children identify with both human and animated characters. Young and mid-age children like SpongeBob because he is funny and not mean to Patrick. Children know cartoon violence isn't real, even though the violent actions are based on reality and therefore possible.

"Animation [violence], it is just figures and you know that there are people on the computer doing it." (Carlos, 10)

### Tayla watches cartoon violence

Tayla, 11, is a fan of *The Simpsons*. She watches the cartoon with her younger siblings and her mum. In one episode, Homer is being electrocuted. He doesn't die, but the intensity of the electric shock is obvious. Tayla doesn't react to the scene, nor do the others. They don't talk or change posture, and keep watching until the end of the episode.

### Cameron watches cartoon violence

Cameron, 9, watches an episode of *King of the Hill*. A female character talks about committing suicide because of her poor school grades. Other characters decide to take her and her boyfriend out to cheer her up.
Cameron doesn't react physically to this theme. He says, without much empathy, "It's a cartoon, it's OK. It's people who hate their life." He can put suicide in perspective and avoid seeing it as dramatic because it's in a cartoon.

However much violence there is in a cartoon, children know it's fake. Children react, though, to both movie and cartoon violence. They feel uneasy watching extreme fictional violence – a town blown up or somebody getting stabbed in the chest. They change position on the couch, grimace or cuddle up to their parents. While watching the violent scene, children take it all in and don't think of it as fictional. If they have understood and enjoyed the story so far, the violence seems to affect them more than when the story has been complicated and hard for them to follow.

**Amy deals with real and fictional violence**

The TV's always on in Amy's house, and Amy, 6, and her siblings watch a lot of programmes. Sometimes she watches movies with them all before going to bed. She doesn't really understand, and when she's bored, she plays or draws pretty pictures.

She knows a drink-driving commercial, though, where some young men drink a lot in their local pub. One of them drives everyone home but misses a bend and crashes into a bridge. A friend dies. Amy recounts the story accurately with a big smile and animated body language. She mimics the car crashing into the bridge and shows with her hands how the car ends up on its roof. She doesn't talk about the person in the car who bleeds and later dies.

Later on, Amy talks about a scary, violent part of the movie *Candyman*, and that if you say "Candyman" three times in front of a mirror, he comes to kill you. Amy didn't see the movie, but her older sister did, and when she told Amy the story, Amy was scared. She believes the story is true, even though her family jokes about it and tells her the Candyman doesn't exist. When she tells the story of the Candyman, she looks around and moves closer to a family member.

## Reported and witnessed violence

Parents are divided on the topic of what's worse for children: hearing about violence or seeing it first-hand. This is unrelated to the number of children they have or the children's ages. It has more to do with fundamental values, beliefs and morals, and parental opinions are divided within and between socio-economic and ethno-cultural groups.

Some parents argue that reported violence is worse than witnessed violence because children hear the complete analysis of a crime: how to commit a crime and not get caught, what happens while a crime is being committed, and what issues need thinking through before committing one. They believe children imaginatively reconstruct the crime, and, if they are smart enough, can even improve on it. Some parents fear children might imitate what they hear and try to do it better.

These parents believe witnessed violence is not as bad as reported because onscreen images leave nothing to children's imagination – they see everything. Although witnessing violence can be distressing, as some parents mention, they nonetheless believe their children's imaginations are more influential than their eyesight.

Other parents argue that witnessed violence is worse than reported violence because children are more affected by visual impact than by a story. For these parents, pictures depicting violence make the crime itself clearer – how it's committed and what the outcomes are. Seeing violence initiates children into another world, the images amounting to unnecessary educational material. Images powerfully teach children about violence because they combine theory – people talking about it – with practice – children seeing what happened.

Children hearing a violent story only grasp what their imagination will allow them to. Children are creative and resourceful, yet parents believe if children are unaware of certain ideas and concepts, they won't be able to make them up "out of thin air". This why these parents believe hearing about violence is, in some ways, better than witnessing it.

> "They are showing Gaza and bombs [in the news]. Because they were showing the kids and families being attacked. That's disturbing. Definitely. Seeing is bad in comparison to the inferred one [reported violence]. The one that is apparent [witnessed] is bad in comparison to the inferred one."

> "One is quite evident, it is right there. [But] if it is reported, you do not know the authenticity of the report and also you have not seen it happening so, it does make a difference. Real violence is definitely worse, but cartoon violence isn't good either."
> (Carlos' mum)

Parents do not, however, approve of violence in the first place, and so feel uncertain and confused about justifying what type might be better or worse than another. When articulating a potential scale of violence, they are reluctant to consider some forms of violence less bad than others.

## Physical violence and verbal abuse

When it comes to physical violence, parents and children tend to think violence against people and animals is worse than violence against property, although none of them condone the latter. Parts of some reality shows are upsetting to children, young and old – for instance, an episode of *Supernanny* showing a father hitting his child; an episode of *Animal Rescue* showing farm animals starving and badly neglected.

Violence against people, animals and property is unacceptable and is costly to compensate financially, emotionally and time-wise. However, the major difference between people/animals and property is that an object can be replaced, albeit with great difficulty, whereas people and animals can be scarred for life and their situation can affect many people around them.

> **"Cutting off someone's ear is really disturbing."** (Carlos, 10, giving an example of inappropriate violence)

> **"Killing is not good. They tie people's arms and cut them, and that is not good."** (Molly, 14, citing an example from a rented DVD she saw recently)

Parents look at onscreen violence in terms of what their children can learn from it, particularly how they can avoid it happening to them. Children, however, see violence against people and animals as worse than violence against property because of their emotional connection to onscreen characters. Children watch people and animals trying to protect themselves and escape violence, and, when they can't, having to suffer the consequences.

When onscreen violence against people, animals or property is extreme, children feel uneasy, and they or their parents usually take action – the children leave the room, the parents change channel.

### Brooke watches people fighting

Brooke, 9, is drawing in front of the TV while she watches *Most Shocking* with her parents. One video shows adults fighting in the street. One of them falls to the ground and doesn't get up again. The others keep on punching and kicking.
Brooke is mildly interested, watching for a few seconds at a time. She isn't upset or shocked, only indifferent and bored. Her parents laugh and say, "This is stupid." Later, Brooke's mum explains that she talks to her children and tells them they mustn't copy things like that.

### Jasmine watches a window get broken

Jasmine, 14, watches *Two and a Half Men* with her brother. One of the main characters is clumsy bringing a kayak into the lounge and, when he turns it around, ends up breaking a window. Jasmine and her brother find this funny, and smile. They keep on watching.

**Brooke sees the effects of a tsunami**

Brooke, 9, is eating dinner with her family and glancing from time to time at the TV. An item about a tsunami that devastated a large area in a third world country shows flooding and destruction of houses. Brooke is interested and stands up to watch better. She stops eating. She opens her eyes wide and stares at the screen, her face reflecting strong interest. When the item is over, she sits down and goes back to her dinner.

Parents sees verbal abuse as violence but children of all ages are uncertain. Verbal abuse is more insidious than physical violence in that it can have longer-lasting effects that are not obvious from the outside. Not every child can clearly identify situations where people treat others with verbal disrespect. Children can identify physical violence, such as a fisticuff outside a pub, but don't always identify language as a violent medium, such as when someone threatens another without raising their voice. This is especially so for younger ones.

Humour can convey a negative message in a light-hearted tone of voice – via sarcasm, for instance, where the message is highly critical. Young children take humour at face value and can't "read between the lines". Children's programmes tend to avoid such subtleties – characters make it obvious when they're being funny, by speaking loudly or gesticulating more, and this children understand.

**Kevin wants to watch *Hell's Kitchen***

Kevin, 13, likes *Hell's Kitchen*, but his dad doesn't want him to watch it. They argue about it, Kevin explaining that you can't hear the swear words – "It does go beep." His dad isn't convinced – "They use wicked language", and the chef talks disrespectfully to his staff.
For Kevin's dad, the atmosphere and language convey verbal abuse and this deters him from letting the family watch, even though the programme content – cooking – is harmless.

## Violence that's closer to home

New Zealand violence has more impact on viewers than violence overseas, whether it's real or fictional. Parents and children find programmes depicting New Zealand stories more powerful than those made in, say, the US or Britain, although some children said American programmes were usually better because they had better editing and better outfits.

Parents and children prefer *Shortland Street* to *Home and Away*. Few watched *Coronation Street*. Children and parents alike relate more to New Zealand characters – their accent, clothing, lifestyle, attitude and culture, as well as the scenery. *Shortland Street* is like "New Zealand reality TV". The storyline also touches on subjects pertinent to viewers' everyday lives. When children watch American-based series and movies, such as *CSI Miami*, *Bones* and *Gridiron Gang*, they don't relate as strongly or in the same ways to the characters because these characters belong to another world.

