



Three Steps to Making the Most of  
**Family Movie Nights**

A free eBook provided by Bridgestone Multimedia Group |





Parents are superheroes. In our quest to be dynamite 24 hours each day, seven days a week, we pack our family's weekends with fun and educational outings, heap our kids' plates with appetizing vitamins and minerals, and do our best to turn every learning moment into a life lesson. However, even the best moms and dads are left in a quandary when it comes to managing the media their children consume.

The greatest power we possess as parents is our ability to instill strong values in our children, but too often, we pop in a DVD with no inkling that in half an hour, we'll be wrestling with the urge to shield our kids' eyes and ears from off-color jokes or innuendos. While you can't control a movie's content, you can swiftly select quality films that match your family's values by following the three simple steps outlined in this guidebook.



## Step 1: Identify Your Moral Code

One of the most defining characteristics of a superhero is a strong moral code. At the beginning of your mission, you must determine your ethical standards and expectations for movie content.

The first factor to consider in your criteria is the age of your audience. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that parents wait until a child is at least two years old and begin with slow-paced, interactive shows that encourage word repetition, answering questions, or singing and dancing with the characters. Complex storylines or fast-paced action is likely to confuse toddlers and cause them to lose interest or slip into an autopilot-like trance. As your child's attention span grows, so will your comfort zone. Every child differs, but most attention spans have matured enough to handle a feature film (90 minutes or more) by the time he or she is four or five.

Next, ask yourself an important question:

### What's Okay for My Family to See on Screen?

Time and again, research has proven that children are affected by the media they consume – for better or worse. Therefore, staying vigilant is vital to shaping their worldview, character, and faith.

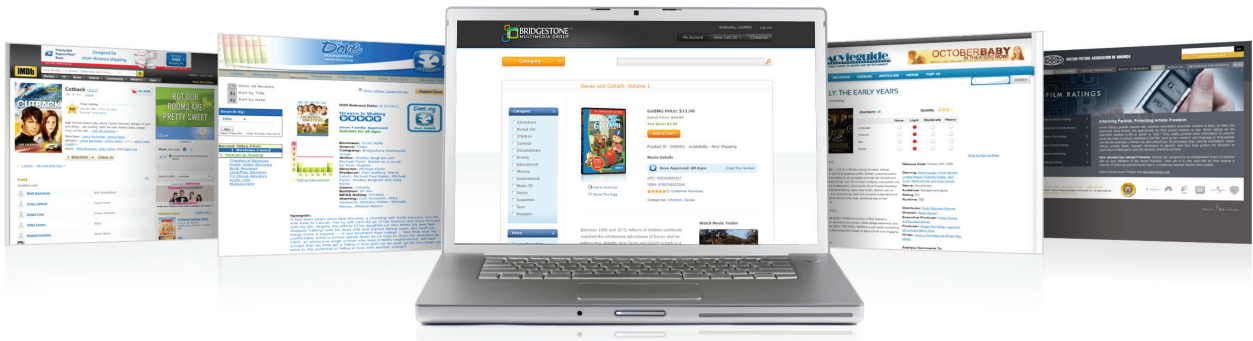
Start by ranking your reactions to this list of potentially objectionable content. Are there some types of scenes you simply wouldn't stand for and others you'd be more likely to

overlook? For each item, give yourself one point if it wouldn't bother you, two points if you'd reach for the remote, and three points if you would shut off the screen altogether.

- Mild violence, such as hitting
- Profanity
- Partial nudity, such as a character in his or her underwear
- Drug or alcohol use
- Guns or other weapons
- Kissing or making out
- References to sex or premarital sex
- Adultery
- Disrespectful behavior, such as back talk
- Sarcastic or cynical dialogue
- Consistent use of slang in dialogue
- Scary or supernatural themes
- Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and other fictional figures
- Animal cruelty
- Criminal behavior or mindless violence
- Total**

How did your values add up? If you scored over 30 points, you hold high standards for family viewing.

## Step 2: Consult a Trusted Advisor



Even the most quick-witted caped crusader seeks guidance when making a crucial decision. For example, where would Batman be without Alfred or Superman without the mentorship of his father?

Once you've identified your moral code and expectations, your next move is to turn to trusted sources. With your checklist of objectionable subject matter in mind, consult critical reviews to ensure that a particular movie meets your expectations for clean content and values.

**The Motion Picture Association of America**  
([mpaa.org](http://mpaa.org))

Many parents consider the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) ratings system to be the authority on whether a movie is appropriate for their families.

- G** General audiences. All ages admitted.
- PG** Parental guidance suggested. Some

material may not be suitable for children.

**PG-13** Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

**R** Restricted. Children under 17 require accompanying parent or adult guardian.

**NC-17** No one 17 and under admitted.

As the film industry's official content ratings system, the MPAA is a solid starting point; however, the organization's gauge for judgment is broad with ratings assigned by an independent board of parents who likely don't share your family's tastes and sensibilities.

If your standards tend to be stricter than the MPAA's middle-of-the-road approach, you may want a more explicit heads-up on content before picking a flick. Fortunately, the web offers dozens of sites that specialize in family-friendly movie reviews and ratings.

## The Dove Foundation ([dove.org](http://dove.org))

One of the best tools available to discerning movie audiences is the Dove Foundation. This faith-based, nonprofit foundation reviews both new theatrical releases and direct-to-DVD titles with a sharp eye on family friendliness. In addition to a plot synopsis, staff review, and detailed content description, Dove awards a family-approved seal to movies that meet its criteria, specifying whether the film is appropriate for viewers of all ages or audiences 12 and up.

