



Talk Back!

How To Take Action On Media Issues

GUIDE



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One of the most important skills for digital and media literacy is knowing how to talk back to media companies when something bothers you.

This TALK BACK! guide will introduce you to the organizations that oversee Canadian media, the codes that cover children and other important issues, and steps you can take to voice your concerns.

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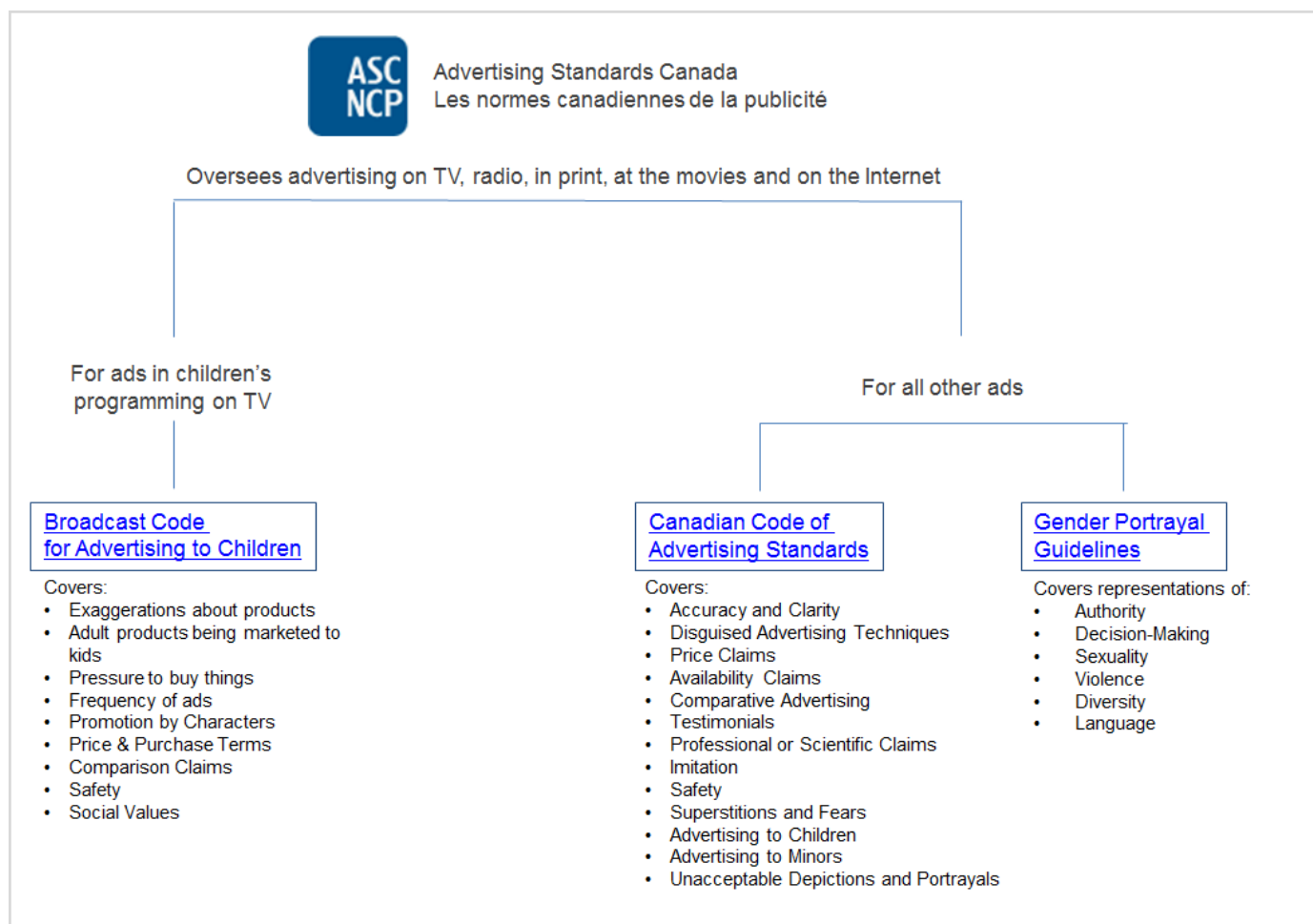
Advertising

In Canada, there are rules for advertising to children under the age of 12. (They don't apply in Quebec where it is against the law to advertise to children under age 13.)