"[*Shortland Street* is] related to our kind of life." (Amy's older sister)

"I think that the people who are writing the programme [*Shortland Street*] are trying to make it really interesting, but they have to remember that 11 year olds are watching." (Carlos' mum)

"My only purpose was to understand their accent, because they are Kiwi series [*Shortland Street*], so when I migrated here I was advised by friends to watch this series, because it helps me to be familiarised with their accent." (Brooke's mum)

Because overseas TV violence has less impact – the violence "does not happen in New Zealand" – New Zealand programmes with low- to medium-level violence, such as *Shortland Street*, might have more impact on children than overseas shows with low-to high-level violence, such as *Gridiron Gang* and *Desperate Housewives*.

**Henry's mum protects him from onscreen violence that's closer to home**

Henry is 12, and his mum says New Zealand-made programmes have a bigger impact on her children because the characters' lifestyles, culture and stories are like those of New Zealanders. She says of *Shortland Street*, "It's the closest to New Zealand life." So she lets Henry watch *Gridiron Gang*, an extremely violent American movie, but doesn't want him to watch *Outrageous Fortune* because she believes her children may relate too much to the characters and imitate them. The violence in the series is all too real.

"**I don't think it should be on TV because people might copy it.**" (Molly, 14 , talking about an ad promoting TV2, in which two strangers kiss on the lips at the bus stop)

# Sexuality and nudity

## Children's low tolerance

Children feel uncomfortable watching sexual material and/or nudity. This is probably because sex and intimacy are usually somewhat taboo in families. Most parents say they try to be open and answer children's questions, but they add that they don't necessarily offer supplementary information they think children don't yet need to know.

"**[Young] children can't decipher right and wrong.**" (Molly's caregiver)

 "**[*Go Girls*] has a bad effect on children, 15 years, 16 years old. These children are just growing, they think that life is just like that.**" (Jasmine's mum)

"**It's not like that for every child. I know my boundaries.**" (Jasmine, 14, responding to what her mum has just said about *Go Girls*)

Young children feel uncomfortable, puzzled and curious about anything remotely related to the body and intimacy. They express this when watching TV – "You can see her panties!". They also make noises of disgust, and grimace when they want to show they don't like what they see. Young children are fine when people hold hands, kiss on the cheeks and hug; they are also fine with friendship and platonic love, relating to these positively because they are familiar behaviour.

Mid-aged children can put up with a little more than their younger counterparts. They can watch people holding hands, kissing on the cheek and hugging without any problem. They can also watch scenes where a man and a woman kiss lightly on the lips (as opposed to French kissing – this isn't acceptable on TV, even for parents). However, these children start feeling uncomfortable with nudity and bedroom scenes. Watching women wear a one-piece bathing suit, for instance, makes some boys feel uncomfortable. This group of children also feel uncomfortable when young people or adults are in a bedroom; their discomfort level varies according to what then happens. The wider survey results show that the older the child, the more they feel that sexual content or nudity is inappropriate. Sixteen percent of 6-8 year-olds believe sexual content ("rude things") to be inappropriate, compared with 41% of 9-11 year-olds and 50% of 12-13 year-olds.

**Ana gets uncomfortable watching two women kiss**

Ana, 12, and her mum watch *Shortland Street* several times a week. When her mum is at work, Ana doesn't watch by herself, but tonight mum is home in time.

Ana is busy texting her friends while she watches. Towards the end of the episode, two female nurses argue about the recent murder of one of the doctors. Ana looks up at the screen when the nurses start arguing, and stops texting. After a while, the two nurses cease arguing: the camera zooms in on their faces as they get physically closer.

Ana watches avidly, her body tensing. When it's clear the two nurses are going to kiss, she lowers her head and goes back to texting her friends. But now she holds her mobile in mid-air, whereas before it was on her lap. This lets her glance at the screen while pretending to send messages.

She wants to check what's happening and if the kissing is over. When she realises the nurses are still kissing, she goes back to texting. When eventually the credits roll and the music plays, Ana is relieved: her body relaxes, she looks up at the screen again and puts her mobile back on her lap.

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**Carlos doesn't react to a conversation about a lesbian relationship**

Carlos, 10, watches *Shortland Street* with his older sister who does her homework at the same time. In one episode, a female nurse talks to a woman friend about her lesbian relationship with another nurse.

Carlos doesn't respond – he remains expressionless, and doesn't seem to understand what the nurse and her friend are talking about. Carlos' sister, though, stops doing her homework and watches until the conversation is over. Then she goes back to her homework.

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Mid-aged children can watch without flinching a couple dressed and lying on a bed without touching, and a couple undressed and in bed, but with the duvet pulled up to their throats and not touching.

They feel uncomfortable about a couple dressed and lying on a bed but kissing on the lips and/or touching each other (not necessarily on the genitalia), a couple undressing each other in a bedroom, a couple naked in bed and making love (although no bare flesh is visible under the moving bed linen), a couple in bed not touching but bare flesh visible; a same-sex couple kissing lightly on the lips.

Although this group of children is more aware of sex and sexuality, they still feel very shy about it and are uncomfortable when watching suggestive TV scenes.

> "When they reach their teens, they'll know and discuss it [sexual life] at school …. They should learn from home first." (Brooke's mum)

> "Kissing is weird and random." (Carlos, 10)

> "It was OK to start with, but the more she [daughter] watches it [*Shortland Street*], the more she comes up with all these questions, which is quite a good thing. Lately they have been saying more swear words. There has been more themes like sexual themes like you can see couples in bed …. It makes her ask all these questions that I really don't want her to be asking at 11 years. It goes over the other two's [younger children's] heads They are not interested in *Shortland Street*. They go out and play." (Tayla's mum)

Older children also feel uncomfortable with TV sex and intimacy (and the wider survey results suggest that they feel more uncomfortable than children in the other age segments). Some mid-aged children may feel as comfortable, or even more comfortable than, older children watching the same scene, depending on children's emotional maturity. In the case of mid-aged children, having older siblings has helped them become more emotionally mature, particularly if they see that their older siblings have a sex partner.

### Kevin sees some blacked-out nudity

Kevin, 13, watches a promo for *The Girls of the Playboy Mansion*.
One of the Playboy bunnies lifts her top to expose her naked breasts, which are blocked out by a black rectangle. Kevin watches without reacting. His body language doesn't change and he keeps watching that channel.

**"Sex talk, making love …. I don't agree with it."** (Carlos' mum)

**"[Characters in *Shortland Street*] jump from person to person [have affairs] and that is not Kiwi culture."** (Carlos' mum)

**"I don't mind a kiss, I don't freak out about it, because the boys see Dad and I cuddle and kiss, so it's not like you can't ever do that. It's the other stuff, like naked. From time to time you have some programmes that just brink on pornography."** (Michael's mum)

Parents sometimes find it difficult to assess what's acceptable for children to watch and how to avoid either puritanism or pornography. Their unsuitability threshold (i.e. what they consider utterly inappropriate for children to view) is relatively high: French kissing, making love and pornography. However, it's not always easy for them to know at what point their children are going to feel uncomfortable. Neither is it always clear to them how much verbal sexual content their children understand. Some parents allow children to watch mild sex scenes, such as a couple kissing, then talk with them about it if children want to or they ask questions – which children rarely do, given they already feel uncomfortable.

### Sexual content goes over Natasha's head

Natasha, 10, watches *Shortland Street*. A teenage couple in love are kissing on the lips. An adult friend sees them, approaches and asks if they're already sexually active. She goes on to talk about condoms, and to promote safe sex.
Natasha watches the whole scene without registering what it's about. She doesn't react to the talk about sex and condoms, and keeps watching the programme.

### Sexual content goes over Jasmine's head

Jasmine, 14, and her brother watch *Two and a Half Men*. A male character jokes to his friend that "Sex in the shower is a young man's game …. If I put it in for Christmas, it doesn't stop shaking until New Year's Eve." Jasmine keeps watching without reacting, while her brother chuckles.

### Sexual content goes over Kevin's head

Kevin, 13, is watching *Malcolm in the Middle* when one female character tells her husband, "Yours is the only tongue that has been in my mouth." Kevin doesn't react to this, despite the pre-recorded laughter, and keeps watching.

Some parents, especially those with younger children, deliberately choose programmes they know have no sex scenes. Parents don't push children to experience situations that are beyond them, but they also don't want to make the topic even more taboo than it is.

