

## **FREE-TO-AIR TELEVISION PROGRAMME CODE**

### **PREAMBLE**

1. Television exerts a strong influence on the community. In Singapore, as a medium for entertainment, information and education, television reaches almost all homes and is easily accessible to all people, including the young. Because of its impact, programmes over free-to-air television must at all times maintain a standard that is acceptable to the community.

2. The Info-communications Media Development Authority (“IMDA”) is empowered to issue, and from time to time, review codes of practice relating to the standards of broadcast programmes. This Free-To-Air Television Programme Code (the “Code”) seeks to ensure that nothing is included in the programmes of any free-to-air television service which is against public interest or order, national harmony, or which offends good taste or decency.

3. The Code outlines the general standards to be observed for free-to-air television broadcasting in the Republic of Singapore. It takes into consideration the greater influence of local productions, as viewers can more easily identify with the lifestyles and values portrayed in them. Broadcasters must therefore be especially mindful of the overall context and themes of local programmes, apart from specific scenes or sequences. The implications, influences, lasting impressions and cumulative impact of such programmes must also be considered.

4. It is the responsibility of broadcasters to ensure that their programmes and services (whether analogue or digital) comply fully with the Code. The provisions set out in this Code have to be applied in spirit and should be read in conjunction with applicable legislation and licence conditions. Under the Broadcasting Act (Cap 28), IMDA has the power to impose sanctions, including fines, on broadcasters who contravene the Code.

5. To aid parental guidance and allow for greater viewing choice, all content must be rated according to the Film Classification Guidelines (appended in Annex A) consisting of the following ratings:

- G - General
- PG - Parental Guidance
- PG13 - Parental Guidance for Children below 13
- NC16 - No Children below 16 years of age
- M18 - Mature 18, for persons 18 years and above
- R21 - Restricted to persons 21 years and above

6. Programmes rated up to PG13 are allowed for broadcast on free-to-air television.

## **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- 1 Programmes should not undermine public security interest or public confidence in the law and its enforcement in Singapore.
- 2 Matters pertaining to race and religion should be handled sensitively. Programmes should not be of a proselytic nature.
- 3 Broadcasters should be vigilant against the likely effects of all television material on children. It is therefore necessary for broadcasters to exercise considered judgement on the capacity of children, in different age groups, to cope with the depiction and treatment of material which may not be suitable for them.
- 4 Children's programmes should be wide-ranging in genre and content, but should avoid gratuitous scenes of violence, horror or sex. There should be a balanced mix of programmes to cater to the needs of children of different age groups.
- 5 Programmes with horror and supernatural content should be broadcast in timeslots that are less accessible to children.
- 6 Broadcasters should provide advisory notices for programme content which may be potentially disturbing or upsetting so as to enable viewers to make an informed choice.
- 7 Programmes on crime and violence should not be treated in a cynical, frivolous or callous manner. Such programmes should not incite, glamorise or in any way promote violence or other types of anti-social behaviour.
- 8 Content pertaining to sex and nudity (including programmes on AIDS, sex education, childbirth, etc.) should be treated with discretion and due consideration so as not to offend against good taste and decency.
- 9 Factual programmes such as news, current affairs or documentary programmes should present information in an objective, accurate and balanced manner.

## **PART 1: NATIONAL INTEREST**

- 1.1 Television programmes should not:
  - (a) promote values and attitudes which are contrary to national interest;
  - (b) present information or events in a manner likely to mislead or cause alarm to the public;
  - (c) contain propagandist and ideological messages on behalf of any foreign country, group or organisation;

- (d) contain extremist or anarchic messages, including the incitement of violence for political ends or other purposes; or
  - (e) sensationalise the treatment of any issue whether local, nationalistic or foreign in nature.
- 1.2 Broadcasters must ensure that due impartiality is observed in programmes dealing with matters of public policy or controversial issues of public importance in Singapore. Due impartiality requires programme producers to deal even-handedly when opposing points of view are presented in a programme. On matters of public importance, balance should be sought through the presentation, as far as possible, of principal relevant viewpoints. Programmes should not be slanted by the exclusion of facts or by misleading emphasis. Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the factual content of programmes is accurate.

## **PART 2: RACIAL & RELIGIOUS HARMONY**

2.1 Matters pertaining to race and religion are sensitive and capable of evoking strong passion and emotions. Broadcasters should exercise due caution when featuring the views, beliefs, practices, or activities of racial and religious groups.

2.2 For the purpose of this part, race includes dialect groups and ethnic groups.

### **Race & Religion**

2.3 Television as a mass medium should be kept secular. Programmes of a proselytic nature should not be broadcast.

2.4 Programmes which denigrate or are likely to offend the sensitivities of any racial or religious group should not be broadcast.

2.5 Programmes which incite or are likely to incite racial and/or religious intolerance, or misunderstanding, should not be broadcast.

2.6 References to race and religion should be presented accurately and in a dignified and sensitive manner.

2.7 Broadcasters must bear in mind the main religious faiths practised in Singapore whenever they carry programmes which make reference to or touch upon religious views or beliefs. In featuring any religious view or belief, broadcasters should ensure such views do not in any way disparage or cast other faiths in poor light.

2.8 Racial and religious stereotyping must be avoided.

## **PART 3: FAMILY VIEWING POLICY**

3.1 It is the Authority's aim to ensure that unsuitable material for children is not broadcast at times when there may be a large audience of young viewers.

## **Family Viewing Policies**

- 3.2 All programmes broadcast between 6am and 10pm must be suitable for family audiences. The transition from family-oriented to more adult programming after the watershed time of 10pm should also be executed gradually.
- 3.3 Consumer advice like warnings, labelling, classification details and other information announcements should be sufficient and reliable and given prior to telecast of the programme or its trailer. However, this does not diminish the licensee's responsibility for sensitive scheduling of programmes to reduce the risk of causing offence.

