

bbfc View what's
right for you



BBFC Guide to

Suicide and Self-harm

BBFC Guide to Suicide and Self-harm



Our approach to classifying suicide and self-harm balances the right of artists to express and discuss difficult ideas with our duty to protect vulnerable audiences from content that may be harmful.

We work closely with academics, charities and policymakers in the fields of suicide and self-harm prevention, including those offering support to people struggling with their mental health. This assistance alerts us to current concerns, how certain portrayals may be more harmful than others, and how we should relay relevant information in our content advice. This expert advice is reinforced by our own research and experience.

Mental health can be broached at any category depending on its treatment, although we would expect content at U and PG to carry positive messages about supporting those in need and empowering people to seek help. Mistreatment of those with a mental illness will likely be assessed under our classification standards for Discrimination.

Our research has shown that references to suicide and self-harm may, in some cases, be treated more leniently than depictions, but it is rare that such material will be rated lower than 12A/12. Where scenes of suicide or self-harm occur at 12A/12, they should be undetailed, and presented aversively or have a reassuring resolution in which suicide or self-harm is avoided.

More detail is permitted at 15, but the content as a whole should not endorse or encourage suicide or self-harm. More detailed portrayals or those with ambiguous or misleading messaging will likely require an 18. Those presenting particularly dangerous novel information or promotional depictions of suicide or self-harm may require intervention if we believe they present a harm risk to audiences.

See the case studies included in this guide to learn more about how we classify these topics.



Shaped By You.

Our latest guidelines consultation
involved 12,000 people.

To find out more about our age
ratings, content advice and new
Classification Guidelines go to
bbfc.co.uk/about-classification

How each age rating deals with Suicide and Self-harm



Universal

U-rated content is suitable for audiences of all ages, although not all U-rated content is aimed at children.

Children's content should be set within a positive framework and should offer reassuring counter-balances to any violence, threat or scary scenes. Generally a U is unlikely to unsettle a four-year-old, although it is impossible to predict what might affect any particular child.

Classification decisions take into account the overall theme, including its treatment and the sensitivity of its presentation.

Certain challenging themes (for example, suicide, substance addiction, sexual violence) are unlikely to be appropriate at U and PG. In principle, however, most themes can be presented in a manner that allows classification at 18 or, where suitable, at lower categories.

Parental Guidance

General viewing, but some scenes may be unsuitable for young children

PG-rated content is suitable for general viewing. A PG should generally not unsettle a child aged around eight, although parents and caregivers should be aware that some scenes may be unsuitable for more sensitive children.

Classification decisions take into account the overall theme, including its treatment and the sensitivity of its presentation.

Certain challenging themes (for example, suicide, substance addiction, sexual violence) are unlikely to be appropriate at U and PG. In principle, however, most themes can be presented in a manner that allows classification at 18 or, where suitable, at lower categories.



12A/12

Cinema content classified 12A and video content classified 12 contain material that is not generally suitable for children aged under 12.

No one younger than 12 may be permitted to attend a 12A cinema screening unless they are accompanied by an adult. Adults planning to take a child under 12 to a 12A should consider whether the main feature is suitable for that child. To help them decide, we recommend that they check the BBFC's content advice for the film in advance. No one younger than 12 may rent or buy a 12-rated video.

There may be references to suicide and self-harm, although stronger details are unlikely to be permitted unless justified by context. Portrayals of suicide and self-harm should only be brief and discreet.



15

Suitable only for 15 years and over

No one younger than 15 may see 15-rated content in a cinema. No one younger than 15 may rent or buy a 15-rated video.

Scenes of suicide and self-harm should not be frequent or endorsed. Glamorisation of suicide or self-harm may result in a higher rating. Graphic depictions or detailed references are unlikely to be permitted.



18

Suitable only for adults

No one younger than 18 may see 18-rated content in a cinema. No one younger than 18 may rent or buy an 18-rated video.

Adults should be free to choose their own entertainment. Exceptions are most likely where material or treatment appears to us to risk harm to individuals or, through their behaviour, to society. For example, the detailed portrayal of violent or dangerous acts, or of illegal drug use, which may cause harm to public health or morals.



Case studies



H Is For Happiness

dangerous behaviour, bereavement theme, language, discrimination

Based on Barry Jonsberg's novel, *My Life as an Alphabet*, *H Is For Happiness* follows twelve-year-old Candice as she tries to help her grieving family reconcile following the sudden death of her infant sister.

The film captures Candice's optimistic outlook and quirky sense of humour through its colourful visuals and off-beat humour. Other characters, however, do not share Candice's perspective and she is bullied at school by other girls who call her 'SN', for 'special needs', and 'freakard'. Candice dismisses these insults and they are implicitly condemned by the film itself.