**"I don't believe in gays and lesbians – because it's not a part of our culture …. It's not good, because teenagers think 'that's what adults always do'."** (Molly's caregiver)

### Natasha, 10, avoids even mild sexual content

Natasha's religious and cultural background stresses modesty and restraint. Sex and intimacy aren't openly discussed because parents and siblings are uncomfortable about it. Natasha feels very uncomfortable when watching mild TV intimacy and spends a lot of time changing channel to avoid seeing people get physically closer. When teenagers, young adults or adults kiss on the lips – rather than peck on the cheek – she switches over. She can't stand watching people touch.

One evening, she began watching *My Wife and Kids*, but when two adults kissed by the bed, she switched to *Home and Away*. A young adult couple started kissing. She switched to the music channel, where she watched highly sexualised choreography and decided to switch to *Malcolm in the Middle*. Another young couple were kissing. She switched channel again.

Characters in *My Wife and Kids* were also talking sexual fantasies, and in *Home and Away* about being sexually active and using condoms, but Natasha didn't react to this dialogue. She probably doesn't understand the concepts. She reacted strongly, though, to the kissing – grimacing and changing channels.

## When children do watch sexual content

When by themselves and choosing their own programmes, children hardly ever watch programmes with sexual material and/or nudity, preferring children's shows that don't have any. When with older siblings and/or parents, though, they watch programmes aimed at more mature audiences, and these usually contain at least low levels of sexual material and/or nudity. So children can be made more aware of intimacy and sexuality through their siblings' choice of programme. If they feel too uncomfortable – during, for instance, a "build-up" to the intimacy – they may leave the room and do something else, such as playing rugby in the dining room or computer games. This is consistent with what children say that they do (exit the situations); however, as already discussed, their behaviour can be dependent on such things as the length of the scene or whether the scene was anticipated.

### Jasmine watches a sex scene

Jasmine, 14, and her mum watch *Go Girls* together. In one episode, a young couple is in bed having sex. Viewers can't see the couple's bodies – they're under the duvet and no flesh is visible. Jasmine and her mum don't react. Jasmine's posture and expression don't change, and, when the scene is over, the two keep watching in the same way.

Sometimes older siblings change channel on the advice of the parents, so all the children can watch something together. Watching intimate scenes in this situation gives children an opportunity to learn about intimacy and sexuality while under the supervision and with the approval of their siblings, and in their reassuring presence. When parents watch something containing sexual references, they rarely change channel, although during the family discussion many expressed concern about the sexual content of some programmes, even those screened before 8:30pm, and said it was unacceptable.

Programmes with a few intimate scenes are more acceptable than those where such scenes are a crucial element. Intimate movie scenes, for instance, are only part of the story, whereas sexual images and references are central to music videos. Many parents dislike contemporary music videos where singers dance erotically and the costumes are revealing. Some also express concern about what's conveyed to young people by videos that show unequal power relations between men and women, and suggest women should conform to a certain body shape.

Paradoxically, younger and older children don't appear to react as much to the sexualised video clips as they do to movies – they know the tune and/or lyrics, and the video accompanies these. This lack of reaction is partly because music videos don't have a "build-up", and the sexual material lacks context – the choreography doesn't tell the story in the lyrics.

> ## Ana tries not to watch a lesbian kiss
>
> Ana, 12, watches *Shortland Street* with her mum and sister. She likes it because sometimes it deals with topics in her own life, like bullying – she wanted to know more about bullying and find answers to it.
> Sometimes, though, episodes have too many simultaneous stories – a haunted house that must be exorcised; a disabled staff member who has to work from a wheelchair; two nurses trying to cover up a murder one of them committed. The stories can be very dramatic, and Ana doesn't understand them all. She spends a lot of time texting her friend rather than watching attentively.
> Towards the end of one episode, she saw two nurses arguing then becoming silent. She felt the tension grow and, becoming uncomfortable, she went back to texting her friend. She kept peeking at the screen, and at one point saw the two nurses kiss on the lips. She immediately went back to texting and didn't look at the screen again until she heard the music at the end.
> She apparently knows what it means to be a lesbian because her mum explained it to her.

# How children react to what they see on TV

## How children react to various content

When children watch something positive – something they find funny and that is packed with action – they are intent, sometimes smiling or laughing. They stare at the screen, their body relaxed, lying on the couch or sprawled on a chair.

Children are more alert and physically involved when playing a computer game or being with friends. They talk to themselves and their friends, move their feet when at the desk, open their eyes wide or pull faces, move their bodies in time with the joystick or keyboard, and have a longer attention span.

When watching TV, children are mostly inert and expressionless. The attention levels vary widely, however, within the same programme. When they watch something neutral or negative, their expression hardly alters. Sometimes when they don't understand a scene or it surprises them, they frown and/or focus hard on the screen. Their eyes may open wide and they may look worried. Overall, though, they are more passive watching TV than when playing on the computer or interacting with friends.

Children adopt various strategies when they see something that scares them or makes them uncomfortable. They get up and leave the room or cuddle up to their parents if they are sitting next to them. A mid-aged child watching a stressful war documentary even sucked his thumb while cuddling his mother. Another mid-aged child adopted the foetal position while watching a violent movie scene, and moved closer to his mother so their bodies were touching.

Sometimes children hide their faces behind their hands or a pillow, or pull a blanket or piece of clothing over their eyes so as not see the screen. When they want comfort, they may touch their teddy bear or polar fleece blanket while watching TV. Sometimes, such as during the news, children do something else – skimming a book, playing with a hand-held game console, drawing pictures or sending text messages. Or they may leave the lounge to go to the bathroom or get a glass of water. This is also a mark of boredom.

Children are more active and/or involved when they watch something that affects them negatively. These reactions depend not just on children's ages but also on the environment in which they are being brought up. Young children are more sensitive to scary scenes and react more spontaneously to them, while older children tend to tough it out and try not to be scared or uncomfortable.

However, young and old children from a structured environment with parents strongly involved in their upbringing tend to seek the comforting presence of their parents more than children whose parents are less physically and/or emotionally involved in their upbringing.

> **"They're begging us to change channel [when the children watch something they do not like]."** (Brooke's dad explaining why he's not worried about his children watching inappropriate content)

At times, when watching TV, some children look as if they need reassurance from a parent or older sibling, but they don't get it. Some parents dismiss children's feelings or devalue what they say. When, for instance, a child is explaining what scares her and cites a horror movie she didn't see but was told about by a sibling, her mother hears but doesn't really pay attention and doesn't comfort the child. In a less structured family environment, children's negative reactions aren't always taken seriously and responded to, so the children have to learn to deal with it themselves. In a more structured family environment, parents tend to listen to children and respond to any negative reactions.

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**Justin needs reassurance when watching a war documentary**

Justin, 12, likes historical docos, especially those about war, because they tell real stories about real people. He usually watches programmes like this with his parents reassuringly on either side of him. He watched one documentary on National Geographic that followed soldiers and explained what they did in that conflict zone. It featured real gunshots and live bombs exploding.

A bomb detonated underneath a tank and killed a soldier. The explosion shocked the soldiers (and Justin) because it was unexpected – it was night-time and everything was quiet. The young man's death was very sad, and when the other soldiers went back to base, they held a service in his memory. Some of them cried.

When watching this sort of thing, Justin concentrates hard on the screen and tends to snuggle up to his mum. When the programme is over, he goes to bed with his head full of drama and emotion.

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## How much attention children give TV

Four key elements determine children's attention level when watching a programme.

1. The nature of the images: the visual appeal of the programme, the images shown. A wide angle shot of, say, a rural scene, gives an impression of freedom, while a close-up of, say, a bedroom, is fairly claustrophobic. An action-packed scene is more appealing to children than an introspective scene.

2. The music or audio background: children can feel more or less comfortable with what they see depending on a programme's soundtrack. Loud bass music scares them, while gentle music is soothing. Music alone can have a profound impact on children, even if the images don't match the level of disquiet created by the music.

3.  The accessibility of the story and the way characters are presented: a complex story, full of tension and drama, and played out psychologically is more difficult for children to comprehend than a straightforward story involving everyday people.

4.  Scene duration: children will understand and remember a brief segment more easily than a longer one. Children remember an advertisement for a product they know of, such as Lotto, more clearly than the storyline of a movie. This is especially so for young children, whose attention span is more limited than that of older children.

The interplay of these four factors determines whether children will watch a programme and the extent to which they will focus on it.

Another factor impacting on their understanding and focus is repetition. Children see advertisements many times a day and they usually have lively music, sharp dialogue and a striking story. Children can memorise these, recalling dialogue and main points of action. A one-off movie doesn't have the same impact. Repeated viewings allow children to identify what they like and dislike, and to focus accordingly.