## **Programmes requiring Parental Guidance (PG) and Parental Guidance 13 (PG13)**

- 3.4 Programmes that are rated PG13 usually contain themes and content which may not be suitable for children below 13. These programmes should only be aired between 10pm and 6am. PG-rated programmes, may be aired before 10pm, but should be scheduled in appropriate timeslots. In addition, programmes rated PG and PG13 should also be accompanied on screen before the start of the programme by a viewing advisory describing the principal elements which have contributed to the rating, including their intensity and/or frequency (e.g. "*Due to strong violence/frequent horror scenes etc, parental guidance is advised.*"). This description should be clearly worded and displayed in a readily legible typeface that should remain visible for at least 5 seconds.
- 3.5 For all PG and PG13-rated programmes, a warning indicator should be superimposed at the top left-hand corner of the screen at the beginning of the programme and after every commercial break for one minute.
- 3.6 To provide more information to viewers, broadcasters are encouraged to include the relevant viewing advisory beside programmes rated PG and PG13 in publicity materials (like the TV page in newspapers and TV guides), such as:

**PG13 [Mature Themes]**  
**PG13 [Horror]**  
**PG13 [Violence]**

## **Trailers and Programme Promotions**

- 3.7 Trailers of programmes should be prepared with care and sensitivity based on target audience and broadcast time, and in compliance with the guidelines stipulated in the TV Advertising Code.

## **PART 4: CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES**

- 4.1 Children may not be able to distinguish real life from fiction, and are likely to be disturbed by the realistic portrayal of violence, horror etc. They are also

more predisposed to imitative behaviour. As such, no advantage should be taken of children's natural credulity.

- 4.2 For the purpose of this section, "children" refers to persons aged 14 years and below.

### **Range and Quality of Children's Programmes**

- 4.3 Children's programmes should be wholesome and in general designed to impart a broader knowledge of the world around them, and to promote appreciation of good social and moral values. Stories must generally reflect respect for law and order, parents, elders and fellow human beings. Stories should clearly portray good morals e.g. heroic and villainous characters must be distinguishable, and the lifestyles of gangs and gangsters should not be portrayed as desirable.
- 4.4 Programmes should not contain scenes depicting the consumption of liquor or tobacco products unless an educational point is being made, or in very exceptional cases if the dramatic context makes it absolutely necessary. Swear words should also not be used in such programmes.
- 4.5 The portrayal of any dangerous or harmful behaviour easily imitated by children should be avoided. Animated programmes must avoid excessive violence, especially those featuring humans and life-like characters and depicting realistic story lines. While it is accepted that stylised violence can be entertaining and often humorous in comedy and in animation, more serious representation, for example, in children's drama, should always be editorially justified and should ensure that the consequences of violence are treated appropriately.
- 4.6 Programmes should not be presented in a manner which may be disturbing or distressing to children or which may in any way adversely affect their general well being.
- 4.7 Programmes for younger children require special care as they may find violence and horror scenes/programmes in both realistic and fantasy settings to be disturbing. For programmes which may be frightening to pre-schoolers, broadcasters should provide an advisory to alert parents.

### **PART 5: PUBLIC MORALS & SOCIAL VALUES**

- 5.1 Broadcasters should bear in mind the importance of the family as the basic unit of society in Singapore. The sanctity of marriage should be respected, and divorce should not be treated casually or in a frivolous manner. Adultery, cohabitation and promiscuity should not be endorsed, glamorised or encouraged.
- 5.2 Programmes should not make careless references to any class or group of persons as being inherently inferior. Programmes should not encourage or in any way discriminate against any section of the community on account of gender, age, disability or occupational status.

- 5.3 Behaviour such as smoking and alcoholism should not be presented as glamorous or desirable, especially in local programmes.
- 5.4 Broadcasters should be mindful of social and cultural sensitivities, such as kissing in programmes targeted at Malay audiences which should be avoided.

## **PART 6: THEMES**

- 6.1 The theme (subject matter or topic) and message are important in the classification of a programme. The acceptability of a theme is determined by its suitability and treatment, i.e. the way it is presented and the context in which scenes are presented. Suitability and treatment of a theme is especially important for the lower classification ratings as they have an impact on the young.

## **PART 7: SEX & NUDITY**

### **Sex**

- 7.1 The level of sexual activity allowed in a programme depends on the explicitness and frequency of the activity, its relevance to the storyline and the target audience. Generally, depictions of sexual activity are not allowed for G, PG -rated programmes, while PG13-rated programmes may contain implied sexual activity, but should be infrequent and brief.
- 7.2 Scenes depicting sexual activities such as sado-masochism, bondage or sexual violence are not allowed on FTA TV. However, scenes implying these activities may be permitted if sensitively treated and appropriately rated.
- 7.3 Programmes likely to encourage deviant sexual activities such as pedophilia, bestiality and necrophilia are not allowed for all ratings.
- 7.4 Content considered to be pornographic or obscene in nature is not allowed for all ratings.

### **Nudity**

- 7.5 Nudity is not allowed for a G rating. Rear nudity is allowed in PG-rated programmes if it is discreet, justified by context and not meant to titillate. Side nudity in a non-sexual context is allowed under PG13.
- 7.6 Nudity featured in health programmes such as breast-feeding can be rated PG or PG13 depending on its portrayal and treatment. Top frontal nudity may be allowed only under exceptional circumstances and in a non sexual context. For example, some nudity may be appropriate and may be shown in programmes which feature historical or dramatised events such as the World War II Holocaust, tribal ways of life, or health programmes on breast feeding and breast cancer.

