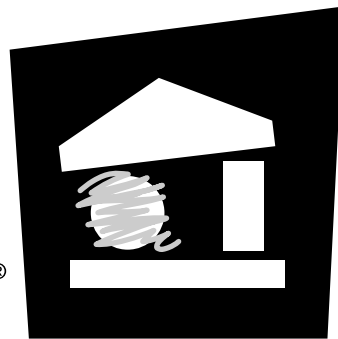


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5th Annual Video and Computer Game Report Card

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Fifth Annual Video and Computer Game Report Card

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President, National Institute on Media and the Family

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This Video and Computer Game Report Card is the fifth issued by the National Institute on Media and the Family, an independent, non-partisan, non-sectarian, non-profit organization. The report provides a snapshot of the interactive gaming industry on issues related to child welfare. The parent-generated KidScore® ratings of popular games were released in November, 2000 in time for the holiday shopping season. KidScore is the only universal rating system that applies equally well to electronic games, TV programs, films, and videos.

Introduction

The past year brought a number of changes that will have a tremendous impact on the future of the video and computer game industry. A report in the November, 2000 issue of *Wired* shows that interactive game revenues are now as great as those of the retail software industry and significantly greater than the domestic film industry. The next generation of technology arrived on October 26, 2000 with the release of the Sony Playstation 2. The advances in the power of the technology over the past two years are remarkable. The original Sony Playstation processes 350,000 polygons per second (pg/s). (Electronic game images are composed of polygons, making polygons/second a good measure of graphic quality.) Sega Dreamcast, which was released in 1999, boosted that to over 3 million pg/s and Playstation 2 rocketed to 66 million pg/s. It is no wonder that game enthusiasts were lined up outside the stores days in advance of the release. Many report the graphics are approaching motion picture quality. Nintendo and Microsoft promise to release even more powerful platforms in 2001. The advances in technology not only make the games more realistic and exciting, but they are likely to heighten the impact on young players. Careful attention to these issues, therefore, becomes more important.

In spite of the recent technological achievements, the industry was once again a focal point of controversy. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) released an extensive study in September, 2000, confirming what we have reported in previous report cards. "Nearly all the game companies contacted have marketed violent M-rated games to children," according to the FTC. The investigators also confirmed our findings that children could routinely buy or rent adult rated games with no difficulty.

While the past year's new releases include some very good games for children and youth, games featuring violence and gore continue to push the envelope. It is against this backdrop that the Fifth Annual Report Card is released.

Areas Covered in the 2000 Report Card

- Review of progress on past recommendations
- Industry ratings
- Ratings education
- Retail ratings enforcement
- Arcades
- Marketing and advertising
- Overall grade
- Recommendations
- Research update
- KidScore ratings for popular games

How the Report Card Study Was Conducted

- Onsite visits to 11 arcades in MN, WI, UT, and TX conducted October through early November, 2000.
- Telephone survey of 50 retail and rental stores in 13 states (AZ, CA, FL, IL, KS, MA, MN, NY, PA, TN, TX, WA, WY) during October, 2000.
- Research study involving over 700 students in grades 8-12.
- Interviews with industry representatives.
- Review of recent research on effects of violent video and computer games.
- Panels of parents reviewed and rated 132 games using the KidScore rating system.
- Field research with youth buyers ages 7-14 ("sting operation").

Results

Review of Progress on Past Recommendations

This is the fifth annual report card issued by the National Institute on Media and the Family. We have concluded previous editions with recommendations for improvement.

We are very pleased to report that there has been significant progress on each of these recommendations. Although this year's report card contains criticisms, we think it is important to acknowledge the industry's responsiveness to our calls for reform. In fact, we believe that the video and computer game industry's responses to public concerns have been more responsible than the other major media industries'. Policies and programs, of course, need to be backed up by action so we will continue to monitor implementation and compliance. However, we do acknowledge the steps that have been taken thus far to address the issues we have raised in past years. The following are five recommendations we made in earlier report cards and an update on the industry's responses to them.

Recommendation: The industry should stop marketing adult games to children and teens.

Response: The industry set up the Advertising Review Council (ARC) which began operations on January 31, 2000. ARC has developed a code of marketing and advertising principles with mechanisms for enforcement. ARC reports a great deal of cooperation from all segments of the industry.

Recommendation: The industry should educate the public about the rating system.

Response: The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) initiated a four part public education campaign called "Check the Rating." The program includes public service announcements, paid advertisements, outreach to child advocacy groups, and outreach to retailers. We have seen significantly more evidence of ratings information since the program began.

Recommendation: The industry should develop and enforce a code of advertising and marketing conduct.

Response: The ARC guidelines include enforceable standards for advertising and marketing.

