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PRESS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KEEPING KIDS SAFELY ENTERTAINED DURING SCHOOL CLOSURE

19 March 2020, Centurion. Physical distancing has become an overnight buzz word all around the globe, as countries take action to curb the spread of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). In South Africa, fast and decisive action was taken to close schools until after the Easter weekend, keeping our little ones safely at home and out of harms way.

But are parents aware enough of the dangers of harmful content consumption to keep their children safely entertained while they are at home?

Inevitably the easy answer to keeping children entertained for many a parent in our digital world is 'increase their screen time'. From streaming movie sites, to DVDs and gaming – these will all become distractions of choice as children are kept away from their peers during this time.

The Film and Publication Board (FPB) reminds parents to be alert to the type of content their children are consuming, as well as the internet and social media sites they are frequenting. This is what you need to know:

Age-appropriate films and games

The FPB – regulator of content of movies, games and certain publications in South Africa – noted a trend in the 2018/19 financial year that 58.2% of films released for distribution in the country were targeted at the “teen” market, with only 17.8% and 18.2% suitable for “tweens” (7-12 years) and family viewing (A and PG) categories. On the gaming front, the statistics are very similar (38.4% teens, 22.2% tweens and 19.2% family viewing).

Now this might seem like a advantage for parents (especially those with teenagers) during the holidays. However, FPB Acting CEO Abongile Mashele says that the organisation also found during the process of assigning ratings that the most prevalent elements in films and games was violence, offensive language, sexual activity and substance abuse. “In games, the level



of violence is more intense where violent acts are required to advance to higher levels or to gain rewards,” she adds.

“Our classification process takes these elements into account when we assign age ratings. They are there to protect our children, and we ask parents to pay special attention to this when allowing their children to watch films and play games,” she says. Conscientious distributors of films in South Africa work with the FPB to ensure children only watch age appropriate content.

Parents should also put strict controls in place for the selection of films and games at home. While the film distributor controls access in public viewing platforms, parents are solely responsible for what their children watch and play in the privacy of their homes or the homes of friends and relatives. “Don’t allow the convenience of technology and ‘digital babysitters’ to derail you from good parenting,” Ms Mashele advises.

A research study conducted by FPB with the University of South Africa in 2015 showed that children as young as 10 years old are being allowed to play games with an age restriction of 18 years, exposing them to gruesome and graphic violence as well as offensive language.” Children participating in this focus group were asked to explain how these games made them feel, with some comments such as ‘I feel like fighting after playing the game and someone is irritating me’ and ‘In gaming you’re kind of in control of what happens to you personally it is scarier because what happens in a movie happens to everyone’ painting a telling picture of the effect of this exposure.

It seems that violence sells, but parents still have a choice of whether to buy these games. Ask yourself - are you sure that playing these games is not having a negative impact on your child. Don’t ignore the ratings and consumer advisories on films and games.

Cyber savvy children are also cyber safe

Ms. Mashele emphasises that the world around us is becoming more reliant on digital solutions in every sphere of daily life. “If the rapid increase of data usage is a yardstick, we can expect digitalisation to become a bigger part of every child’s world at even younger ages and across the economic and geographic divide,” she says.



“As South Africans we embrace the imperative to create a tech-savvy younger generation that are empowered to thrive in a cyber-led world. We are faced with both the amazing potential that this world holds for our children, but conversely we need to be vigilant about the many threats to their cyber safety,” Ms. Mashele adds.

The internet and social media have become a fertile hunting ground for paedophiles. “While the FPB does not want to put a damper on an already difficult time in society, the harsh realities of the world we live in is that children left unsupervised to surf the net or spend endless hours chatting on social media without the necessary safeguards in place are at greater risk of being targeted by deviant criminals, who often pose as “friends” of the same age group but are in fact adults luring children into unsavoury schemes.

Don't let the COVID-19 School Closure period hold more nightmares than good memories for your children by following these tips:

- Putting a DVD into the player: is the movie you choose within the recommended rating appropriate for your child's age? Look at the consumer advisories for films, along with the age rating. Age ratings are there for a reason, you may be doing immeasurable psychological harm to your child through premature exposure to graphic content. Visit our website to learn more about the ratings and advisories before choosing a movie to watch: <http://www.fpb.org.za/ratings/>
- Allowing them to play games? Look carefully at the age rating. Does the game have graphic violence that can scar your child psychologically. If you can, try to play the games before your child plays them to satisfy yourself of its contents.
- Monitor the type of digital content to which children are exposed.
- Download monitoring App's on your device. These App's monitor your child's online activities and can be set to:
 - Alert you when your child logs on to an App.
 - Allow you to set limits of how much time they can spend online using their devices.
 - Alert you when the child tries to download an App.
 - Allow you to grant permission for your child to download an App.
- Always supervise your children when they are online.



- Teach children not to share personal information and to ensure their privacy settings are always on.
- Assist them to identify activities or people that make them feel uncomfortable and to report such activities to you immediately.
- Ensure that the devices they have access to are restricted to age suitable content.
- Digital addiction is a very real and escalating problem in modern society. Keep track of your kids' screen time. Limit the use of tablets, computers, phones, gaming consoles and TV. Rather plan activities that get kids active or catch up on their schoolwork.
- There is no substitute for meaningful time spent with you kids, so get involved in their activities.
- Use the content of films and games you view together to start a conversation about topical issues and give your kids a supervised life lesson.

Help the FPB to keep the children of South Africa safe by:

- Contacting us on our Client Support line 0800 000 555 for enquiries or reporting child sexual abuse material on our hotline 0800 148 148. The FPB will continue to have skeleton staff available during this time to deliver services to the public.
- You can also familiarize yourself with the age ratings and consumer advisories on our website: <https://www.fpb.org.za/>

Physical distancing does not need to be a time of boredom for children and frustration for parents, as long as digital entertainment is done in a responsible manner.

- ENDS -

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Notes to the Editor

The Film and Publication Board (FPB) is the regulator of the creation, production, possession and distribution of films, games, certain publications, and more recently certain online content. This is done to provide consumer advice to enable adults to make informed viewing, reading and gaming choices for themselves and children in their care; to protect children from exposure to disturbing and harmful material and from premature exposure to adult experiences, and to make the use of children in, and the exposure of children to pornography, punishable.

Paramount to the mandate of the FPB is the protection of children. Protecting children under the Act is a proportional balancing of the rights afforded in the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights against the right of the child. The protection of children as enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights includes physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or moral harm to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation. It further ensures that children's best interest is of paramount importance in every matter concerning a child.