## **PART 8: VIOLENCE, CRIME & DRUG USE**

### **Violence**

- 8.1 The depiction of violence may frighten, unnerve, unsettle or invite imitation, especially from children. Therefore, only mild portrayals that are relevant to the plot may be allowed in programmes meant for children.
- 8.2 The concerns in violence are:
- Depiction of graphic/gratuitous violence
  - Normalising the use of violence as a solution to resolve problems;
  - Depiction of violent gangster behaviour (e.g. self mutilation rites);
  - Emphasis on violent techniques/acts (e.g. methods of torture, gang-fights, combat techniques);
  - Encouraging aggressive and sadistic attitudes towards infliction of pain and violence;
  - Explicit and prolonged sexual violence or erotic portrayal of sexual assault /coercion.
- 8.3 Mild portrayals of violence are allowed for a G rating, provided the portrayal does not include dangerous or harmful behaviour that can be easily imitated by children. Moderate portrayals of violence without detail are allowed in PG-rated programmes if justified by context, and if the portrayals of violence do not dwell on cruelty, infliction of pain or torture of any kind. Moderate portrayals of violence with some details is allowed in PG13-rated programmes if justified by context. The portrayals of violence can include some infliction of pain and injury but should not be detailed, intense or prolonged.

### **Crime**

- 8.4 Programmes should not glamorise or in any way promote persons (e.g. gangsters, vandals, delinquents etc.) groups or organisations who use or advocate the use of violence or engage in any criminal activity within Singapore or elsewhere.
- 8.5 Broadcasters should not broadcast any information from any source which could endanger lives or prejudice the success of attempts to deal with any crime such as hijacking or kidnapping.
- 8.6 In programmes dealing with criminal activities, whether in fiction or a documentary, there may be conflict between the demands of realism and the risk of unintentionally assisting the criminally inclined. Careful thought should be given and, where appropriate, advice taken from the police, before information is given about law-breaking or methods/techniques countering law enforcement or other security measures.

- 8.7 Care needs to be taken in programmes to avoid any impression that illegal drugs and substance abuse are socially acceptable, glamorous, or harmless. Detailed depiction of methods of illegal drug-taking should be avoided.

### **Drug Use**

- 8.8 Clear, instructive details are not allowed in G, PG and PG13 content as they can be imitated by the younger audience. Portrayals glamorising or encouraging the use of illegal drugs are not allowed for all ratings.

## **PART 9: GAMBLING & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

- 9.1 Broadcasters must take into account the potential cumulative effect of programme content normalising anti-social behaviour or gambling, as regular and recurrent portrayals of such content may lead viewers to become more callous about anti-social behaviour or the ills of gambling.

### **Gambling**

- 9.2 Programmes depicting gambling or the use of gambling devices should be presented with discretion and in a manner that does not encourage or offer instruction to viewers. Gambling programmes/segments are acceptable only if it is relevant to the development of the plot or as an appropriate background to the story.
- 9.3 The broadcast of all forms of gambling tips is strictly prohibited. No programme should encourage, promote or in any way offer instruction on gambling even with regard to legitimate forms of gambling.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

- 9.4 Glorification of gangs and secret societies should be avoided.
- 9.5 Hooliganism, vandalism, juvenile delinquency and the lifestyle of deviant sub-cultures should not be glamorised or presented in a favourable light.

## **PART 10: HORROR, SUPERNATURAL, FORTUNE TELLING & OTHER BELIEFS**

- 10.1 Classification of programmes with horror elements should take into consideration the impact and shock effect of such films to ensure that younger audiences are protected from disturbing materials.
- 10.2 The treatment of horror for G-rated content should not be too realistic or threatening, and such scenes should also be mild and not psychologically disturbing. PG-rated programmes should not contain frightening sequences that are prolonged or intense. The depiction of horror can be more realistic and intense in PG13 programmes.
- 10.3 Belief in superstition should not be promoted.



## **Occult and 'Psychic' Practices**

- 10.4 Programmes exploring occult or 'psychic' practices, particularly those with actual demonstrations of exorcisms and occult practices involving supposed contact with spirits or the dead, should be treated with caution.
- 10.5 Broadcasters should exercise caution when scheduling fiction programmes which focus on 'psychic' or supernatural phenomena. Programmes of this nature should be scheduled after 10pm, especially in instances where the treatment or presentation of such themes is dark and frightening for younger viewers.

## **Fortune Telling & Other Beliefs**

- 10.6 Programmes based on or pertaining to fortune-telling, feng-shui, palm-reading, numerology, mind-reading, tarot reading, astrology, new age healing and the like should not give the impression that these practices are exact sciences.

## **PART 11: NEWS & OTHER FACTUAL PROGRAMMES**

- 11.1 Due impartiality requires broadcasters to deal even-handedly with diverse viewpoints in any factual (especially forum-based) programmes. Balance should be sought through the presentation of different viewpoints. Programmes should not be slanted by the exclusion of facts or by misleading emphasis. Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the factual content of programmes is accurate.
- 11.2 A right of reply or an opportunity to respond shall be granted to the Government or its agencies, to correct mistakes, wrongful reporting or misrepresentations. For private individuals and groups, an opportunity to respond should be considered on the merits of each case. IMDA may direct a broadcaster to give an aggrieved party the opportunity to respond over an appropriate medium.
- 11.3 Significant errors in factual programmes such as news, current affairs and documentary programmes should be corrected and broadcast at the earliest opportunity.

## **News**

- 11.4 Presentation of news must observe the following guidelines:
  - (a) News reports / bulletins should always be presented with due impartiality and without the interjection of personal views by presenters. They should also be clearly distinguished from commentary and analysis.
  - (b) Morbid, sensational, or alarming details not essential to factual reporting should be avoided.