Recommendation: Retailers should develop, implement and enforce policies prohibiting the sale of adult games to children and youth.

Response: Many major retailers have either agreed to stop selling M-rated games or to implement policies prohibiting sale to minors. While we applaud this development, "sting operations" conducted in different parts of the country continue to show that children have easy access to mature games.

Recommendation: The coin-operated arcade industry should develop and implement a rating system.

Response: The arcade industry implemented such a system this year, and we saw some evidence of its effectiveness.

Grade for industry response to recommendations.....A-

Grade for implementation of recommendations.....Incomplete

Industry Ratings

Virtually all computer and video games are now rated, and the ratings are clearly displayed. Parent raters using the universal KidScore rating system reviewed 132 games. Overall they disagreed with roughly one out of every four game ratings. For example, 23% of T-rated (teen) games reviewed by the parent raters were judged to be inappropriate for teens 13-17 years old. As one avid gamer told us, "Some of the T games are more violent than the M games, but as long as they don't have blood spurting, they get a T."

Grade for accuracy of the ratings.....B-

Ratings Education

We have already applauded the public education program the industry has launched. The results of our survey underscore the ongoing need. While gaming magazines are clearly carrying better ratings information, only 32% of stores provide any education in the form of posters or pamphlets. While that is up from last year's 26%, there is still a great deal of room for improvement. The stores that are part of national chains do a much better job of education than the independents (46% compared to 17%). Yet, 32% of employees selling the games still do not understand the rating system. That can probably be explained by the fact that only 37% of stores have a policy of training employees about the ratings. Store employees that sell games are more likely to understand the ratings than those who rent (83% compared to 50%). In our study of youth we found that only 41% understand all of the ratings, and only 29% of their parents understand them. This finding probably reflects the confusion caused by the multiple industry rating systems. We will address the need for a universal rating system in the recommendation section. The grade for ratings education reflects the average of industry and rental/retail educational efforts.

Grade for ratings education.....C

Retail Ratings Enforcement

Most major retail chains announced the implementation of a video game ratings enforcement policy in late 2000. This step was clearly needed. Our young researchers, ages 7-14, successfully purchased adult rated games in 13 out of 16 tries before the enforcement policies were announced. We and others have repeated "sting operations" since the retailers' announcements about ratings enforcement. Unfortunately, the results have been disappointing. The only major chains we have found enforcing the policy are Target and FuncoLand. This will be a major focus of next year's report. As noted earlier, a policy is useless if it is not enforced. In addition to lack of follow-through, there are still major retail chains that have refused to enforce ratings.

Grade for ratings enforcement.....D+

Arcades

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of arcade games bearing the rating stickers. Eighty-two percent of arcades we visited had ratings stickers, and 80% of the games in these arcades had stickers. Fifty-five percent of the arcades did not have any "red-stickered" games. However, only 18% had any enforcement policies, and none of them had materials educating the public about the ratings. Parents need to be aware that most arcade games are unsupervised, so monitoring of the rating system is left up to the parents.

Grade for arcade ratings and enforcement.....C

Marketing and Advertising

Some of our strongest criticism in past years has been about marketing and advertising practices. The ARC guidelines are intended to correct those abuses. We found evidence that they are working. Although we found violations, there were fewer than in previous years. While we applaud ARC's activities, many of the abuses being addressed should never have happened in the first place. This year's grade reflects both the progress made as well as the room available for improvement.

Grade for marketing and advertising.....C

Overall Grade

In response to public requests, we are issuing an overall grade for the first time. We understand that there are independent sectors in the gaming field. The overall grade, however, provides a snapshot of the entire gaming field as it relates to child welfare issues.

When we began issuing these report cards, ratings were done on a hit-or-miss basis, children could easily access adult games, and there were widespread abuses in marketing and advertising. While the overall grade this year reflects progress over the past five years, much of the progress has been in changing activities and practices that never should have occurred in the first place. We are hopeful that as the reforms are implemented we will see this overall grade continue to improve.

Overall grade.....C

Recommendations

1. Our research shows that media ratings continue to be confusing to parents. We renew our recommendation that the game, film, and television industries adopt a universal rating system that is administered independently. The industries' responses to this idea

have been that such a system is not workable. However, our experience shows this is not true. We have used the KidScore rating system to rate TV shows, movies, videos, and video/computer games for five years. Parents report that it is easy to understand, reliable, valid, and easy to use.

