

## UNDERSTANDING THE RATING SYSTEMS

Rating systems can be helpful when trying to choose appropriate movies, but with many different systems in use in Canada, they can also be very confusing. To help make sense of the differences, here's an overview of all the systems currently in use.

### MOVIES FOR THEATRICAL RELEASE

Before feature films are released for viewing in Canadian theatres, they're rated by provincial and territorial classification boards. These ratings can vary from one jurisdiction to another.

In Ontario, instead of displaying the traditional film ratings of G, PG, PG-13, 14A, 18A, and R, film exhibitors are required to provide information about what is in the films they are showing. These still include a recommended age at which it's appropriate to view the film, but also more specific information such as violence or sexual content, coarse language or drug, alcohol or tobacco use. Older films with ratings given to them before 2021 will still display their rating on DVDs or on digital rentals instead of the above information.

### STREAMING SERVICES: NETFLIX, CRAVE, AMAZON PRIME, ETC.

Popular streaming services such as Netflix, Crave and Apple+, fall outside provincial jurisdiction and are not subject to the same film classification requirements seen above. The ratings of programs on these streaming services that are becoming the predominant way the public views media content, have no universal application of ratings, as "each company compiles ratings from sources of their own choosing".

Due to the fact that each streaming service follows a different set of rules that they have decided, it can get very confusing, therefore each has to be looked at separately to comprehend:

**Netflix:** Ratings are visible in the description and onscreen. The following ratings are used by Netflix in Canada:

Kids: TV-Y, TV-Y7, G, TV-G, PG, TV-PG

Teen: PG-13, TV-14

Adult: R, TV-MA, NC-17

**Disney +:** Uses the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rating system for their content and also posts specific content notices.

**Amazon Prime:** Depending on the province, will rate content using either ratings from the *Canadian Home Video Rating System*, the *Régie du cinéma*, or the *Canadian Broadcast Standards Council*.

**Crave:** Uses a rating system developed by The Action Group of Violence on Television. This includes: E (Exempt), C (Children), C8 (Children over 8), G (General), PG (Parental Guidance), 14+ and 18+. Crave also uses specific content indicators to notify viewers if a program contains violence (V), mature language (L), sex (S), nudity (N) or mature themes (M).

## WATCHING MEDIA ON THE INTERNET

Media posted on the Internet does not require licensing from Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). **YouTube** primarily relies on their uploaders to be transparent with rating their own content through their own tagging process, which provides specific elements to tag. There is no age-rated classification as content is rated by maturity with three levels given for its content: none, mild, and restricted 18+. For this reason, MediaSmarts recommends that parents subscribe to trusted channels such as TVO or the National Film Board, use YouTube's Playlist function to curate a list of approved videos for young children, and turn on Restricted Mode. See our tip sheet on *Using Parental Controls* to learn more: <https://mediasmarts.ca/using-parental-controls-tip-sheet>

## PROBLEMS WITH MOVIE RATINGS

Ratings do not always accurately reflect the content of a movie, or its appropriateness for certain ages. Even movies rated Family (F) or General (G) are not always suitable for young kids.

Because there's a dearth of F- or G-rated movies, many parents opt for movies rated PG (Parental Guidance) to show young children. The problem is, many PG movies contain explicit language, sexual content and violence.

For Canadians, one of the biggest problems is that the classification systems often contradict each other. For example, some films for theatrical release are rated R by the MPAA and several Canadian film classification boards. But when those movies are released on video, often the *Canadian Rating System for Home Videos*, which averages all the provincial and territorial ratings, will give them an 18A and even 14A rating (suitable for people 14 and older). Parents should be aware that a 14A rating doesn't necessarily mean that a film is appropriate for 14-year-olds, or even older teens.

The film classification system rolled out in Ontario in 2021 provides parents with more information, but also requires more attention on the part of parents as there is not always a recommended age. Whichever province you live in, getting information about the content of a film is essential. When in doubt, you can talk to other people who've seen it, read newspaper and media reviews, use one of the many Internet movie review sites for parents, or watch the movie yourself first - so you'll know what you're getting.