Dove also offers scorecards that chart the amount of sex, language, violence, drugs, nudity, and other questionable subject matter in each title. The foundation also points out unwholesome content other ratings boards might not mention, such as cigarette-smoking and cleavage.



Because Dove's standards are stricter than most, its blue-and-white seal carries a great deal of weight with

filmmakers and families familiar with the foundation's standards for movie content. For this reason, Dove reviews can be one of the most efficient tools for sifting through the plethora of films available to buy, rent, download, and stream.

## MOVIEGUIDE ([movieguide.org](http://movieguide.org))

MOVIEGUIDE is a magazine and website that informs, entertains, and enlightens the public with news and reviews from the Christian and family film industry. A Hollywood watchdog since 1985, the publication encourages audiences to seek wholesome alternatives to the violence in typical big-budget action movies and sexuality in many adult and teen dramas. It also piques the general public's interest by offering interviews with A-list actors, in addition to reviews, ratings, and recommendations.

MOVIEGUIDE's ratings system awards films between one and four stars for quality and uses numerical values for family appropriateness:

- +4 Exemplary: Biblical, usually Christian worldview with no questionable elements.
- +3 Moral: Some minor questionable elements.
- +2 Good: Moderately questionable elements.
- +1 Worthwhile: Discernment required for young children.
- 1 Caution: Discretion advised for older children.
- 2 Extreme Caution: Discretion advised for adults.
- 3 Excessive: Excessive sex, violence, immorality, and/or worldview problems.
- 4 Abhorrent: Intentional blasphemy, evil, gross immorality, and/or worldview problems.

### Plugged In Online ([pluggedin.com](http://pluggedin.com))

This Focus on the Family publication evaluates popular movies, videos, music, TV episodes, and games in an effort to spark intellectual discussion and spiritual growth. The site provides detailed content through articles, commentary, news, and podcasts, as well as parenting tools like Family Room and Movie Nights that recommend age-appropriate titles for kids and teens. Plugged In Online also broadcasts movie reviews for new theatrical releases and DVDs on over 600 radio stations each week.

### Common Sense Media ([www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org))

A gem for moms and dads, Common Sense Media uses child development criteria created by national experts to rate content according to age appropriateness.

Register your name, email address, and your child's age to browse a vast collection of movie reviews, which are color-coded to denote if the material is age-appropriate for your child. A green "On" icon indicates that it's a go, a yellow "Pause" icon warns that the movie is somewhat edgy for that age, and a red "Off" means that the content is not age-appropriate.

The site calls out the minimum age for content with an age-rating bar. It also highlights content concerns in specific categories and measures the movie's entertainment value with a star rating.

### Other Resources

Another common characteristic of superheroes is that they are often everyday people who respond to threats of danger and enforce justice on behalf of the general public. Therefore, mining the opinions of average citizens can help inform your cause, in addition to those from sources whose moral code aligns with yours.

The Internet Movie Database ([imdb.com](http://imdb.com)) offers user reviews and ratings, a plot summary, a complete list of cast and crew, movie stills, external news articles, trivia, production details, a parent's guide, and a list of similar titles that can help you determine if you're on the right track. You can also check how a film fared with professional critics at Rotten Tomatoes ([rottentomatoes.com](http://rottentomatoes.com)), which shows the percentage of critics who gave the movie a positive review in the form of a "tomatometer" rating, as well as an audience score.

Another resource that many superheroes routinely turn to is a sidekick. When possible, run your choices by your spouse or co-parent for feedback. Take care when communicating with your children that you don't disguise your reasons as to why some movies are allowed and others aren't.

## Step 3: Be a Role Model

Picking the perfect family flick requires more than knowing what's appropriate and doing your research. Sometimes reading the synopsis and review can't prepare you for a film's tone, so here are four additional to-do's as proposed by Plugged In Online.

### The Four P's to Picking a Family Flick

#### 1. Preview

If you haven't seen the film, watch it before your kids to gauge the age-appropriateness of the content, check for questionable scenes, and get ideas for a post-screening discussion. If you aren't able to preview your choice before screening it, watch a trailer or series of clips online to make sure that what you think you see is what you'll get.

#### 2. Pray

Think about the movie's content and pray for wisdom in evaluating the film as you consider its role in your child's character development.

#### 3. Predict

Like a superhero, parents have enhanced senses that allow them to be uniquely in tune

with their children. Avert danger by anticipating ways that certain scenes or lines of dialogue might affect your child. Also, be prepared to respond.

#### 4. Protect

Just as you want to shield your family from inappropriate language and scenes, you also want to guard your time together. Limit interruptions by tucking away your cell phone and other distractions. Also, start the movie early enough to allow time to discuss what you've watched. Jot down talking points to lead with and see where the discussion goes. Your family just might surprise you.

### Complete Your Mission

Luckily, you don't need to wear spandex or get fancy gadgets to look and feel like a superhero when selecting appropriate family movies. By identifying your moral code, mentors, and mission, you can build character, instill Christian morals, and give your children decision-making tools that last a lifetime.

---

## About Bridgestone Multimedia Group

([gobmg.com](http://gobmg.com))

A leading distributor of family-friendly and Christian films, Bridgestone Multimedia Group (BMG) hand-picks and pre-screens each title in its collection. BMG carries hundreds of children's animated movies and music, inspirational films, dramas, faith-based fitness videos, comedies, adventures, suspense movies, titles for teens, and more. Dedicated to helping parents find quality films for their families, BMG provides a description of each movie's plot and themes, a Dove Foundation rating and review, movie trailers, a list of cast members, and recommended titles.

To learn more about BMG and browse its selection, visit [gobmg.com](http://gobmg.com).