2. The industry should aggressively continue their efforts to educate the public about game ratings.
3. ARC should aggressively enforce the guidelines for marketing and advertising that it has developed and implemented.
4. The retail and rental stores who have committed to policies preventing the sale or rental of adult games to children and teens should actively enforce them.
5. The retail chains and independent stores that have refused to restrict access to adult games should do so. We call upon the public to exert pressure on them to adopt responsible policies.
6. Video and computer games are played by many young people (the number of players peaks between the ages of 8 and 15). Many parents are not as knowledgeable as they need to be in order to provide adequate supervision. In our study with over 700 youth, 71% report that their parents do not understand the ratings, and only 17% report that they have ever been prevented by a parent from buying a game because of its rating. Parents need to become more knowledgeable about the games their children are playing and should exert greater supervision.

Research Update

Concern about violent video and computer games is based on the assumption that they contribute to aggression and violence among young players. The research base for that assumption is growing in spite of industry denials. Some in the industry insist that there is absolutely no evidence that playing a violent video game leads to aggressive behavior. That is not true.

In a forthcoming meta-analysis, Dr. Craig Anderson and Dr. Brad Bushman from Iowa State University statistically analyze 35 different studies involving 4,262 individuals, most of whom are younger than 18. They conclude that "violent video games increase aggressive behavior in children and young adults." Research reported last year by Dr. Craig Anderson of Iowa State University and Dr. Karen Dill of Lenoir-Rhyne College demonstrated such a causal link.

Dr. Douglas Gentile, director of research at the National Institute on Media and the Family, Paul Lynch of the University of Oklahoma, and I have begun a program of research on the

effects of video and computer games on children and teens. While the entire program will take a number of years and sufficient funding to complete, I am able to report a number of preliminary findings here.

These results are based on responses from over 700 teens in grades 8-12 and include a subset of 43 "at-risk students," defined as those students who have had legal involvement. Among the findings:

- 86% of teens own video and/or computer games.
- The average amount of time teens play is 9 hours per week, with boys playing significantly more than girls (13 compared to 5 hours).
- 27% report that their parents think they play video games too much.
- 43% of 8th and 9th graders report that they like more violence in their games compared to two or three years ago.
- 63% have customized their games.
- 20% report that they have felt "addicted" to games and 36% report that they have friends who are "addicted" to games.
- 54% of 8th and 9th grade boys have bought M-rated (Mature) games with their own money.
- "At-risk" boys play significantly more than their peers (16 hours per week) and play more violent games.
- Youth who report an increased appetite for violence in video games are more likely to have gotten into physical fights in the previous year.

Even these few statistics demonstrate that the concern about children's access to violent video games is well-founded and is not, as the industry claims, simply an issue for politicians and child advocates.

We will release the full findings of the first stage of this research program at the international conference of the Society for Research in Child Development in Minneapolis on April 20, 2001. Included with this release will be our findings on the relationship between violent video games and aggressive behavior.

2000 Video and Computer Game Report Card
Summary

Industry response to recommendations	A-
Implementation of recommendations	Incomplete
Accuracy of ratings	B-
Ratings Education	C
Ratings Enforcement	D+
Arcade Industry Ratings and Enforcement	C
Marketing and Advertising	C
Overall Grade	C

Industry Rating Descriptions:

- EC means "Early Childhood", content suitable for children three years and older.
- E means "Everyone", content suitable for persons six years and older.
- T means "Teen", content suitable for persons 13 years and older.
- M means "Mature", content suitable for persons 17 years and older.
- N/A means rating "Not Available."

Here's what the symbols mean for the content categories:

- 

Green – Go!
The raters found no or very few instances of material in this category.
- 

Yellow- Caution!
The raters found some instances of material in this category.
- 

Red – Stop!
The raters found many and/or some very intense instances of material in this category.

Product	Industry Rating	Violence Amount	Violence Portrayal	Fear	Illegal/Harmful	Language	Nudity	Sex	Ages 3-7	Ages 8-12	Ages 13-17
Sony Playstation 2											
Dynasty Warriors 2	T	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
ESPN International Track and Field	E	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding	E	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
Evergrace	T	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green
Fantavision	E	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Kessen	T	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow
Moto GP	E	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
Q-Ball: Billiards Master	E	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Real Pool	E	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Ridge Racer V	E	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
Silent Scope	M	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
Smuggler's Run	T	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow
SSX	E	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green
Street Fighter EX3	T	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Red
Summoner	T	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow
Surfing H30	E	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Tekken Tag Tournament	T	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Red
Timesplitters	T	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red

Product	Industry Rating	Violence Amount	Violence Portrayal	Fear	Illegal/Harmful	Language	Nudity	Sex	Ages 3-7	Ages 8-12	Ages 13-17
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Sega Dreamcast