[Advertising Standards Canada](#) (ASC) is the industry association that manages all of the advertising codes and deals with complaints from the public.

- On TV, ads in children's programming fall under the [Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children](#). The Code does not cover ads from U.S. stations, but Canadian broadcasters have to follow it.
- All other types of ads (including ones directed at kids) are covered by the [Canadian Code of Advertising Standards](#) and the [Gender Portrayal Guidelines](#).

It's a good idea to take a few minutes to go over these codes – especially if you are planning on making an official complaint – so you can explain why you think an ad is breaking rules.



If there's a print ad that you're concerned about:

Contact the magazine or newspaper *and* the company that owns it.

If it's a Canadian publication, also contact [ASC](#).

- Whether you do this online or by mail be sure to include the name and date of the publication and a copy of the ad.

If it's a commercial on TV or radio:

- Contact the TV or radio station.
- You can also file a complaint online to [ASC](#) or the [Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission](#) (CRTC) which requires that TV services follow the [Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children](#) as part of their broadcast licences.
- For either TV or radio, you will need to tell them: the station that you saw or heard it on, the date and approximate time, the product being advertised, and why you think it's breaking the rules.

For online ads:

- Take a screenshot of the ad as it appears on the webpage, which you can then print out and attach to an email: see www.take-a-screenshot.org for information on how to do this in different browsers and devices.
- Contact the company that owns the website.
- If it's a Canadian-owned website, also contact [ASC](#).
- You will want to tell them the date you saw the ad, the website where you saw it and include a printout or screen grab of the ad.



Special issues:

Adult ads during kids' programming

Sometimes ads for adult or teen-rated films may appear during children's movies or TV shows. When this happens, you can:

- Complain to the theatre management if this happens at the movies.
- For TV shows, contact the TV station. Also send your comments to [ASC](#) and the [Canadian Broadcast Standards Council](#) (CBSC) using their online complaint forms. The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council generally doesn't deal with advertising, but they do monitor what's called the *Watershed* period for programming – between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. – when materials only intended for adult audiences are not allowed to be broadcasted.

Toys based on adult entertainment

It can also be concerning when toys based on adult programming, such as mature or adult-rated movies or video games, are marketed to kids:







- If you see the ad on TV, contact the TV station.
- Send your comments to [ASC](#) and the [CBSC](#).
- If the ad is in a magazine or newspaper, contact the publication directly and the company that owns it. If it's a Canadian publication, also contact [ASC](#).
- For websites, contact the website directly.
- If it's a Canadian website, you can file a complaint on the [ASC](#) website.
- Check your local toy store to see if it sells these kinds of toys. If they do, send a letter to the store manager and the toy company to protest this practice.
- Use social media to speak out to the company (i.e. post on their Facebook page or tweet at them).
- Boycott stores where these kinds of toys are sold.