- (c) Particular care must be taken when reporting on sexual crimes. Reports must not carry information which could lead to the identification of such victims.
- (d) News reports must be sensitive to the use of materials or information relating to a person's personal or private affairs. The broadcast of such materials or information is acceptable only if there is an identifiable public interest for doing so.
- (e) Images that may seriously distress or offend should only be displayed when there is an identifiable public interest reason for doing so. In this regard, sensitivity must be exercised in broadcasting images of or interviews with bereaved relatives and survivors or witnesses of traumatic incidents.
- (f) Sexual or other sensational material should not be exploited as news items without justification.

11.5 Any simulation of a television news bulletin or news flash to be included in any programme should be clearly distinguishable from an actual news bulletin.

### **Personal View Programmes**

11.6 Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact in all factual programmes. Personal view programmes in which an individual is given the opportunity to put forward his or her own views, without necessarily referring to opposing views, are subject to the following guidelines:

- (a) The programme must be clearly identified as one which contains personal opinions/views, both in advance announcements and at the start of the programme.
- (b) Acknowledged or undisputed facts must be respected, and broadcasters have an obligation to do what they can to ensure that the opinions expressed, however partial, do not rest upon false or inaccurate facts.
- (c) A suitable opportunity for response to the programme should be provided to correct mistakes, factual errors or biased analyses.

### **Accuracy and Fairness in Dramatised 'Reconstructions'**

11.7 Dramatised "reconstructions" in factual programmes or docu-dramas that seek to reconstruct actual events as a means of obtaining greater authenticity should not distort key reality issues and should be identified as such, so that the fictional elements are not misleadingly presented as fact.

11.8 The evidence on which a dramatic reconstruction is based should be tested with the same rigour required of a factual programme. Sequences that are based on extracts of court proceedings or other matters of public record must be fair and accurate. Where the creative realisation of some elements (such

as characterisation, dialogue or atmosphere) may introduce a fictional dimension, this should not be allowed to distort the known facts.

## **PART 12: REALITY, MUSICAL & VARIETY PROGRAMMES**

### **Reality TV**

- 12.1 As Reality TV may involve the filming of ordinary individuals with or without their consent or in set-up situations, complaints about programme invasion of privacy can arise from the gathering of material or from the way an individual is treated in such programmes. Broadcasters shall only collect material for broadcast purpose by means which are lawful and fair in the circumstances of the case.

### **Musical & Variety Programmes**

- 12.2 Films and music videos disallowed under the Films Act should generally not be broadcast. However, if suitable edits can be made, such content may be deemed passable for broadcast. Songs disallowed or otherwise prohibited under the applicable laws and regulations in Singapore must not be aired. Music associated with drugs, alternative lifestyles (e.g. homosexuality) or the worship of the occult or the devil should not be broadcast.
- 12.3 Broadcasters must exercise sensitivity and avoid humour which offends good taste and decency. Examples include jokes based on race, gender, disability, as such humour (even without malicious intent) can easily cause hurt or humiliation.
- 12.4 It is the responsibility of the broadcaster to ensure that choreographed dance sequences and the appearance of artists should be in good taste and not offend any religion, race or culture. Specifically, entertainment programmes involving children should not be exploitative or distasteful. Care must be taken to ensure that children performing in entertainment programmes are not made to behave inappropriately (e.g. stripping and wearing skimpy clothing).
- 12.5 Where a contest is included in a programme, references to prizes must not be made in such a way as to amount to advertising. Aural or visual references to prizes or acknowledgement of the source of prizes are allowed in contests provided that they are not excessive. The presentation of tobacco products as prizes or gifts for contests is not permitted.

## **PART 13: LANGUAGE**

- 13.1 Programmes should maintain high standards of language and speech in the four official languages of Singapore.
- 13.2 Standard English, which is grammatically correct, should be used for programmes such as news, current affairs and info-educational programmes. Local English, which is also grammatically correct but

pronounced with a Singaporean accent and which may include local terms and expressions, could be used for programmes like dramas, comedies and variety shows.

- 13.3 Singlish, which is ungrammatical local English, and includes dialect terms and sentence structures based on dialect, should not be encouraged and can only be permitted in interviews, where the interviewee speaks only Singlish. The interviewer himself, however, should not use Singlish.
- 13.4 All Chinese programmes, except operas or other programmes specifically approved by the Authority, must be in Mandarin. Dialects in dialogues and songs may be allowed provided the context justifies usage and is sparingly used. Exceptions are given to:
- (a) News, current affairs and info-educational programmes where dialect interviews are given by older people or foreigners who can only converse in dialect. Subtitles or voice-overs should be provided for these interviews.
  - (b) Some dialect terms such as those used for food (e.g. *bak kut teh*, *char kway teow* and *ang gu kuey*) may also be used in local dramas.
  - (c) Dialect theme songs may also be played during the opening or closing programme credits of acquired Chinese dramas.
- 13.5 Sub-standard Mandarin (characterised by poor syntax or use of vocabulary, poorly pronounced Mandarin or mixed with many dialect terms) should be avoided in all Chinese programmes.
- 13.6 Dialects in dialogues and songs in English programmes may be allowed provided the context justifies usage and is sparingly used. (Exceptions as in Clause 12.4 (a) and (b) apply.)
- 13.7 The use of Bahasa Melayu Baku (standard pronunciation of Malay) is encouraged for all Malay programmes, particularly news, current affairs and information programmes. Specific guidelines as follows:
- (a) For local programmes, info-educational and current affairs programmes must be in Bahasa Melayu Baku. Some flexibility can be given to drama and variety shows.
  - (b) Foreign or acquired programmes that require dubbing should be in Bahasa Melayu Baku. However, acquired programmes that are already in Malay need not be re-dubbed into Bahasa Melayu Baku.