> **"Kids pick up more in ads than in other programmes."** (Amy's mum)

> **"Kids can remember those ads more than a movie."** (Amy's dad)

# 5. ADULTS ONLY TIME AND PROGRAMME CLASSIFICATION

This chapter examines two aspects of TV broadcasting related to children's viewing: the 8:30 shift to Adults Only programming, and classifications and warnings.

## The 8:30pm timeband and its implications

### Trusting the broadcaster

The vast majority of parents trust the "broadcasting people", that is, those responsible for choosing what programmes are broadcast. Parents believe "broadcasting people know what's best", and that programmes screened during the day are suitable for a wide variety of viewers (including children and teenagers), while programmes aimed at more mature audiences are restricted to evening slots.

For most parents, the shift to Adults Only programming at 8:30pm officially indicates that programmes shown from then on are unsuitable for children. Conversely, they trust that programmes broadcast before 8:30pm are fine for children, and that they don't need to check them, especially if these are specifically for children, such as cartoons.

Some parents, though, have eventually become more aware of the content of children's programmes, such as *Ben 10*, and *Drake and Josh* on SKY TV, and are surprised to find they contain a good deal of violence and destruction.

> **"There is this sort of assumption that, if it's before 8.30pm, it's not bad."**
> (Cameron's mum)

> **"There is nothing suitable for kids after 8:30pm."** (Amy's mum and dad)

> **"There is nothing on after 8:30pm."** (Natasha, 10)

To some extent, then, parents transfer authority and decision-making power to the broadcasters. This is more because parents are busy rather than ignorant. When parents take time to watch a programme with their children, be it cartoon or movie, they reclaim their authority as decision-makers and assess whether it's suitable for their children, relying less on the broadcaster to decide on their behalf and more on what's acceptable for their children and their family values.

Trust in the broadcaster and reliance that the broadcaster will not show AO programming before 8:30pm doesn't depend on the age of the children, although parents with young or very young children tend to supervise their children's viewing from closer at hand than parents of older children.

> **"I don't see that killing, or whatever. Hopefully, they didn't show the killing of the person .... I'm not sure [what's acceptable in *Shortland Street*/on TV] .... My understanding is that, if it's on that early, at 7 o'clock, then they wouldn't have [broadcast it] .... Knowing that a majority of Kiwis would watch it, Kiwi families would watch it .... Hopefully not .... Now it's going to make me want to watch it all the time ....**

> **"I'm of the understanding that, surely, the broadcasting people know ... that so many New Zealand families will be into that show [*Shortland Street*], including the whole family, parents and kids, and would have enough [sense] not to have that sort of thing in a programme, have enough sense not to have them .... Otherwise that might stop a lot of families watching it."** (Henry's mum talking about the murder of the doctor in *Shortland Street* and its broadcast before 8:30pm)

## The AO timeband and bedtime routines

This study highlighted two kinds of family: those with relatively strict routines for their children, and those for whom the routine was relatively flexible. Strictness of routines doesn't depend much on children's ages, since a few young to older children follow strict bedtime routines, while other young to older children have flexible routines. Children's routines depend more on family values and environment.

In some families, parents are more physically and/or emotionally present in their children's lives. These children tend to have stricter daily routines – TV switched off when children do homework, and children going to bed at a fixed time every school day. The routine children follow is unrelated to the level of love and care shown by their parents. Clearly, some families express their love and care through a strict routine, while others express these by giving children more freedom.

In families with a strict routine, the shift to Adults Only programming at 8:30pm determines when children must stop watching TV and go to bed. This is more so for families with younger children. Young children stop watching from 8pm until 8:30pm, but are usually allowed to stay up and play in their bedroom until 8:30pm. If they stop watching at 8:30pm, they usually go straight to bed (assuming they have already put on their pyjamas and brushed their teeth).

Older children who follow a strict routine, go to bed from 9pm until 9:30pm. They either watch TV with their family or are supervised from a distance by their parents. Parents remind children of their bedtime a few minutes beforehand so children can get ready for bed.

In families without a strict routine, the children's bedtime is flexible and depends on their evening activities rather than their age. Young and mid-aged children alike may go to bed before the Adults Only viewing time or after it (older children have a flexible bedtime too, but tend to go to bed after 8:30pm). In families with a flexible routine, parents tend not to be too concerned about the shift to Adults Only viewing time and what it means.

### Brooke has a strict bedtime

Brooke, 9, knows her bedtime during the week is 8:30pm sharp. After dinner, she watches TV until her dad asks if she's brushed her teeth. She goes to the bathroom for a few minutes to get ready for bed. Then she comes back to the lounge and sits on the sofa next to or between her parents.

She usually looks at her story book or her hand-held game console. Sometimes she talks with her mum. She doesn't pay much attention to TV, tending to watch only when there's action or a loud noise, and then she goes back to what she was doing.

At 8:30pm, she kisses her parents good night without taking a last look at the TV. On Friday nights she watches wrestling with her brother and parents, going to bed when the matches finish at 10pm.

### Ana has a flexible bedtime

Ana, 12, is supposed to go to bed earlier during the week than at the weekend, but it varies during the week. Sometimes she goes between 9 and 9:30pm, sometimes towards 10pm. It depends if her mum and dad are home.

Even when she's in her bedroom, she may not go to sleep straightaway but may spend time texting her friend until around 11pm. At the weekend, her bedtime is more flexible because she can sleep in the next day. She can watch an entire movie then go to her bedroom and send more texts, unbeknown to her parents.

### 8:30pm and bedtimes

Children, whatever their ages, all tend to go to bed earlier when they have school the next day, although the younger they are, the earlier they tend to go. In families with a strict routine, children have to be in bed by a certain time on weeknights. In the weekend they are allowed to go to bed later, although still at a fixed time. They're allowed to watch a DVD or a TV movie that finishes after 8:30pm, meaning bedtime may vary from its fixed time by a few minutes, depending on the duration of what they watch.

Flexible weekday routines tend to become even more flexible at weekends, and children are allowed to go to bed much later, depending on their evening activities, social gatherings and celebrations.

The start of Adults Only programming at 8:30pm informs parental evening viewing expectations but does not rule them. There is fluidity in how parents enforce bedtimes. All children are allowed to watch TV after 8:30pm during the weekend (sometimes DVDs), whereas some of them are not allowed to do so during the week.

Programmes shown after 8:30pm during the week are considered less suitable for children than programmes shown after 8:30pm at the weekend, parental supervision at both times notwithstanding. It might be argued that children can sleep in longer in the weekend and therefore watch TV after 8:30pm. But this contradicts the justification, provided in discussion, that children must be in bed before 8:30pm because of inappropriate programme content after that. In these same families, children watch TV after 8:30pm during the weekend, although with parental supervision.

Children who stay up after 8:30pm hardly ever watch children's programmes. In some cases, parents limit children's viewing to specific programmes, such as wrestling and war documentaries. In other cases, children are allowed to choose what they watch without much parental input. An explanation for this conflicting situation is that parents feel in a better position to monitor programme content during the weekend because they have more time to watch with their children. During the week, housework occupies most of parents' evenings – getting dinner, making sandwiches for the next day, washing dishes, catching up with children and partner, helping with homework and tidying the house.

The 8:30pm shift to Adults Only time is both an official way of informing parents of programme content and helping them enforce children's bedtimes. It doesn't, however, substitute for parents' decision-making power: they ultimately decide what's suitable for their children and when it's suitable, during the week or at the weekend.

# Programme classifications and warnings

### Knowing about classifications and making use of them

Most parents know the acronyms used to classify TV programmes but don't necessarily know how to interpret them – what kind and level of violence they depict, for instance, or what type and level of sexual content/nudity. Nonetheless, a programme's classification does help parents evaluate how suitable it is for their family. Many children also know what the acronyms stand for, and most know what they mean in terms of programme content.

A few children, however – younger ones, up to 12 – aren't clear on the relationship between classification and content, and they see classification in terms of time of day rather than content. They believe programmes screened once they are in bed are adult programmes because only adults are awake to watch them – hence the AO rating. These children are confused about causality, believing that if a programme is aimed at adults, it will most likely be broadcast when only adults can watch it – that is, late in the evening – to guarantee it reaches the right audience.

**Henry interprets the meaning of AO**

Henry, 12, knows AO-rated programmes are for adults only. According to Henry, AO programmes screen in the evening because then it's too late for children to watch them.

He links programme rating to broadcast time, believing an AO-rated show can't screen during the day because children are up and watching TV.