The family are also dealing with the grief of losing Candice's infant sister, who died from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Her mother is struggling with depression and is seen taking medication which she describes as her 'happy pills'.

In an attempt to reunite her father and uncle, Candice also risks harming herself by jumping into the sea with the expectation that the men will jump in and work together to save her. However, this does not go to plan and she barely survives, but makes it clear in voice-over that she regrets her ill-considered actions.

Despite the film's challenging subject matter, it maintains a light tone and ends in a reassuring manner. Additionally, the visual discretion, positive messaging, humour, and sensitive handling of its themes all have value for younger audiences. We therefore classified *H Is For Happiness* PG for dangerous behaviour, bereavement theme, language, discrimination.

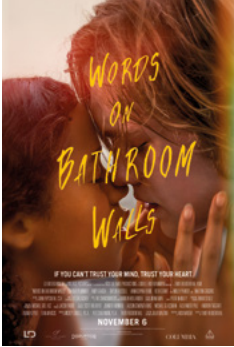
FILM

Classification date
19/03/2021

Director(s)
John Sheedy

Genre(s)
Children, Comedy, Drama

Approx. running minutes
98m



12A

Words On Bathroom Walls

mental illness theme, moderate sex references, infrequent strong language

A teenage boy's mental illness is exacerbated by the emotional turmoil of school, family life and his burgeoning feelings for a classmate in this touching US romantic drama.

Based on Julia Walton's novel of the same name, *Words On Bathroom Walls* explores protagonist Adam's schizophrenia. He is given medication to help his condition, but finds it affects his ability to taste and is seemingly ruinous for his ambitions to be a chef. When he stops taking his medication, however, his auditory and visual hallucinations become increasingly prolonged and distressing. His visions take the form of different people, as well as a spectral black shape that whispers invasive and aversive thoughts, including brief suicide ideation.

The original team of Compliance Officers who viewed the film were split over which age rating to assign it, given it's troubling themes, including suicide, affecting a young teen character. The film was therefore viewed by senior staff, who felt it was

containable at 12A given the value in how the film explains Adam's mental illness in a compassionate and accessible manner that young audiences would understand and empathise with.

To ensure the 12A was appropriate, the film was also shown to our Advisory Panel for Children's Viewing (APCV), made up of doctors, teachers, academics and other experts in child welfare, as well as our Youth Panel, made up of young people aged 15-21. Both panels supported the 12A, and felt the film was a sensitive portrait of mental illness with value for 12-14 year olds.

We also tested the film in our latest guidelines research, showing it to various focus groups including teens, teachers and parents, who positively approved of the 12A rating.

We classified the film 12A for mental illness theme, moderate sex references, infrequent strong language.

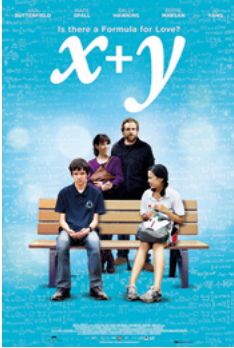
FILM

Classification date
14/10/2020

Director(s)
Thor Freudenthal

Genre(s)
Drama

Approx. running minutes
110m



12A



X+Y

strong language, drug use, injury detail, brief self-harm

An autistic teenager travels to a maths camp in Taiwan, hoping to be chosen to represent Great Britain in an International Mathematics Olympiad, in this moving British comedy drama.

Nathan struggles with social anxiety and interacting with others as a result of his autism. His teacher – who has multiple sclerosis – recognises Nathan's immense talent in maths and strives to provide an opportunity for him to excel. By centering Nathan in the film's story, *X+Y* enables young viewers to see the world from his perspective and understand how certain aspects of the school experience are challenging for him, encouraging a sympathetic approach to the story that may have benefits for other children of a similar age to see.

In Taiwan, Nathan encounters similarly gifted students whose personal circumstances, in some cases, affect their mental health. One student feels overwhelmed by pressures to excel, and expresses his feelings in a brief scene of self-harm. The moment is presented as aversive and harrowing, and clearly not condoned by the film as a whole.

Depictions of self-harm at 12A/12 are rare, but the film's sensitive handling of its subject matter and value in teaching audiences about autism, the adverse effects of self-harm and for better acceptance and understanding of others means it is within our standards for that category. We also tested the film in our latest guidelines research, with participants strongly supporting the 12A classification.

We classified this film 12A for strong language, drug use, injury detail, brief self-harm.

