

GUIDELINES FOR AUDIO-VISUAL PROGRAMME CONTENT CREATED FOR CHILDREN

The following guidelines are intended to assist in the development of audio-visual programmes for children.

Characterisation and Values

- Story lines should reflect positive personal and interpersonal values, enhance children's self-esteem, foster cooperative behaviour, show caring and sharing behaviour and promote empathy for others.
- Dangerous stunts and techniques or negative behaviour that can be easily imitated should be avoided.
- Adults should be portrayed in a positive and supportive way, unless the programme is focusing on adult behaviour that is harmful or hurtful to the child, and depicts the child's appropriate response. In reality-based programs (animated or live-action), when consistent with the story line, there should be an adult or person in authority to whom a child can go for support.
- Whenever possible, the story line should promote and/or show examples of a healthy lifestyle and a clean environment.
- Special care should be taken to develop comprehensible language and vocabulary in programmes for children. Vulgar language should not be used. New and different words can be introduced in order to enhance the child's vocabulary.
- Given that bullying and put-downs have been identified as a major cause of violence among children, special precautions must be taken not to encourage the demeaning or ridiculing of people. Examples of characteristics that are often targeted include children who are deemed "smart," "nerds," "slow to learn," "wear glasses," "overweight," "small," and come from "homes with very low incomes."

Conflict and Violence

- Conflict situations should be handled with great care. Whenever possible, conflict resolution by means of dialogue, negotiation, mediation or other clever techniques should be reinforced.
- Antisocial behaviour (for example, vandalism, aggression, criminal behaviour or bullying) should be portrayed as unglamorous and unacceptable.
- Gratuitous, graphic or excessive violence - whether physical or psychological - must be avoided in programmes for children. A limited level of violent behaviour may be shown, but only when the subject is properly explored, portrayed in the appropriate context, and the dangerous and negative consequences are clearly and realistically depicted.
- Unless integral to the story or for the purpose of sensitizing the audience to the proper care of animals, portraying scenes in which animals are injured or mistreated should be avoided.
- The portrayal of criminal behaviour should always carry with it a clear message that "crime does not pay."

Diversity and Stereotypes

- Portrayal of diversity should be encouraged. Special sensitivity and balance are necessary in the portrayal of gender, ethnicity, color, age, religion, culture, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and physical and mental disabilities.
- It is important to understand that the concept of family is changing. When representing families, creators should be sensitive to the concept that families can be composed of single parents, adopted children, foster children or other household combinations.
- There should be opportunities for balanced portrayals of characters representing various groups who have unique personality styles, diverse points of view, are independent thinkers, and who are willing, in acceptable ways, to be unconventional.
- Positive portrayals of unconventional individuals should be encouraged so long as their behaviour remains consistent with the guidelines in this document.
- Overt stereotyping of any group should be avoided by creating characters who are multifaceted in their behaviour, thoughts, and actions.

Promotion of cultural awareness and proper use of the maltese language

- Cultural awareness should be fostered in children's programming and proper use of the Maltese language should be resorted to.
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