

The MEDIA SMART Family

By Sr. Rose Pacatte, FSP

I remember reading the back cover of a Reader's Digest Condensed book from the early 1950's that said that television would be the ruin of reading.

Sixty years later, this prophecy has not been fulfilled. If the Harry Potter phenomenon is any indication, reading and books remain popular and essential to living meaningful lives in today's world. The fact is, we have become multi-literate and children who have access to technology learn to multi-task using this literacy from a young age. Literacy, the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce content, whether written, visual, audio, or all the above, includes all communications media.

Parents and care-givers often tell me that they are challenged by information

technology and entertainment media because mediated values on television or the Internet are often not the "values" parents wish to teach their kids. Further, parents sometimes seem at a loss as to the best way to approach the media world with their children.

Here are some basic principles that can help parents and care-givers to navigate the media world:

1. Talk to your children from the day you bring them home from the hospital so they will know that communication in your family is normal. As a family therapist once said, "Talking about unimportant things at home opens up the possibility to then talk about important things."
2. Articulate your human and Gospel values, those ideas and ideals that guide your life, such as honesty, community, fidelity, and faith and love.
3. Talk about your values as you watch television with your children, the same way you would when you are reading a book with them. Ask questions: Do you think that was a good thing for that character to do? What would you have done? What was the right thing to do?
4. Place the television and computer in a central place in the home, not in bedrooms.
5. Make a contract with your children and teens about television, the Internet, cell phones, and other devices. Visit www.safekids.com for ideas. Remember, you have to sign the contract, too.

These principles flow from a topic that is becoming more important in our schools, religious education programs, and ministries: media literacy education.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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