### **Coarse Language**

- 13.8 Obscene or offensive jokes, words, gestures, songs, dialogues and subtitles should not be broadcast.

## **PART 14: INTERACTIVE SERVICES**

## **Contests & Premium Charge Telephone Services**

14.1 If, during a program or program promotion, viewers are invited to use a premium charge telephone service (including SMS) to obtain information, register a view on a matter or participate in a competition, the broadcaster must provide clearly readable information about the cost of the call. If the programme is one that has a substantial child audience, information about the cost of the call must be in a form which children can understand, and must be presented visually and orally. Children must be asked to seek parental permission before calling.

## **SMS, MMS & Other Interactive Services**

14.2 Locally produced or packaged programmes which allow viewers to interact on-air via short messaging service (SMS) or multimedia messaging service (MMS) are subject to the guidelines in this Code and the following conditions:

- (a) All SMS/MMS should be screened and moderated before broadcast and be in accordance with the guidelines in this Code.
- (b) The provision, promotion or facilitation of anonymous private chat services or options is not allowed. Even if the broadcaster does not offer an actual private chat service or option, the moderator must screen out all SMS/MMS that solicit private chat among users (e.g., messages that provide users' personal contact details must be screened out). The programme should also not be used as a means for soliciting dates among users (e.g., strangers arranging to meet each other at an agreed public place).

## **PART 15: STIMULI BEYOND NORMAL PERCEPTUAL THRESHOLD**

### **Subliminal Messages**

15.1 Broadcasters should not employ the process known as "subliminal perception" or any other techniques or devices (e.g. by using images of very brief duration) which attempts to convey information to the viewer by transmitting messages beyond the normal threshold of awareness.

### **Flashing Images and Regular Patterns**

15.2 Flashing lights and certain types of regular visual patterns can cause problems for some viewers who have photosensitive epilepsy. Care must be taken to minimise these risks in all programmes, but especially those where young people are likely to be watching as they could be more susceptible.

### **Hypnotism**

- 15.3 For any broadcast on demonstration of hypnotism for entertainment, care must be taken to minimise the risk of hypnosis being induced in susceptible viewers. In particular, the hypnotist must not be shown performing straight into the camera.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME CODE**

This Code shall come into effect on 24 June 2013 and replace the Code that took effect from 18 January 2012. IMDA may from time to time revise or update the Code to maintain currency. The Code should also be read in conjunction with the TV Advertising Code and the TV Programme Sponsorship Code.

**- END -**

**BOARD OF FILM CENSORS  
CLASSIFICATION GUIDELINES**

**Preamble**

1. These Guidelines have been prepared to raise awareness and understanding of the Board's film classification process. This is not a legal document and is not intended to limit in any way the Board's exercise of functions under the Films Act (Cap 107). While care has been taken to define the content concerns and classification categories, the Board reserves the right to classify any film in such manner as it deems fit.

2. The following guidelines serve as a basis for classifying films, drama, documentaries and TV series on free-to-air TV, subscription TV and video-on-demand. It will enable subscription TV and free-to-air TV to adopt the same ratings for films which have been classified by the BFC for the cinemas and video release.

**Introduction**

3. Classification Guidelines aim to reflect community standards, while ensuring that due consideration is given to the film's artistic, educational or literary merit. The purpose of classification is to protect the young while allowing more choice for adults.

4. When making a classification decision for a film, the Board takes careful consideration of the film's content as well as all other relevant factors and concerns. The description of each of the classification categories and the indication of the suitable audience in terms of age may be found in these guidelines. To clarify the usage of words in the guidelines, a glossary of terms is included.

5. There are six ratings in film classification. They are:

- G - General
- PG - Parental Guidance
- PG13 - Parental Guidance for Children below 13
- NC16 - No Children below 16 years of age
- M18 - Mature 18, for persons 18 years and above
- R21 - Restricted to persons 21 years and above

6. G, PG and PG13 categories are advisory ratings while NC16, M18 and R21 are enforceable by law. Cinema operators are required to obtain a licence to screen NC16, M18 or R21 films. They should ensure that the age restriction is enforced.

7. In exceptional cases, a film may not be allowed for all ratings (NAR) when the content of the film undermines national interest or erodes the moral fabric of society.

## General Principles

8. In general, the Board's classification decisions are guided by the following principles/considerations:

- Generally accepted social mores
- Need to protect the young
- Racial/religious harmony
- National interest
- Treatment of theme, content and context
- Evaluation of impact

a. Generally Accepted Social Mores

Films screened must be sensitive to community standards of morality and decency, as well as social norms acceptable to the general public.

b. Need to Protect the Young

For the lower ratings, particular attention will be paid to content that may be harmful to or unsuitable for the young.

c. Racial/Religious Harmony

As Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-religious society, films that denigrate any racial or religious group, or create misunderstanding or disharmony amongst the races are not allowed for all ratings.

d. National Interest

Films deemed to undermine public order, national security and/or stability will be disallowed for all ratings.

e. Treatment of Theme, Content and Context

How a film is classified depends on its theme or message, presentation of content, and the context in which scenes are presented.

f. Evaluation of Impact

The impact of a film or a scene will be evaluated based on the presentation, duration, frequency, degree of visual and audio details, and their cumulative effect.

The impact may be stronger where a scene:

- Is shown in greater detail; uses close-ups and slow motion
- Uses special effects such as lighting, sound, colour, or size of image to heighten emotions
- Is prolonged and/or frequent
- Is more explicit than implied



- Is realistic rather than stylised
- Is one in which the local audience can identify with
- Is visual rather than verbal or written.

9. In addition, films produced in a 3D format heighten the viewing experience and will be assessed for impact. They may be considered for a higher rating.

