

On the MOVE



John Robbins watches ESPN "SportsCenter" while he munches breakfast before school. Rebecca Graham and her friends make "General Hospital" a regular part of their after-school activities.

Joe Sheppard and Kari Young eagerly await Thursday-night episodes of "Friends."

Call it a habit. Call it an addiction. But unless any of you reside in a cave, it's darn near impossible to avoid a TV screen for very long.

This week, we've found that teens are in a state of transition when it comes to their viewing habits. Five years ago, they may have watched cartoons and "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood." Now, for instance, 15-year-old Kari watches "Friends" - but not without reservations from her mom over the show's sexual themes.

"My mother gets upset with some of the things, but she still lets me watch it," said Kari, from St. Lawrence Church in Greece.

Program content has been a big priority recently for President Bill Clinton - and now the television industry. On Feb. 29, following a meeting with the president, several industry executives announced plans to introduce a TV ratings system indicating violence and sexual content. The ratings would go into

effect sometime next year. Carrielynn Dolan, 18, said that regulation of television is an important issue. For instance, although she enjoys "Melrose Place," she added that she probably wouldn't let a 12-year-old watch it because of its sexual content.

Rebecca Graham makes the same distinction, saying that shows with sexual themes such as "Beverly Hills 90210" and "Blossom" should not be shown to little children. But for teenagers, Rebecca added, "It's not that big a deal."

"It's life, and it's not like they don't hear about those things in school," continued Rebecca, 16, from St. Agnes Church in Avon.

In addition, the federal government's recently passed Telecommunications Act will require TV manufacturers to equip each new television with a chip to block out violent shows.

The chip, Carrielynn said, would be effective for parents who can't be there while their children are watching TV.

However, Kari pointed out that it's still up to the parents to enforce these regulations.

"It's a good idea, but I don't think a lot of parents are going to look at it unless they were trying to check what their kids were watching before," Kari commented.

Michael Theisen, diocesan youth-min-

istry coordinator, pointed out that program ratings aren't going to totally shield youths from shows with questionable content.

Therefore, Theisen said, adults, along with the teens, should closely examine TV content.

"You can't bar everything the kids are going to see on TV," he commented.

"The adults should be asking critical questions: What's going on here; is this real; do you find this to be happening with your friends," Theisen said.

Theisen added that media literacy is a "an issue of interest to teens, and one that their youth ministers often address with them."

This type of awareness comes in handy when teens encounter daytime talk shows such as "Ricki Lake." John said he occasionally tunes in on Ricki, but realizes the subject matter often leans toward sensationalism.

"I watch it to see how crazy those people really are, and to tell myself I'm sane," said John, 15, from Sacred Heart Cathedral. "Sometimes when I'm feeling like I'm a little crazy, I'll watch that show. Then I'll say, 'I'm totally sane!'"

Carrielynn, from Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Brighton, said she gets a kick out of Ricki because "it's just so trashy," with themes such as "My father who beats me."

"And who married my ex-boyfriend's aunt, and now I'm pregnant," her brother Billy, 16, joked.

Networks such as The Discovery Channel, C-Span and the Public Broadcasting System remind us that TV can provide education as well as entertainment. In fact, during his recent meeting with TV executives, President Clinton emphasized his desire for stations to air at least three hours of educational programming per week.

Carrielynn supports the president's goal, saying, "Kids just watch TV to watch TV. If (educational shows are) on regular channels, they might happen to watch it. At first they might think it's boring, but then they might say it's not bad after all."

Carrielynn said she sometimes opts for programming on The Discovery Channel. Meanwhile, although Billy said his father "makes me watch CNN and C-Span," he often finds these news channels interesting.

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