Television

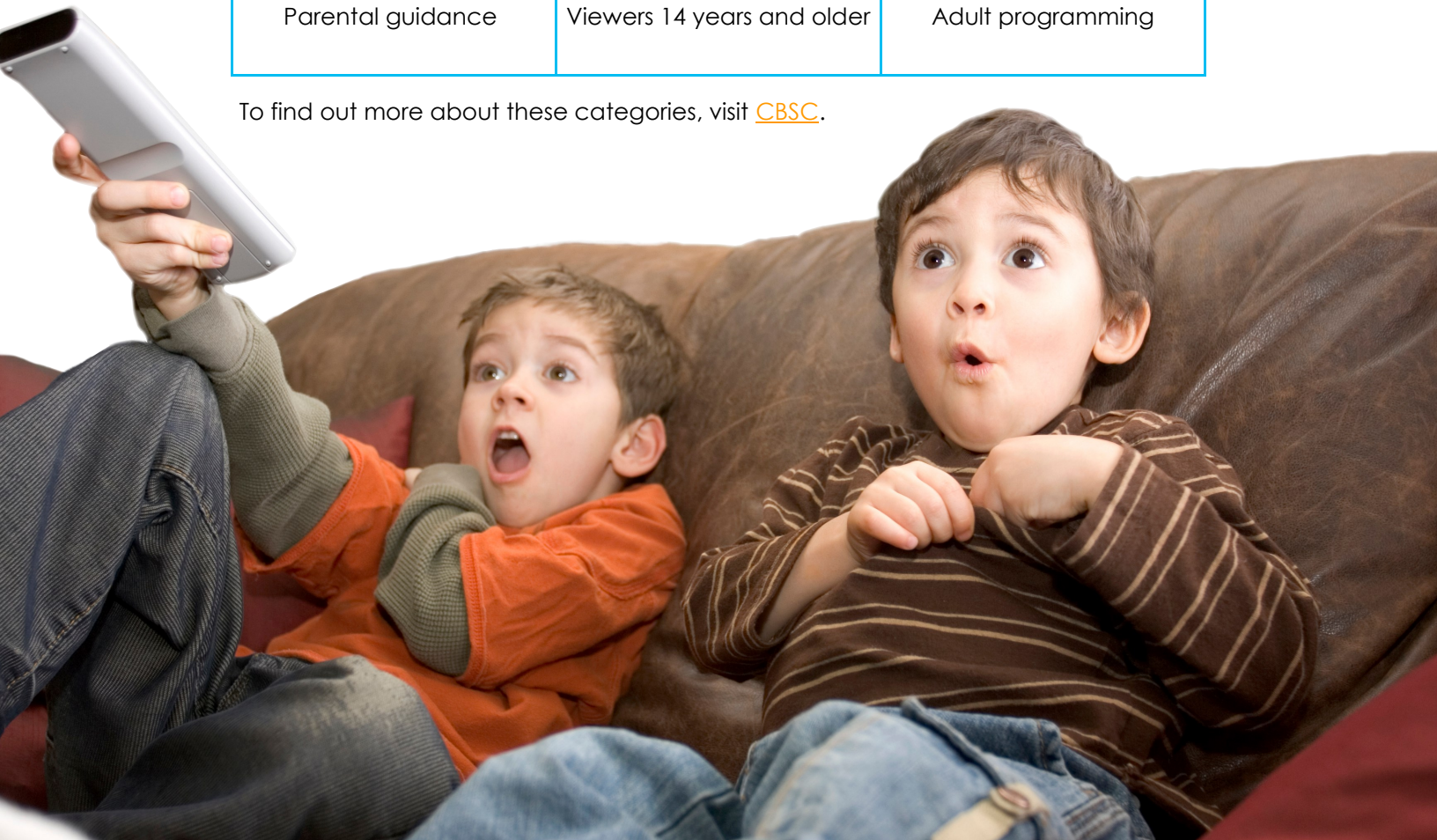
In Canada, broadcasters, cable companies and specialty channels have voluntary codes of conduct on issues such as violence, gender representation, ethics, and advertising to children.

The Canadian television industry has also developed a TV classification system where Canadian TV services must classify certain Canadian or foreign programming through icons that appear in the top left-hand corner of the screen at the start of each program. (French-language broadcasters and American stations that broadcast in Canada use different ratings systems.)

The English classification categories are:

E = Exempt		
 Children	 Children eight years and older	 General programming, suitable for all audiences
 Parental guidance	 Viewers 14 years and older	 Adult programming

To find out more about these categories, visit CBSC.



Canadian Broadcasting Codes

The [Canadian Association of Broadcasters](#) (CAB) developed broadcasting codes as guidelines for radio and TV stations in response to public concern and demand. These codes are managed by the [Canadian Broadcasting Standards Council](#) (CBSC), which responds to any complaint.



While these codes are voluntary, the [CRTC](#) – which regulates Canadian broadcasters – requires that TV services follow the [Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming](#), the [Equitable Portrayal Code](#) and the [Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children](#) as a condition of their licence (see the Advertising section for details on this code).

- If you want to make a complaint about something you see on TV, send a letter or an email to the station or network.
- If you're not satisfied with their response, submit a complaint to the [CBSC](#) and the [CRTC](#).
- Complaints about cable or satellite television service (signal interruptions, billing errors, etc.) should be made to the [Commission for Complaints on Telecommunications Services](#).

Video subscription streaming services such as Netflix, Shomi and CraveTV do not fall under the CRTC's mandate. If you have complaints about content on these services, feel free to reach out to the companies themselves.

Video Games

It's important for parents to know what the ratings mean on the video games their kids play.








The [Entertainment Software Rating Board](#) (ESRB) has developed a rating system for computer, Internet, and video games that is used by most games sold in North America.

ESRB ratings have three parts: rating symbols that suggest ages for the game, content descriptors of things in a game that may impact its rating and/or be of interest or concern, and more detailed rating summaries that can be read on the ESRB website.