Despite understanding classification and its purpose, parents, with children's encouragement, sometimes decide to ignore a classification and watch a programme anyway. They don't want their choices limited by someone else's judgment. Some parents think New Zealand TV is relatively conservative and that programmes wouldn't attract such ratings in other countries; European countries were cited as being more liberal in this respect. Parents are grateful for classification and ratings, but consider these don't always align with their own worldviews and value systems, and use them only as a guideline in deciding whether or not something is suitable for their children.

> "We still watch [a programme containing violence or bad language] if we want to, but when we encounter those scenes, we say, 'It's a bad word'." (Brooke's dad)

> "New Zealand is too PC about [classification]." (Justin's dad)

> "Programmes on TV you can control ... news you can't control." (Justin's dad)

> "[We] can control [when we go to] movies but not for programmes." (Amy's mum)

## Infrequent reliance on classification

Generally, parents don't make a lot of use of programme classification, yet 73% claimed in the wider survey to frequently (45%) or sometimes (28%) use them. If they happen to come across one for something they're about to watch, they take note of it, even more so if they intend watching the programme with their children. But if the classification isn't obvious and accessible – if it's not, for instance, shown in the TV schedule, on the screen or during the programme – parents tend not to go out of their way to discover what it is and aren't committed to checking before a programme begins.

Parents tend to rely on their own knowledge and experience of programmes in determining if they're suitable for their children. Also, they assume programmes screened before 8:30pm *are* suitable and don't feel a need to check. They mostly use classification for programmes broadcast from 8:30pm onwards.

## Situations requiring classification and/or warnings

Parents may, in the evening, check programme classification when they're unsure about something they want to watch with their children. This gives them a guideline for deciding, rather than compelling them to assess programme content itself. On Friday night, for instance, children are allowed to stay up later and watch a movie, so parents may check its classification to ensure it's suitable. If it's a week night and the children are in bed, parents won't check the classification but rely on their own judgement in deciding whether they want to keep watching.

Some content, such as a news item about a murder or a documentary containing a graphic scene, needs an indication that the programme may be disturbing. Given that only parts, rather than all, of the programme may disturb, parents suggested there should be warnings applied to these. News readers, for instance, should *always* warn viewers before the item is shown; they do this for some items, but not consistently. Moreover, the warning is verbal rather than also displayed onscreen using a symbol, and it's given only just before an item instead of being available to viewers for its duration.

Parents are concerned warnings are easily missed, and would like to see signage throughout the programme. If, for example, viewers switch on in the middle of a programme or change channel after a programme has started, they are not made aware of any warning. Although some parents believe the classification system is useful, they'd also like to see warnings when disturbing items are shown because classification refers to the whole programme and doesn't warn when disturbing items are coming up. Again, parents are more concerned for their children than themselves.

## Children watching AO-rated programmes

In some families where there's a strict routine and parents take an active part in their upbringing, children aren't allowed to watch AO-rated programmes, even during the weekend. In other families, where children have a more flexible routine, they're allowed to watch AO-rated evening programmes. If parents think children are old enough to understand such programmes – that they can differentiate between real life and acting, and learn life lessons from it – they may be allowed to watch.

Sometimes children watch AO programmes because their parents believe a rating is too conservative and doesn't accurately reflect content. If it's the weekend and children don't have to go to school the next day, that helps them to negotiate being allowed to stay up late and watch.

### Henry watches an AO-rated movie

It's Saturday night and Henry, 12, wants to watch TV. The upcoming movie, *Gridiron Gang*, is AO, and the voiceover explains it contains bad language and violence that may offend.

Henry's mum asks him if he should be watching. Henry's sister looks at him then their mum and back at Henry. After a few seconds' reflection, he says, "Yes, because I don't have school tomorrow." His mum chuckles and agrees. She and Henry settle comfortably on the sofa bed while Henry's sister sits on a chair.

The first few minutes of the movie feature a drive-by shooting and a domestic violence incident ending in a gun death. Henry initially lies on the sofa bed near his mum, touching her with his head and leg. Later he gets into a foetal position against his mum's body and sucks his thumb. He keeps watching the movie.

### Molly isn't allowed to watch AO-rated shows

Molly's sister and caregiver explains that Molly, 14, isn't allowed to watch AO programmes because she's too young and it's inappropriate. Even she doesn't watch them, because she doesn't like their content. There's usually bad language and/or sexual references that make her uncomfortable and that she doesn't want to watch.

In many cases, parents with a strong interest in a certain type of programme and/or who believe in its educational value watch with their children despite an AO rating. Only rarely are parents uninvolved with TV and leave it up to their children to decide what to watch. Generally, parents watch AO-rated programmes with their children and provide more active supervision: if they realise the programme is unsuitable, they can take immediate action by switching the TV off, changing channel, sending the children to bed or reassuring and comforting them.

"[The] household rule is that if an AO comes on, we change the channel." (Cameron, 9)

"We tell them that it's adult programmes, and [the children say] 'But I want to watch TV,' and we are like, 'Well, there is nothing on for kids, it's all adults programmes,' so they still moan and complain but they understand that it's not suitable." (Michael's mum)

"Like AO. She can't watch that, but then, when there are movies that are for adults on TV, I don't watch it [either]" (Molly's caregiver; Molly is 14)

"Children just know so much they know everything .... You know the ones who have been watching the late night movies, not only are they tired ... I heard these kids the other day talking about a blow job and they are only 10 .... You wouldn't know what a blow job was unless you had been watching a movie .... And they seemed to have this 'I'm never going to die attitude' .... I have kids in my class who have watched all the *Saw* movies .... It just desensitised them." (Tayla's mum, who is a teacher)

"I don't want him to be freaked out by TV [so I let him watch it]." (Henry's mum; Henry is 12)

## Recording programmes to watch later

None of the participating families record TV programmes, although some of them used to. Of the parents taking part in the wider survey, 29% said that they recorded programmes screened after 8.30pm for watching at a later date, although only 6% watch these programmes at times when their child might be exposed to the content. They watch programmes at their scheduled screening time or repeats, if they are available. TV is the fall-back option: if people have nothing else planned, they watch, but if they're busy with something else, they don't watch TV. In this case, missing a programme isn't considered important. Moreover, missing an episode of a soap doesn't stop a viewer following the general storyline, as threads tend to unfold slowly and viewers can catch up quickly and fill in the gaps.

If viewers miss a movie, they can either watch the repeat, on SKY, for example, or rent the DVD. Some families rent DVDs to watch in the evening, especially at the weekend. Watching a DVD as a family is slightly different from watching a TV show as it requires choosing one the family can enjoy together.

Sometimes families use their own video camera to record family celebrations and holidays, and they watch these together in the evening. A few families have SKY TV and can choose from more programmes. This means they don't need to record programmes – they can watch repeats at various times of the day or evening.

# APPENDIX I. DETAILED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This appendix details the methodology used for this project, focusing on the research design, the challenges and processes of the research, the involvement of the 14 families and the timeframe of the research project.

## Qualitative research

The research project consisted of observing the behaviours and reactions of younger audiences when watching TV, as well as gaining an understanding of these behaviours and reactions through a discussion with the family. This understanding was reached through using a combination of research methods, i.e. ethnographic observation and in-depth interviewing. The following section describes more specifically the steps involved in conducting the project.

# Research design

### Frequency and duration

The project involved a total of 14 families (nine in Auckland and five in Wellington) who agreed to have a researcher come to their home and spend four evenings with them during the week. These four evenings were consecutive for three families. For the other 11 families, the four evenings included a break – for five of these families, there was one evening break; for six of these families there were two breaks of one day each or one break of two or three days. The potential for breaks during the project depended on the families' availability and the children's evening activities.

All the days of the week were covered during the project (from Monday evening to Sunday evening – see table below). The evenings during which the researchers visited the families were set by the families and the researchers, according to their respective availability. It was hypothesised that TV watching during the week (e.g. when children have school the next day) may be different from the weekend.

The researchers spent the following evenings at the 14 families' homes:

| Evenings spent with the families | Auckland | Wellington |
|---|---|---|
| Week days only | 2 families | n/a |
| Weekend (including week days) | 7 families | 5 families |
| Total | 9 families | 5 families |

The four evenings were broken down into three observation evenings (the first three evenings) and one evening aimed at the family discussion (fourth evening). In some cases, the researcher was able to conduct more observation at the beginning of the fourth evening, before the family discussion took place. During the first three observation evenings, the researcher's role was to observe the child watching TV (e.g. types of programmes watched and reactions of the child). The researcher also asked the child a few informal questions (e.g. what is the storyline of the programme watched by the child and what the child likes/dislikes in the programme).