10. In classifying films, due consideration will be given to the artistic, educational or literary merit of the film.

### **Major Content Concerns**

11. This part of the guidelines spells out content concerns that are applied in different degrees at all classification levels. The seven major content concerns are:

- Theme
- Violence
- Nudity
- Sex
- Language
- Drug Use
- Horror

#### **a. Theme and Message**

The theme (subject matter or topic) and message are important in the classification of a film. The acceptability of a theme is determined by its suitability and treatment i.e. the way it is presented and the context in which scenes are presented. Suitability and treatment of a theme is especially important for the lower classification ratings as they have an impact on the young. Films dealing with mature content (e.g. drug use, prostitution or homosexuality) would generally be classified as NC16, M18 or R21.

#### **b. Violence**

(i) The depiction of violence may frighten, unnerve, unsettle or invite imitation, especially from children. Therefore, only mild portrayals that are relevant to the plot may be allowed in films meant for children. For the higher classifications, a stronger depiction of violence is permitted if it is justified by context.

(ii) The concerns in violence are:

- Depiction of graphic/gratuitous violence
- Normalising the use of violence as a solution to resolve problems;
- Depiction of violent gangster behaviour (e.g. self mutilation rites);
- Emphasis on violent techniques/acts (e.g. methods of torture, gang-fights, combat techniques);
- Encouraging aggressive and sadistic attitudes towards infliction of pain and violence;

- Explicit and prolonged sexual violence or erotic portrayal of sexual assault /coercion.

c. Nudity

Nudity is not allowed for a G rating. Rear nudity is allowed in PG films if it is discreet, justified by context and not meant to titillate. Side nudity in a non-sexual context is allowed under PG13. Upper body frontal nudity in a non-sexual context is allowed under NC16. Full frontal nudity may be allowed for M18 or R21, if it is justified by context and without gratuitous close-ups.

Nudity featured in health programs such as breast-feeding can be rated PG, PG13 or NC16 depending on its portrayal and treatment. More explicit portrayals including child birth could be given a higher rating.

d. Sex

The level of sexual activity allowed on screen depends on the explicitness and frequency of the activity, its relevance to the storyline and the target audience. Generally, depictions of sexual activity are not allowed for G, PG, PG13 and NC16.

Scenes depicting sexual activities such as sado-masochism, bondage or sexual violence will be subject to strict review and may only be allowed under a higher rating, depending on the treatment and context. The content should also not be gratuitous or excessive.

Films likely to encourage deviant sexual activities such as paedophilia, bestiality and necrophilia are not allowed for all ratings.

Films that depict a homosexual lifestyle should be sensitive to community values. They should not, promote or justify a homosexual lifestyle. However, non-exploitative and non-explicit depictions of sexual activity between two persons of the same gender may be considered for R21.

Content considered to be pornographic or obscene in nature is not allowed for all ratings.

e. Language

Coarse language and gestures with sexual connotations are not allowed in G films as they are easily imitated by young children. In PG13 films, expletives such as 'fuck' may be permitted if infrequent. Stronger language is acceptable in NC16 films. When classifying M18 and R21 films, consideration would be given to the degree of offensiveness (i.e. vulgarity and religious association) and frequency of such language.

Films with dialect content are allowed on a case-by-case basis. Chinese films meant for theatrical release should generally be in Mandarin, in line with the Speak Mandarin Campaign.

f. Drug Use

Clear, instructive details are not allowed in G, PG and PG13 films as they can be imitated by the younger audience. Such scenes are more acceptable for higher ratings if they are justifiable by context. Portrayals glamorising or encouraging the use of illegal drugs are not allowed for all ratings. .

g. Horror

Classification of horror films will take into consideration the impact and shock effect of such films to ensure that younger audiences are protected from disturbing materials.

### **Documentaries**

12. Documentaries will be classified in accordance with the general principles and content concerns expressed in this document. If the information/content is distorted or misrepresented, or requires maturity to comprehend and discern the message and/or intent, the documentary may be given a higher rating.

### **Consumer Advice**

13. Film ratings are usually accompanied by consumer advice. Films classified PG may be given consumer advice where necessary, for example, in the case of violence. Films rated PG13, NC16, M18 and R21 must carry consumer advice.

14. Rating and consumer advice must be clearly visible and legible in publicity materials including website synopses, advertisements in newspapers and magazines. This is to provide more information for consumers to make informed decisions. It also serves as a guide to parents about the suitability of a film for their children.

### **Trailers**

15. All trailers of films must be submitted for classification. Where the trailer content is not suitable for a general audience, a higher rating will be imposed. Trailers classified as NC16 and above can only be exhibited to persons who meet the stipulated age requirement.

16. Trailers rated PG13 should not be shown prior to a G-rated or PG-rated film, or in public places such as video walls.

17. Trailers of NC16 and M18-rated films may be screened during films of a lower rating and/or at cinema lobbies and at video walls. However, in all cases, the content should be suitable for a general audience, including children. Trailers for R21 films can only be shown before films of the same rating. Film distributors should also observe any conditions imposed by the BFC on the screening of the trailers.

## **Publicity Materials**

18. To avoid offending unsolicited viewers and attracting the under-aged, stricter content standards are applied to publicity materials. These materials include posters, banners or billboards displayed in public places, advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Publicity materials for all ratings should conform to community standards and should not offend the general public. Detailed guidelines for print publicity materials are available on the IMDA website.

19. Once a film is classified, posters displayed at public places should clearly display the rating and consumer advice. The display of posters and banners for R21 films should be restricted to cinemas licensed to exhibit R21 films. More sensitivity should also be exercised in the dissemination of publicity materials for films in the lower rating categories as they can be displayed in public places where young audiences are exposed to them.