If you are concerned about the rating of a video game, contact the [ESRB](#) or the [Entertainment Software Association of Canada](#) (ESAC). The ESAC represents the Canadian video and computer game industry.

To express concerns about content in a video game, contact:

- The video game manufacturer - most have toll-free numbers.
- The [Film Classification Board](#) for your province or territory.
- Your local Member of Parliament.

 ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD THE ESRB RATING SYSTEM						
 EARLY CHILDHOOD	 EVERYONE	 EVERYONE 10+	 TEEN	 MATURE 17+	 ADULTS ONLY 18+	INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS Shares Info Shares Location Users Interact Digital Purchases Unrestricted Internet
Early Childhood Suitable for ages 3 and older. No inappropriate content.	Everyone Suitable for ages six and older. May contain minimal violence, comic mischief and/or mild language.	Everyone 10+ Suitable for ages 10 and older. May contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.	Teen (T) Suitable for ages 13 and older. May contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.	Mature (M) Suitable for ages 17 and older. May contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language.	Adults Only (AO) Suitable only for adults. May include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Not intended for persons under the age of 18.	Interactive Elements Lets you know about any interactive features of games or apps that you should be aware of.

You may have concerns with advertisements that promote video games. For example, if an adult game is being targeted at kids, or if an ad is offensive, you can submit a complaint on the [ESRB](#) or [ASC](#) websites.

Special issues:

Questions or complaints about payments made to game companies – such as in-game purchases – should be made to the operator of the app store where you (or your child) bought or downloaded the game:

- For iOS devices such as iPods, go to the [Apple Support](#) page and select Apps and Software, then iOS Apps, then App Store/iTunes Store and Music.
- For Google Play, contact [Google Play support](#).
- Amazon does not currently provide refunds for unauthorized purchases made by children.

In all cases, make sure you have a complete record of the charges made. Records should either be in the email account that was used to open the app store account, in the app store's purchase history, or both.

These can help you avoid unexpected charges:

- Buy your child a gift card to use for online purchases instead of using a credit card.
- Set your device to require a password each time a purchase is made:
 - For iOS devices, launch the **Settings** app, then tap **General** → **Restrictions** → **Enable Restrictions**. Pick a new password, tap **Require Password** in the Allowed Content section and then tap **Immediately**.
 - For Android devices, open **Google Play Store**, tap the **Menu** icon and then **Settings**, tap **Require Authentication for Purchases**.
 - For Amazon devices, open **Amazon Appstore**, tap **Settings** and then **Parental Controls**, select **Enable Parental Controls** and enter your password.

Music

To make a complaint or comment about inappropriate content in music or in a music video, you can contact:

- The store or website carrying the product.
- The producers of the recorded music or music video.
- If the song or music video was broadcast on a Canadian radio or TV station, you can contact the [CRTC](#).
- If you think the music or music video violates the [Canadian broadcast codes](#) for ethics, sex-role portrayal and violence, you can also contact the [CBSC](#).
- If the music was streamed or downloaded from the Internet, contact the website or service where you found it. Some sites like YouTube let you “flag” offensive videos – but you must have a YouTube account to do this.
 - To find out more, see <https://support.google.com/youtube/topic/2803138?hl=en&rd=1>.

Questions or complaints about payments made to online music stores should be made to the operator of the app store where you (or your child) bought or downloaded it:

- For iOS devices such as iPods, go to the [Apple Support](#) page and select Apps and Software, then iOS Apps, then App Store/iTunes Store and Music.
- For Google Play, contact [Google Play support](#).
- Amazon does not currently provide refunds for unauthorized purchases by children.

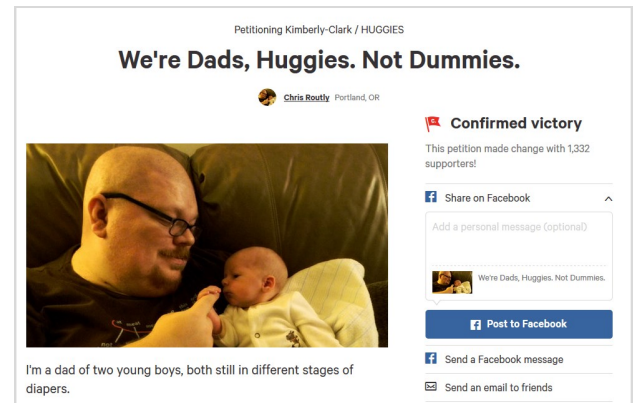
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Movies