During the fourth evening, the researcher conducted a family discussion with the child and the parents. In some cases the child's siblings also participated in the family discussion, although they may not have been present all the time during the three observation evenings. During the project, the researcher tried to work as inconspicuously as possible while in the families' homes, so as not to interfere with their everyday routine too much. The researchers also emphasised to the families that they should do as they normally do, as if the researcher was not present. For instance, if the child wanted to stop watching TV for a while and play a game instead, it was accepted as part of the family's normal daily life.

The researchers spent on average four hours per night in the participants' homes, from 5:15pm until 9:15pm. The start time of the observation meant that the children were home from school and had usually finished their homework. These start and finish times were selected for the study, because the variety programmes shown on TV during this timeframe are aimed at children or adults or both (e.g. cartoons, news and movies).

This timeframe also includes the Adults Only timeband, when programmes aimed at mature audiences are broadcast. The bedtime of the children varied from about 8pm until 10pm during week days (Monday to Thursday), which meant that children were potentially able to watch TV after 8:30pm. In some cases, when the child went to bed before the researcher left their home, the researchers took this opportunity to chat informally for a few minutes with the parents of the child before leaving.

## Observations and family discussion

In each family, the child who took part in the 2007 quantitative study was the focus of this qualitative project. The child's siblings were also observed, when possible. However, the findings reported here mostly relate to the focus child. It is acknowledged that for this project the focus child is about two years older than when the 2007 quantitative study took place; therefore, the child's approach to watching TV may be slightly different from what was said in the 2007 questionnaires.

The researcher spent most of the time in the lounge with the child and his/her family. The researcher sat in a corner so as to be able to observe the child (e.g. body language and reactions on the face) while also being able to watch the content shown on the TV. General notes were taken and specific information was recorded on an observation sheet, which included the following information: type of programme watched; channel; family member deciding what to watch; programme content (e.g. prank, nudity/sexual material, violence and bad language); attention rating and reactions of the child; and reactions of other viewers. This observation sheet enabled the researcher to record all this information from 5:15pm until 9:15pm through five-minute slots.

If the child stopped watching TV during the evening, the researcher either talked with the child (e.g. if the child was still in the lounge) or with the parents (e.g. if the parents were in the lounge and the child had gone outside). In some cases when the child went to his/her bedroom to play, the researcher chatted with the child from the corridor. Generally, the child did not stay by him/herself much and rather enjoyed spending the evening with other family members. During the three evenings of observation, the researcher asked generic questions of the child and other family members. Specific questions were asked only during the fourth evening.

The last evening spent with the family was aimed at discussing key concepts around TV watching, as well as exploring what had been observed during the three observation evenings. The family discussion was in two stages: the initial stage required the participation of the child and his/her parents (siblings were welcome to participate), while the second stage only involved the parents, due to the topic of the questions (e.g. violence, sexual material/nudity and bad language). When the first part of the family discussion was finished, the child was asked to leave the room, so that the parents and the researcher could keep talking without the child feeling uncomfortable or bored by the discussion. A topic guide had been developed prior to the family discussion. Notes were taken during the discussion, which was also recorded digitally.

## Tools and techniques used for this project

Qualitative research uses both direct questioning and projective or non-direct tools to elicit information. Given the variety of ages of the children, it was thought that they would probably react differently to the observations and the family discussion. In order to provide the children with some information-gathering play, a selection of tools and techniques were used in addition to direct questioning.

The children aged six to 11 years old received a small soft toy that they kept after the project completion. This toy was intended to act as a friend who was going to watch TV with them. The children were encouraged to give the toy a name and keep it next to them when watching a programme. The researcher was then able to use the toy as a third-person questioning tool (e.g. what did teddy watch on TV today? Do you think teddy liked the programme?). Using third-person questioning enabled the child to distance themselves from their personal self, thus removing a potential barrier to the expression of their emotions, as it was the toy speaking rather than the child. However, in a few instances, the child personified the soft toy and "gave it a life": one child sat the toy on the couch so that the toy could watch TV while she went playing outside, and another child put her toy in bed because it was tired, thus the toy could not watch TV.

For older children, aged from 12 to 14 years, a video camera was more appropriate, as it enabled them to be in charge of the recording of their own thoughts and feelings. Older children were asked to do three video diaries, one each after an observation evening. They were provided with a short list of general questions, thus giving them a starting point without restricting them in any way. They had the freedom to talk as much as they wanted and express all sorts of thoughts, in the privacy of their bedroom/home. In some cases, the children did the video diaries with their siblings (e.g. sibling holding the camera while the child talks). With one family the video diaries were done with the researcher, as the child and siblings wanted to do it with the researcher. Although the depth and variety of information varied according to the children, the video diaries generally helped uncover some interesting thoughts that the children did not express during the family discussion.

During the observation evenings, an "emotion bear puzzle" or "emotion bear cards" were used. The bear puzzle contained six bears expressing distinct emotions on their faces, while the bear cards provided a larger selection of emotions. A selection of 15 emotions was taken that covered an extensive range of emotions (e.g. angry, upset, happy, shameful, placid and contented). The initial six bear puzzle, and later the 15 bear cards, were used with both the younger and older children when assessing how they felt during or after a programme they had just watched on TV. For instance, the children were asked to pick up a bear puzzle or a bear card that most represented how they felt after watching a programme. They were then asked to describe the bear and then to explain why they picked up that puzzle or card. This method was useful, as it helped the children express their emotions through a visual tool (thus grounding their thinking).

# Recruitment method, process and challenges

The sample for this qualitative project comprised only the families whose children had taken part in the 2007 quantitative study. The recruitment for this qualitative project was therefore limited to the 2007 database, and more specifically to the families located in the Auckland and Wellington regions (a total of 252 families). Not all of these 252 families were contacted for this project, as in 2007 a total of 24 families had indicated that they did not want to take part in further research about audio-visual media. A total of 228 families, listed as potential participants, were contacted and a total of 14 families were recruited to take part in this project.

| Sample size (from the 2007 quantitative study) | |
| --- | --- |
| Initial nationwide sample size | 604 |
| Families in the Auckland and Wellington regions | 252 |
| Families who accepted to participate in further research | 228 |
| Families who refused to participate in further research | 24 |

This project required that the families come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Another requirement was to have a mix of genders for the focus children. Additionally, children had to be aged between six and 14 years old. A few children, whose age tended towards the upper bracket (14 years old) in 2007, could therefore not be recontacted in 2008, as they would have been older than 14 years of age at the time of the project.

The children who took part in the project had to watch a reasonable amount of TV every day, including in the evening. These children generally tended to watch various children's programmes or series after school, then the news/current affairs followed by some soaps (e.g. *Shortland Street*), finishing the evening with movies, documentaries or reality TV programmes.

Given the long period of fieldwork, the recruitment of families had to be staggered over three months. Families were contacted a number of times in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the fieldwork (e.g. finding suitable days for them and the researcher and organising the logistics).

Due to changes in their circumstances or availability, some families cancelled their participation in the project. New replacement families had to be contacted instead. In order to acknowledge the families' involvement in the project, each family was given a thank-you gift of $300 upon completion of the observations and discussion.

## Involvement of the families during the project

The participation of 14 families was required for the successful completion of the project. Each family had to agree to open their home for several hours per evening for four evenings. The families were reassured that the researcher visiting them would be as inconspicuous as possible and were also encouraged to keep to their routine and ignore the researcher. However, none of the families could completely disregard the research process that was taking place and fully ignore the presence of the researcher. The families' involvement in the project was kept to a minimum during the first three evenings of observation. The families' participation was fully required on the fourth evening when the researcher conducted the discussion. In view of the level of involvement required, some families who had initially considered participating in the project later declined and replacement families had to be found.

However, the duration of the project for each family also proved beneficial. The researchers were able to corroborate situations and check the accuracy of their data over the evenings. The duration of the project also meant that the family members were able to relax in the presence of the researcher and did not seem to alter their routine much to accommodate (or 'allow for') the project. The first evening was generally more formal than the others, as family members and researcher had to get used to each other. Subsequent evenings were "business as usual" for everyone involved in the project, which enabled the researchers to gather meaningful and insightful information.

The researchers visited these 14 families over the course of four evenings. The families were asked to go about their normal tasks and pretend that the researchers were not present in their homes. The researchers tried to be as inconspicuous as possible. The researchers managed to build rapport with the children and their family. Family members generally felt relaxed with the researcher's presence. Watching TV is a social activity and the children did not appear to mind watching various programmes with the researcher.

## Fieldwork timing

The project started in December 2008 when two pilot studies were conducted (one in Auckland and one in Wellington). The remaining 12 families took part in the project from January to April 2009 (eight families in Auckland and four in Wellington).