## **Periodic Review and Implementation of Guidelines**

20. The Board will continue to review guidelines periodically in the light of changes in lifestyle, public expectations and concerns.

15 July 2011

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Coarse language:</b>	Crude and/or offensive language lacking refinement or taste.
<b>Denigrate:</b>	To belittle or distort in a negative way the character of a person/race/religion
<b>Depiction:</b>	Representation, and/or portrayal on screen.
<b>Detail:</b>	Treatment of or attention given to the amount of audio or visual information in the representation of a subject. Detail can include close-ups, repeated, prolonged or slow motion visuals.
<b>Deviant sex:</b>	Sexual behaviour or activities that are not considered socially acceptable. Examples are paedophilia, bestiality, necrophilia and orgies.
<b>Discreet:</b>	Subtle, not explicit, lacking in details and close-ups.
<b>Disturbing:</b>	Upsetting or troubling.
<b>Drug abuse:</b>	Improper or excessive use of drugs.
<b>Excessive:</b>	Beyond reasonable limits, especially in terms of detail, duration or frequency.
<b>Expletive:</b>	An exclamatory word or phrase that is obscene or profane.
<b>Explicit</b>	Language or depiction with strong details, usually relating to sex and violence.
<b>Exploitative:</b>	Appearing to take advantage of or abuse the situation for the enjoyment of viewers or for sensationalism; lacking moral, artistic, or other values.
<b>Fetish:</b>	An object, an action or a non-sexual part of the body which gives sexual gratification.
<b>Gratuitous:</b>	Materials which are unwarranted or uncalled for, and included without the justification of a defensible story-line or artistic merit.
<b>Horror:</b>	A strong feeling of fear or distress that is inspired by images or acts that are frightful and shocking.
<b>Implied:</b>	Depiction of a subject in which an act or thing is inferred or indicated without actually being seen.
<b>Incite:</b>	To stir up or provoke strong emotions and actions.

<b>Intensity:</b>	The degree or extent to which a subject matter is acute or strong (The intensity of a scene depends on the duration, the audio/visual effects, language, context and the proximity from which the shot was taken).
<b>Justified by context:</b>	Where the depiction is relevant and necessary for the integrity and continuity of the film.
<b>Mature themes:</b>	Issues dealing with adult life, including adultery, alternative lifestyles, promiscuity, suicide, drug dependency, etc.
<b>Moderate:</b>	Depiction that features some details and may have some impact that is kept within reasonable limits, which is generally acceptable.
<b>Nudity:</b>	Nudity can consist of frontal or rear nudity, above and below the waist for both sexes. It is determined by the details of nudity shown, and also by other factors including the duration of visuals, repetition, close-up shots and clarity.
<b>Offensive:</b>	Material that causes outrage or disgust to most people.
<b>Pornography:</b>	The depiction of erotic behaviour intended to cause sexual excitement.
<b>Sexual activity:</b>	An act performed with another for sexual gratification. May include foreplay.
<b>Sexual Connotation:</b>	Words or gestures that imply sexual activity.
<b>Sexual violence:</b>	The act of sexual assault or aggression, in which the victim does not consent e.g. rape.
<b>Sexual simulation:</b>	Imitation or enactment of sexual activity that is not real but looks realistic.
<b>Strong:</b>	Detailed depiction likely to have high impact on viewers.
<b>Suggestion:</b>	Mild, discreet treatment of a subject in which an act or object is hinted at, generally through discreet manner, rather than the whole picture.
<b>Tone:</b>	The quality of mood, such as sadness, humour, menace, lightness, or seriousness.
<b>Transvestism:</b>	The lifestyle in which a person adopts the clothes and behaviour of the opposite sex for purposes of emotional or sexual gratification.

**Treatment:**

The way in which material is handled or presented.

## CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS

How a film is rated depends on seven classifiable elements: theme, violence, sex, nudity, language, drug and substance abuse, and horror.

### Theme

G	Themes are suitable for viewers of all ages. Content should promote positive social values e.g. family bonding, respect for the elders.
PG	Themes should be suitable for children below 13 years. Themes should generally have a low sense of threat or menace, and be justifiable by context. Special attention should be paid to their Impact on children. Crime, violence, juvenile delinquency and promiscuity should not be glamorised or promoted.
PG13	Themes should be suitable for young teens between 13 and 15. Darker themes can be allowed. Crime, violence, juvenile delinquency, and promiscuity should not be glamorised or promoted.
NC16	Portrayal of mature themes (e.g. gangsterism and transvestism) may be allowed, provided they are treated with discretion and appropriate to those 16 years and above.
M18	Stronger portrayal and exploration of mature themes are allowed. Homosexual theme/content as a sub-plot may be permitted, if discreet in treatment and not gratuitous.
R21	Stronger and more explicit portrayal and exploration of mature themes are allowed. Films that portray, as a main theme, same-sex marriages or parenting will be subject to strict review.
NAR	Themes that promote issues that denigrate any race or religion, or undermine national interest will not be allowed. Themes that glorify undesirable fetishes or behaviour (e.g. paedophilia and bestiality) are not allowed. Promotion or glamorisation of homosexual lifestyle.