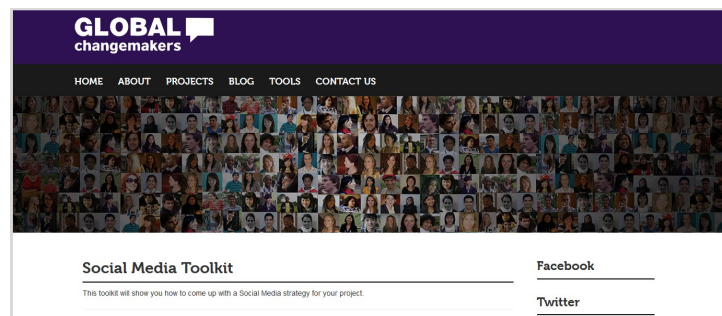
- To comment on or complain about the content of a movie, contact the film company and distributor.
- Each province has its own legislation for who is allowed to be in the theatre with or without an adult, so if you are concerned about the rating of a movie being shown, contact the film classification board for your province or territory.
- Concerns about ads for movies on Canadian TV or radio should be directed to [CBSC](#) or [ASC](#).

Using Social Media to Speak Out

Don't underestimate the power of social media for uniting parents around issues. Online campaigns have been highly successful in getting a response from the industry. For example: a social media campaign and online petition conducted by Change.org in reaction to Huggies ads that implied that fathers didn't know how to change diapers, led the company to change their advertising – and seems to have indirectly led to more positive portrayals of fathers in advertising overall as well.

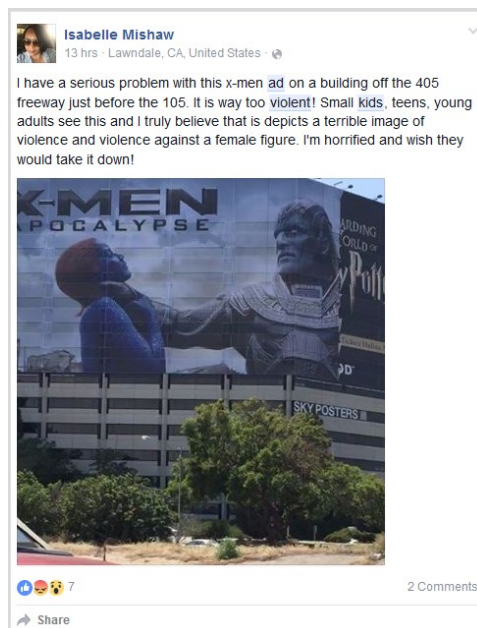


Using social media effectively to promote your cause requires preparation and thought. Different strategies work for different sites. For example: on Facebook, friends automatically see everyone's status updates – making it a good space for organizing a movement or event. While on Twitter, you don't have to follow people who follow you and you can follow people without their permission, which can make it harder to get your message out. BUT, if one of your tweets is retweeted by someone with lots of followers you could reach a much bigger audience than through Facebook.



Global Changemakers' Social Media Toolkit (http://www.global-changemakers.net/assets/gcm-socialmedia-toolkit_eng.pdf) outlines how to structure a social media campaign and how to use different social media effectively. It provides many real life examples and demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of each platform.

TWEET/POST/SHARE your concerns!



Don't be afraid to ask your kids for help in getting the word out on social media. Chances are, your children can help you pick the right platform and use tools effectively to get companies' attention.

Not on social media? You can always take action by writing a letter to the editors of newspapers about issues that concern you.

Almost all mainstream media outlets have websites, as do some community newspapers and news stations. However, some outlets exist entirely online. Online media and community media may be more responsive to ideas from the public and can be easier to access; while mainstream media outlets often have more room for content. Because of online media's more interactive nature, the writers often respond directly to comments and suggestions from members. The more a member engages with them, the more standing their comments and posts are given.

Additional Resources

These MediaSmarts tip sheets are good conversation starters for parents and kids:

[Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#)

[Talking to Kids about Media and Body Image](#)

[Talking to Kids about Gender Stereotypes](#)

[Talking to Kids about Media Violence](#)

[Talking to Kids about Racial Stereotypes](#)

