The Importance of Classifications and Age Restrictions.

Classification systems

In Australia, the same classification system is used for TV, movies and video/computer games. These classifications are based around age and what content, e.g. violence, language and sexual themes, is appropriate for different age groups. These classifications are G, PG, M15+, MA15+ and R18+. There is more to determining what is suitable for your child than just checking the classification. For example, a game which is rated M15+ is recommended only for people over the age of 15 whereas MA15+ is restricted to only those people aged 15 years or older; what affects the classification is what makes up the game. It is then necessary to look at what the content of that game is, and then assess whether it is appropriate for your child to view.

Minimum ages on Internet sites

The majority of social media websites are restricted to users aged 13 years and above. Facebook and YouTube require users to confirm that they are 13 or older in order to sign up. This age restriction is there because these sites require a level of maturity to use them safely and responsibly. If a child has lied about their age in order to signup to one of these accounts, they are sending the wrong message to other internet users. For instance, if a 12 year old lies about their age and pretends to be 18 years old to join Facebook, they could receive communications of an adult nature from other users, or receive adult-oriented targeted advertisements for dating websites or alcohol. Just because they are 13, however, doesn't mean it is appropriate for them to join these sites. Parents need to discuss with their children what is involved in joining these sites and whether their children are mature and responsible enough to use them safely.

Look at the games your child plays

Check the classifications on the games your child is playing at home and make sure they are age appropriate.

Speak to your child about what games they play at friends and relatives houses and make sure that they are also age-appropriate. Don't just take your child's word on what the classification is; do your own research as well. Find out what is involved in the game; do you have to solve problems or kill people? Talk to your child about how they feel during and after the game and whether or not playing the game is impacting on other areas of their life.

Do your own research

Find out more about the TV shows and movies your child wants to watch. There are a number of websites which provide reviews of TV shows, movies and games from a child-protection perspective.

www.youngmedia.org.au

www.commonsensemedia.org

Learn more about the content of the film, show or game and decide whether it's appropriate for your child. As many of these can be viewed online or downloaded, it's important to explain to your child why you don't want them to watch the media form, not just telling them they can't watch it.

What can parents do?- Talk to your child about what they do online.

If they are using sites which aren't age appropriate, discuss with them the reasons why age restrictions are in place. There are mechanisms for reporting underage users to social networking sites and having their profiles removed. However, this may drive their usage underground and your child might simply start up a new account and not let you know. Discuss with your child what you are going to do about their use of these sites: an approach might be that you have the log-in details to their account and monitor their usage very closely .

Get involved!

Watch TV and movies, and play video games with your child. Get a better idea of what interests them and why. Discuss with them what you've just seen: let them know how it made you feel, explain if it was realistic and what they should do if what happened on the screen happens to them etc. Make viewing media a learning experience for your child.