## Violence

G	Mild portrayals of violence are allowed. The occasional mild threat or menace is acceptable if justified by context. No portrayals of dangerous or harmful behaviour that can be easily imitated by children.
PG	Moderate portrayals of violence without details, may be allowed, if justified by context. Portrayals of violence should not dwell on cruelty, infliction of pain or torture of any kind.
PG13	Moderate portrayals of violence with some details, may be allowed, if justified by context. Portrayals of violence can include some infliction of pain and injury but should not be detailed, intense or prolonged.
NC16	The portrayal of infliction of pain and injuries may be allowed with some details of blood and gore but should not be prolonged or frequent. Explicit sexual violence is not allowed.
M18	Realistic depiction of violence and gore with strong impact is allowed if justified by context. However, the portrayal should not be excessive, gratuitous or exploitative. Stronger portrayals of sexual violence may be allowed if justified by context, infrequent or without strong details.
R21	Strong and realistic depictions of violence and gore are allowed if justified by context. Depiction of torture can be allowed, if not exploitative or gratuitous.
NAR	Detailed or gratuitous depictions of extreme violence or cruelty. Detailed instructions on methods of crime or killings.

## Sex

G	No sexual activity is allowed. Portrayals of affection (e.g. brief kissing) can be allowed.
PG	Sexual activity may be implied, and should be infrequent. Only mild displays of affection (e.g. kissing and caressing) and mild sexual innuendoes are allowed.
PG13	Sexual activity may be implied, and should be infrequent and brief. Sexual humour can be allowed. Sexual innuendoes, crude hand gestures and sexual imagery can be allowed if mild and infrequent.
NC16	Non-explicit depiction of sexual activities may be allowed but should not be detailed or prolonged.
M18	Sexual activity may be portrayed if justified by context, infrequent and without strong details. Depiction of occasional, mild sexual activity (i.e. kissing and hugging) between persons of the same gender may be permitted if justified by context and not gratuitous. Sexual violence may be allowed if justified by context, infrequent and without strong details.
R21	Simulated sexual activities are allowed if they are not excessive. Explicit images of sexual activity (e.g. masturbation, fellatio and sexual act) need to be justified by context. Explicit portrayals of sex between persons of the same gender are not allowed. Films likely to encourage an interest in abusive or unnatural sexual activity (e.g. paedophilia, incest and anal sex) are not permitted. Films with themes involving deviant sexual activities (e.g. sadomasochism, bondage, orgies or sex involving violence) will be subject to strict review and are likely to be disallowed.
NAR	Exploitative or pornographic sexual acts. Depictions of obscene and/or unnatural sexual activities (e.g. bestiality, necrophilia and paedophilia). Real sexual activities (e.g. actual penetration, actual ejaculation). Gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions or sexual activity including fetishes or practices which are offensive or abhorrent.

## Nudity

G	There should be no nudity.
PG	Discreet portrayal of back nudity is allowed if it is brief and in a non-sexual context. Full frontal and side nudity is not allowed.
PG13	Discreet and fleeting side profile nudity may be allowed in a non-sexual context. Full frontal nudity is not allowed. However, infrequent portrayal of female frontal nudity of the upper body may be allowed only under exceptional circumstances and in a non-sexual context. For example, films which feature historical or dramatised events such as the World War II Holocaust, tribal ways of life, or health programmes.
NC16	Infrequent, brief and discreet portrayal of female upper body frontal nudity may be allowed in a non-sexual context.
M18	Full frontal nudity with moderate detail is acceptable if justified by context, and not excessive. No close up of genitalia is allowed.
R21	Full nudity is permitted but should not be excessive. Close ups of genitalia should be contextually justifiable.
NAR	Exploitative and excessive nudity.

## Language

G	No coarse language is allowed.
PG	Infrequent coarse language is allowed if it is relevant and justified by context. Examples are "bitch" and "asshole".
PG13	The word "f**k" is allowed if used infrequently, except on free-to-air television.
NC16	Infrequent use of expletives such as "motherf**ker", "cunt", "chee bye", "lan jiao", "puki mak" and "pundai" may be allowed if justified by context and not impactful. Coarse language which offends community and cultural sensitivities should not be allowed (e.g. "kan ni na lao bu"). Continued aggressive use of strong language and verbal sexual abuse is unacceptable.
M18	Coarse language is allowed if it is not excessive.
R21	Frequent use of strong coarse language may be allowed.
NAR	Language that denigrates religion or is religiously profane (e.g. Jesus F**king Christ).

## Drug and Substance Abuse

G	No references to illegal drugs or drug abuse. Content meant for children should not promote consumption of alcohol and tobacco products.
PG	Only discreet references to illegal drug use are allowed on the condition that such references do not promote or endorse drug abuse and should be justified by context. Content targeted at children should not promote consumption of alcohol and tobacco products.
PG13	Only discreet depictions of illegal drug use are allowed on the condition that such depictions do not promote or endorse drug abuse and should be justified by context. Content targeted at children should not promote consumption of alcohol and tobacco products.
NC16	Drug taking may be allowed if brief and infrequent. The film must not promote or encourage drug and substance abuse.
M18	Drug taking may be allowed with some details. The film must not promote or encourage drug and substance abuse.
R21	Drug taking sequences may be allowed but instructive details of illegal drug use are not allowed. The film must not promote or encourage drug and substance abuse.
NAR	Materials glorifying or encouraging drug and substance abuse. Detailed and instructive depiction of illegal drug use.

## Horror

G	Treatment of horror should not be too realistic, or threatening, as it is likely to cause fear and anxiety among children. Horror tinged with humour may reduce the impact. Scenes of horror should be mild and not psychologically disturbing.
PG	Frightening sequences should not be prolonged or intense. Horror tinged with humour and in a fantasy setting may be mitigating factors.
PG13	Depiction of horror can be more realistic and intense.
NC16	Films with disturbing or gory scenes without strong details may be allowed. Frightening scenes which are more prolonged may be allowed.
M18	Prolonged and/or intense sequences that invoke fear and/or terror may be permitted.
R21	Depiction of intense horror, and sustained threat or menace may be permitted if contextually justified. Portrayals of extreme abhorrent activity that may offend and cause great discomfort may be disallowed.
NAR	N.A.