The pilot study took place before the Christmas holidays. The children who took part in the project at that time were not very busy at school, as it was near the end of the academic year. They had very little homework to do (if at all) and had a lot of free time to socialise with their friends and do activities outside of school (e.g. ball games in the afternoon and evening, as longer daylight enabled this). Given that it was summer time and nearing the school holidays, the children may have had more opportunities to be outdoors and play rather than watch TV indoors.

January and February marked the beginning of a new academic year for the children who took part in the project at that time. Some were still in holiday mode and had not yet gone back into their normal school time routine, whereas the children who took part in the project in the later months seemed to have adopted a more school work-focused routine.

## Sample framework

The following tables show the breakdown of location and ethnicity.

| Location of families | |
| --- | --- |
| Auckland | 9 families |
| Wellington | 5 families |
| Total | 14 families |

| Ethnicity of families | |
|---|---|
| Māori | 3 |
| Indian | 3 |
| New Zealand European/Pakeha | 2 |
| Pasifika peoples | 2 |
| Māori/European | 1 |
| Māori/Pasifika peoples | 1 |
| Other (African and South-East Asian) | 2 |
| Total | 14 |

These 14 families are mostly two-parent households, where both parents tend to work (either full-time or part-time). These families range from low to high income. Some families own their home, while others rent. Some live in relatively safe and high socio-economic neighbourhood, while others live in somewhat unsafe and lower socio-economic neighbourhoods.

Each of these families has from two to eight children; however, not all the children live in the household on a full-time, permanent basis. The children who took part in the project ranged from six to 14 years of age. Most of them have older siblings.

| Age of the focus child | |
|---|---|
| 6 years old | 1 child |
| 9 years old | 2 children |
| 10 years old | 2 children |
| 11 years old | 2 children |
| 12 years old | 4 children |
| 13 years old | 1 child |
| 14 years old | 2 children |
| Total | 14 children |

| Gender of the focus child | |
|---|---|
| Female | 8 children |
| Male | 6 children |
| Total | 14 children |

| Number of siblings of the focus child* | |
|---|---|
| Focus child has 1 sibling only | 5 children |
| Focus child has 2 siblings | 4 children |
| Focus child has 3 siblings | 1 child |
| Focus child has 4 siblings | 2 children |
| Focus child has 5 siblings or more | 2 children |
| Total | 14 children |

* excluding the focus child

| Older and/or younger siblings of the focus child | |
|---|---|
| Focus child has only older siblings | 8 children |
| Focus child has only younger siblings | 3 children |
| Focus child has both | 3 children |
| Total | 14 children |

These 14 children do not go to bed at the same time during the week and during the weekend – the main factor being if the children have to go to school the next day.

| Bedtime of the focus child (week days only*) | |
|---|---|
| Before 8:30pm (school days) | 6 children |
| After 8:30pm (school days) | 8 children |
| Total | 14 children |

  * All children went to bed after 8:30pm during the weekend.

In order to preserve the anonymity of these families and that of their children, a pseudonym has been used for each of the 14 children. These pseudonyms do not necessarily reflect the actual ethno-cultural background of the children. However, they do reflect the children's gender. Appendix II briefly presents these 14 children.

# APPENDIX II. MEET THE CHILDREN

## Three families with younger children (six to nine)

**Amy** is six and lives with her parents, two older sisters (14 and 15), and a three-year-old brother. The older girls are mature and look after Amy and their brother. Both parents work full-time. When Amy comes home from school each day, she does her homework if she has any and watches TV. Sometimes she plays with her siblings outside, but she mostly stays indoors. She eats dinner at the coffee table in front of TV. Later, she has her shower, then she may play in her bedroom or come back to the lounge to watch TV until her bedtime.

**Cameron** is nine. He has a seven-year-old sister and four-year-old brother. Cameron's father works full-time, while his mother stays home to care for the household. Depending on the weather, Cameron may play soccer with his friends after school or stay indoors and watch TV. Cameron's after-school activities also depend on his mother's schedule (e.g. whether she needs some "time out"). The three children often watch TV while their mum cooks dinner. The family then eats together in the dining room, and the TV is turned off. After dinner Cameron and his siblings help around the house. The TV stays off while Cameron is doing his homework (which takes about 20 minutes). After that, it's turned on and he can watch until his bedtime – 8pm on school nights, 8:30pm at the weekend.

**Brooke** is nine and has an 11-year-old brother. She is mature, quiet and obedient. She likes school, and plays soccer with her friends. After school, she watches her favourite TV shows until her mum comes home from work and helps her with her homework. Her father works very long hours. When homework is finished, Brooke watches TV or plays in her bedroom until dinner is ready. The whole family eats in front of the TV. After dinner, the children can either watch until their bedtime or play in their room. The family came to New Zealand several years ago and enjoys living here.

## Eight families with mid-aged children (ten to 12)

**Gemma** is a quiet 11 year-old with sisters of 10 and nearly one). She is a responsible girl who likes looking after her baby sister. She really enjoys outdoors activities, especially netball. She plays a lot with her neighbourhood friends – they're a tight-knit group who come and go from each other's houses. She watches TV intermittently. Gemma's mum stays at home to raise the children while her dad works outside the home.

**Michael** is a 12 year-old who likes school and enjoys studying. He's the second oldest of five boys – his brothers are 21, ten, eight and four. He gets on well with his siblings and his parents. His is a very supportive, loving environment with strong family values. He is a keen rugby player and spends a lot of time discussing tactics with his dad, who coaches the junior team. He and his siblings watch TV intermittently. At the weekend he enjoys watching DVDs with his family. His dad is currently looking for work, while mum works full-time.

**Carlos** is 10. He and his mother, father and 14-year-old sister came to New Zealand several years ago. He's a busy boy, who spends most of his free time after school taking part in various activities. He recently earned his black belt in karate. When he's home, he likes watching TV. Usually, he and his sister eat dinner in front of the TV. He's clear about the sorts of programmes he likes and has memorised the TV schedule – for every night he's home after karate practice, he knows what's on and when. Some evenings, he sits in front of the TV with the family laptop, doing his homework while watching. His bedtime is relatively flexible, usually after 9pm, because of his extra-curricular activities. Both Carlos' parents work full-time outside the house.

**Natasha** is a shy 10 year-old who has six siblings – seven, nine, 12, 14, 16 and 17. She enjoys playing with them, and socialising with friends. She usually watches TV with some of her siblings, but will sometimes go to her bedroom to watch. Her bedtime is flexible around 9pm (later during the weekend), although she switches off TV at 8:30pm. Her parents are both employed.

**Ana** is 12 years old and the youngest of five children. Her 23-year-old brother and 19-year-old sister left home a few years ago, and she lives with her 15-year-old brother, 14-year-old sister, her parents and three relatives. She and her sister get on well and share a lot of secrets. Ana is mildly interested in school. When she comes home in the afternoon, she immediately switches on the TV and stays there until she has to go to bed. She watches all sorts of programmes non-stop, some of them with her sister and/or mother, at the same time sending texts to her school friends.

**Justin** is a quiet but active 12 year-old, who loves playing rugby, cricket and other sports, weather permitting. His two older brothers – 18 and 21 – are students and live away from home. Justin's parents work full-time, but spend a lot of time with him, especially at the weekends. When Justin comes home from school, he usually chills out in front of the TV before doing his homework. Most evenings, he eats dinner in front of the TV and then plays computer games or watches a programme he likes until bedtime.

**Tayla** is a vivacious 11 year-old with a nine-year-old brother and three-year-old sister. She likes watching TV after school, but in between watching her favourite cartoons, she usually reads, practises the piano, plays outside with her siblings or talks with her mother in the kitchen. The family eats dinner together in the dining room with the TV turned off. After dinner Tayla watches more TV, and may read a book at the same time. Sometimes she prefers playing in her room. Tayla and her siblings stop watching TV when they go to bed around 8:15pm on week nights. Both Tayla's parents are in full-time employment, but her father is based overseas.

**Henry** is a mischievous, good-natured 12-year-old. He doesn't really like school, and would rather be outdoors playing rugby and hanging out with his 14-year-old sister. They live with their mother in a small flat. Henry's other siblings have left home – he is the youngest of eight. Like Henry, his mother is a student, but she studies at the tertiary level and will soon graduate. When Henry comes home from school, he may watch TV or play outside. He's very active and needs to keep busy. He watches TV intermittently until his bedtime.