D2	M	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Fur Fighters	T	●	●	◆	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Jet Grind Radio	T	◆	◆	◆	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	T	●	◆	◆	●	◆	●	●	●	●	◆
MDK 2	T	●	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●	◆
NFL Blitz 2001	E	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●
Power Stone 2	T	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●
Quake III Arena	M	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Samba de Amigo	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
San Francisco Rush 2049	E	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	◆	●
Seaman	T	●	●	◆	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Sega Sports NFL 2k1	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sega Sports World Series Baseball 2k1	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage	M	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Ultimate Fighting Championship	T	●	●	◆	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●
Virtua Tennis	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Computer CD-ROM

Age of Empires II: Age of Kings	T	◆	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	◆	●
Backyard Baseball 2001	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Backyard Soccer MLS Edition	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Barney Magical Music	EC	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun	T	●	●	◆	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Deus Ex	M	●	●	●	●	◆	◆	●	●	●	●
Diablo 2	M	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Earth 2150	T	●	●	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●
Easy Bake Kitchen	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Product	Industry Rating	Violence Amount	Violence Portrayal	Fear	Illegal/Harmful	Language	Nudity	Sex	Ages 3-7	Ages 8-12	Ages 13-17
Escape from Monkey Island	T	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	◆	●
Everquest	T	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	◆	●
Everquest: Ruins of Kunark	T	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●
Family Feud	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Freddi Fish's One-Stop Fun Shop	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K.2	M	●	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●
LEGO: Alpha Team	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Madden NFL 2001	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Microsoft Combat Flight Simulator	E	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	◆	◆	●
Pajama Sam 3: You Are What You Eat From Your Head to Your Feet	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panty Raider: From Here to Immaturity	M	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●
Playskool Store	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Putt Putt Joins the Circus	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Roller Coaster Tycoon	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sim City 3000	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sims, The	T	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Soldier of Fortune	M	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Thomas & Friends: The Great Festival Adventure	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Tonka Dig'n Rigs	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Unreal Tournament	M	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nintendo 64											
007: The World is not Enough	T	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Army Men: Air Attack	T	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	◆	◆	●
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2	T	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	◆

Product	Industry Rating	Violence Amount	Violence Portrayal	Fear	Illegal/Harmful	Language	Nudity	Sex	Ages 3-7	Ages 8-12	Ages 13-17
Cruisin' Exotica	E	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	◆	●
Donkey Kong 64	E	◆	◆	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hey You, Pikachu!	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, The	E	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	◆	●	●
Mario Tennis	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Perfect Dark	M	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Pokemon Puzzle League	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pokemon Stadium	E	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater	E	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	◆	●	●
Turok 3: Shadow of Oblivion	M	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Sony Playstation											
Buzz Lightyear of Star Command	E	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	◆	●
Chrono Cross	T	●	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	◆
Disney's Dinosaur	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Driver	T	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●
Duke Nukem: Land of the Babes	M	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Fear Effect	M	●	●	●	●	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●
Frogger 2: Swampy's Revenge	E	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●
Jackie Chan Stuntmaster	T	●	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●
Legend of Dragoon	T	●	●	●	●	◆	◆	●	●	●	●
Legend of Mana	T	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	●	●	●	◆	●
Mortal Kombat: Special Forces	M	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ms PacMan Maze Madness	E	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Parasite Eve 2	M	●	●	●	●	◆	◆	●	●	●	●
Resident Evil: Survivor	M	●	●	●	●	◆	●	●	●	●	●

Product	Industry Rating	Violence Amount	Violence Portrayal	Fear	Illegal/Harmful	Language	Nudity	Sex	Ages 3-7	Ages 8-12	Ages 13-17
Spec Ops: Stealth Patrol	T	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Red Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond
Spider-Man	E	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle
Spyro: Year of the Dragon	E	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle
Star Wars Episode 1: Jedi Power Battles	T	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Red Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond
Strider 2	E	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond
Tenchu 2: Birth of the Assassins	M	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle
Threads of Fate	E	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Green Circle
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	T	Green Circle	Green Circle	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Green Circle
Urban Chaos	M	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle
Vagrant Story	T	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle
Valkyrie Profile	T	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond
WWF Smackdown!	T	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Yellow Diamond	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle
X-Men: Mutant Academy	E	Red Circle	Red Circle	Yellow Diamond	Red Circle	Green Circle	Yellow Diamond	Green Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle	Red Circle

The National Institute on Media and the Family was founded in 1996 as a non-profit organization dedicated to providing research, information, and education about the impact of media on children and families.

The Institute is funded by donations from individuals like you. We also receive grants from foundations and corporations. If you would like information on how you or your employer can invest in an organization that is making a difference, please contact us.

The Institute seeks to educate, inform, and provide parents, educators, community members, and children with the information they need to make more informed media choices.

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