

RECOMMENDATION No. 7 — The Committee urges the Department of Health and Welfare to conclude an agreement with the National Film Board to produce, in co-operation with provincial educational authorities, a media literacy guide which would provide children with the tools to understand the positive potential of television and help them become discerning television viewers. The Committee recommends that television violence form an important component of the proposed media literacy guide.

E. INDIVIDUAL ACTION

This section of our report deals with actions that individuals may take on their own, or with government assistance, so that they may personally control their exposure to violence on television. The Committee firmly believes that with user-friendly technological controls and effective public complaints systems, Canadians would be better equipped to control television violence themselves.

1. Consumer Choice

Those who completely oppose any government regulation of television violence maintain that consumers, who are properly educated (media literate) and who have access to technological aids which can help them to regulate the programming viewed in their homes, would be able to act as their own personal censor boards. Even those who hold more moderate views on government regulation, such as Chairman Keith Spicer of the CRTC, believe providing television consumers with technology and education is 90% of the solution to television violence.¹²⁹

Many witnesses echoed Mr. Spicer's opinion that parents have a responsibility to take charge of television viewing in their homes by watching television with their children, limiting viewing times, and explaining how television works to their children.¹³⁰ Other witnesses and experts, however, were less inclined to place the onus of regulation on parents. Falling into the trap of blaming parents is too easy, according to Alan Mirabelli¹³¹, who noted that the role of socializing children belongs to the community, not just parents.¹³²

The Committee has concluded that expecting parents to serve as models, gatekeepers, and television interpreters for their children, without adequate media literacy training and technological assistance, would not be realistic. It would probably only serve to maintain the status quo, which has been found to be unsatisfactory. "*A number of studies have indicated that direct parent intervention to prevent children from watching programs with violent or other inappropriate content is infrequent.*"¹³³

The Committee does believe in principle that parents should be responsible for regulating the viewing habits of their children. But in practice this may be an unfair expectation to make of working parents, even those who are media literate, because they simply cannot be television watchdogs around the clock. Witnesses who appeared before the Committee described a number of recent technological developments, including channel blockers (blacking out undesirable channels), program filters (blacking out unacceptable programs), and television or remote control locks (preventing unattended children from turning on the television set). The Committee considers it a top priority to have new, home-viewing technological controls widely available to parents at affordable prices as soon as possible.