## Three families with older children (13 and 14)

**Jasmine** is 14 and has a 16-year-old brother. She would rather read than watch TV. The TV is switched off while the children do their homework, but they watch when they're finished – usually cartoons and series. Jasmine also helps her mother around the house. She goes to bed at 9:30pm during the week and an hour later at the weekend. The children live with their mother and a couple of relatives. Jasmine's mum came to New Zealand several years ago. She works full-time during the week and manages her own business during the weekend.

**Molly**'s older sister lives with and looks after Molly, who is 14. Her sister has two children of her own, aged three and six months. She stays home to look after them during the day, and Molly helps care for them after school. The TV is on most of the time, and they eat dinner in front of it, sitting on the floor and sharing the food. Molly tends to like the shows her older sister likes so they rarely argue about what to watch. Molly tends to go to bed around 9pm. At the weekend, she and her family watch DVDs.

**Kevin** is a 13 year-old who enjoys reading, playing outside in good weather and playing with his 18-year-old brother on the XBox at the weekend. Kevin has a strict daily routine. He does his homework with the TV off; he stops watching in the early evening and goes to bed at 8:30pm on a school day. At the weekend, the family watches DVDs and the children's bedtime is a bit later. Kevin's parents came to New Zealand about 15 years ago. They want to pass on their culture to their children at the same as allowing them to integrate into New Zealand society. The family's dual cultural heritage means that, sometimes, family members may hold conflicting values, which creates tension. Kevin's parents are in full-time employment.

# APPENDIX III. VIDEO DIARY QUESTIONS

Thanks for doing a video diary for us. This camera is for you to use over the next three nights. At the end of each night, record your thoughts and feelings about what you've seen on TV that night. There are absolutely no right or wrong answers, we're just interested in your thoughts and opinions about what you've seen.

You can say as much as you like.


Some things you might like to talk about are:

- What did you see on TV tonight that you liked?

- What did you like about it?

- What did you see on TV tonight that you didn't like?

- What did you not like about it?

- If you could decide what to show children on TV, what programmes would you choose?

- In that case, at what time would you screen these programmes on TV?


Have fun with it.

# APPENDIX IV. PROJECT CHILDREN'S QUALITATIVE: NIGHT FOUR DISCUSSION GUIDE

*Note: Much of the discussion will need to be based on what the researcher observed in the previous three nights.*
*Note: Night Four starts with more observation before moving on to the family discussion.*

## 1. Introduction
START THE DISCUSSION WITH PARENTS AND CHILD PRESENT. OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS CAN ALSO PARTICIPATE IF THEY WISH.

Tonight we're going to talk about some of the TV programmes that we've seen and its content

Check okay to record

## 2. Media Forms in the Home
Just to start off, I have a list of things that some people have in their homes and other people don't have. Which of the following do you have in your home? READ OUT: TV, radio, computer, cellphone, video/DVD, device that decodes TV channels, MP3 player, ipod, iRiver, games console, hand held console games, digital camera, camcorder.

Probe:

- Who uses the (NAME DEVICE THEY HAVE IDENTIFIED AS HAVING)?
- Where in the house is the (NAME DEVICE THEY HAVE IDENTIFIED AS HAVING)?
- What is the purpose of the (NAME DEVICE THEY HAVE IDENTIFIED AS HAVING) - e.g. entertainment, educational?
- Who made the decision to buy (NAME DEVICE THEY HAVE IDENTIFIED AS HAVING)?
- What input, if any, do the children have in the decision?

## 3. TV Viewing Decision Making
How do you and your family make decisions around what is watched on TV?

Probe:

- Who makes the decisions about what is watched?
- SITUATIONAL: What role does the time of day or who is in the room play in terms of what is watched and what is not watched?
- How is the decision made in the end?
- Who has the final say?
- What criteria are used to make the decision about what is watched – classification, child seniority, parental decision, appropriateness, language level?

What happens when there is a programme or content in a programme that you feel is not so good for CHILD'S NAME to watch?

Probe:

- What do you do?
- Who is the decision maker?
- What criteria are used to ascertain appropriateness?

## 4. Rules and Restrictions

Generally, what concerns you most about TV watching in your home? Explain.

What are some of the restrictions and/or rules you may have in your household for TV watching?

Probe

- What are the rules?
- How were these rules formed?
- Who decides on the rules?
- Why are there rules in place?
- How are rules enforced?
- What happens when rules are broken?

*If no rules*

Probe

- For what reasons do you not have or not need rules about what is seen?

Has there been a time when CHILD'S NAME has noticed something on TV that has either upset him/her, and/or you didn't approve of its content?

Probe

- What was it?
- What upset CHILD'S NAME about it?
- What was your response? E.g. TV turned off, children sent out of room
- Were there any longer term responses – e.g. nightmares, behaviour change
- What other things do you imagine CHILD'S NAME would be upset by?

Is there a difference between what you would view as inappropriate TV material for children and what others who you know view as inappropriate? In what ways?

Probe:

- Friends
- Peers
- Teachers
- Grandparents
- Family

REST OF INTERVIEW TO TAKE PLACE WITH PARENTS ONLY

## 5. What Counts as Un/Acceptable Viewing

Just thinking about what the child/ren watches...
How would you describe some of the programmes that child watches

Probe:

- How would you describe the content of some of these programmes?
- How appropriate or not do you feel the programme is for children?
- What helps you decide whether something is appropriate or not? – e.g. broadcasting standards/ classification, peers, children, advertising?
- What, if any, concerns do you have about what CHILD watches?

What makes up a good/not so good TV programme from your point of view for children like CHILD'S NAME? Can you give me examples?

Probe

Examples of good/not so good programmes

- At what point does language become no longer acceptable?
- At what level does violence become not acceptable?
- At what point does something get too scary for your child?
- What is the difference in terms of how acceptable something is when it is actually seen to take place compared to something being reported as having happened? So, as an example, actually seeing someone being shot compared with being told someone was shot?

Probe

- Animated violence vs real violence
- Verbal violence
- Does seeing blood matter
- Fictional violence
- Violence in the Past (historical) vs current violence (today)

To help the Broadcasting Standards Authority gain a sense about what parents think is inappropriate sexual content for children what in your view is un/acceptable?

Probe

- Degree of acceptability – hugging, kissing, sexual dancing on music clips, sexual talk/references

Just wanting now to focus on the News…

- Do you feel it is a good thing or a not so good thing for CHILD'S NAME to see the news? How come?
- Do you have concerns about CHILD'S NAME seeing the news? How come?

Probe

News clips that discuss violence e.g. bombing, murders, shooting, stealing etc etc

*Shortland Street*

*Shortland Street* is a very popular programme. What are your views about Shortland Street and the content for children?

Probe

- In/appropriate viewing
- Violence- real violence, verbal violence
- Sexual classification – what counts as too much – kissing, hugging, sexual talk.

## 6. Past 8:30pm Viewing

Thinking now about TV viewing past 8.30pm…
Can you describe to me any TV programmes after 8.30pm that you think are suitable for children to see?
Probe

- What makes them suitable?
- What is the purpose of the programme e.g. entertainment, educational?
- Would it be suitable without an adult present or would it need adult supervision? How come?
- Can you describe to me any TV programmes after 8.30pm that you feel are inappropriate for children to view. How come?

Probe
- What makes them inappropriate?
- How would you feel if CHILD'S NAME saw this programme or bits of its content? How come?
- Are there any programmes that are PGR classified that you think are not okay for children to view even when they are with an adult?
- Which programmes?
- What are they about?
- What makes them inappropriate for children?

Are there programmes that are AO classified that you think are okay for children?
Probe:
- Which programmes?
- What are they about?
- For what reasons do feel they are okay?

## 7. Time Shifting

Tell me about the types of programmes that your family tends to record for viewing at another time?
Probe:
- Who are the programmes recorded for?
- What programmes are recorded? For what reasons are these programmes recorded?
- When do you/person watch what is recorded?

Specifically, are there programmes classified as Adult Only (AO) that are recorded for CHILD to view at other times.
Probe:
- Which programmes?
- How would you describe the content?
- How does CHILD'S NAME feel about the programme?

Are there programmes that you think should have a higher classification rating (restricted viewing recommendation) or aired later than what they are? Discuss
- Probe
- Which programmes?
- What are they about?
- What is it about this programme that you feel it should be rated higher or aired later?

## 8. Observation Questions

END BY PROBING ANY RELEVANT OBSERVATIONS FROM PREVIOUS NIGHTS.
From what I've seen over the last few nights your family seems to watch x,y, and z., or your family seems to do x,y and Z.
PROBES WILL NEED TO BE RELEVANT TO WHAT YOU HAVE OBSERVED

Anything else to say / add?
Thank & close. Gift.