FILM

Classification date
20/02/2015

Director(s)
Morgan Matthews

Genre(s)
Drama

Approx. running minutes
107m



15

The Iron Claw

strong language, drug misuse, suicide

The Iron Claw is a sports biopic exploring a series of tragedies that plagued the Von Erich family of professional wrestlers across the 1980s and 1990s. Based on real events, the film charts their rise to fame, the close-knit dynamics of the four brothers, and how their father's relentless pressure for them to excel took its toll on their mental and physical health.

The film captures the tragedy and trauma of losing a loved one to suicide. Following life-changing injuries and family tragedies, two of the brothers take their own life. The suicide scenes are relatively brief, do not present novel information and are infrequent across the film as a whole. Although they are not graphic, they do feature a level of detail, including in the aftermath of the deaths, that exceeds our standards at 12A/12.

The presentation of suicide is further complicated by a surreal sequence in which the deceased brothers are seen reuniting in an idyllic afterlife. It is a challenging sequence from a classification perspective, as content which may be seen to endorse or romanticise suicide are of immense concern, and in some cases may require an 18 classification or even intervention. However, the film handles this material sensitively, with the reunion seemingly being the imagining of protagonist Kevin Von Erich. Faced with losing his brothers, he has experienced anger, devastation and numbness at his loss, but eventually finds solace in the belief that his brothers are happy and together again.

We classified *The Iron Claw* 15 for strong language, drug misuse, suicide.



FILM

Classification date
15/12/2023

Director(s)
Sean Durkin

Genre(s)
Drama

Approx. running minutes
132m

BBFC Classification Guidelines. Shaped by you.

We provide age ratings and content advice for films and other content in line with our published Classification Guidelines.

With more content more accessible than ever before, it is imperative that our age ratings and content advice provide a trusted guide that people can rely on when choosing what to watch, whether at the cinema, on DVD and Blu-ray or on Video on Demand (VoD) services.

Every four to five years, we speak to thousands of people from all over the country to explore what matters to them when it comes to classification. In our most recent guidelines research, 12,000 people took part – the highest number of participants we have ever consulted – providing us with a very robust set of findings to help ensure our standards continue to reflect the views of UK audiences. Here's what we found:



Classification Guidelines

To read the latest edition of the full BBFC Classification Guidelines, visit our website at bbfc.co.uk

87%

of parents agree with BBFC age rating decisions all or most of the time

97%

of people see a benefit to age ratings for some or all audiences

Trust in BBFC age ratings has grown to

90%

among parents/caregivers in the last five years

85%

trust BBFC age ratings to indicate whether content is suitable for themselves or their family

81%

of people want consistent age ratings across cinema, DVD and Blu-ray and Video on Demand/streaming services

99%

recognise at least one BBFC age rating symbol (78% recognise them all)

About the BBFC



The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is the independent film and video regulator for the UK. We are here to help everyone choose age-appropriate films, videos and websites, wherever and however they watch or use them.

We do this primarily through our widely recognised and trusted age ratings and content advice.

Every BBFC age rating decision and every piece of content advice is based on our Classification Guidelines, which we refresh every four to five years through an extensive consultation with thousands of people across the UK. This gives us an unmatched insight into what audiences find acceptable for different age groups.

The result is a transparent, well-understood and trusted classification system that gives people the best information to help them choose what to view and to protect children and vulnerable adults from harmful content.

We are not-for-profit and are funded through the fees we charge for our services.

We classify:

- films, trailers, advertisements and other content for theatrical (cinema) release on behalf of local authorities who licence cinemas under the UK's licensing legislation¹
- video works distributed on physical media under the Video Recordings Act 1984 (VRA)
- video content distributed on Video on Demand and streaming services (VoD) under a voluntary, self-regulatory service
- commercial and internet content distributed via the UK's Mobile Networks under a voluntary, self-regulatory service

As well as being based on consultation with thousands of people across the UK, our guidelines incorporate other relevant research, expert advice and our accumulated experience. The guidelines, and our practice in applying them, pay particular attention to changes in audience expectations, attitudes and concerns and to changes in the law.

Here, and throughout the guidelines, we take video content to include films, programmes and other content released on DVD and Blu-ray and on VoD services.

We take responsibility for applying the guidelines to all content submitted to us, to ensure their application and interpretation is consistent, fair and reasonable. From time to time, issues may arise that are not addressed directly in the guidelines. Where such issues occur, we will deal with them in line with the standards expressed and implied in these guidelines. The guidelines are not a legal document and should be interpreted in the spirit of what is intended as well as in the letter.

We will provide, on request, guidance on the interpretation and application of these guidelines.

¹Since 31 March 2016 the BBFC has sub-contracted the assessment of cinema advertisements for commercial goods and services to the Cinema Advertising Association, while retaining responsibility for classifying, on behalf of local authorities, films, trailers, public information films and charity campaigns, and other cinema content.

Our guiding principles

To protect children and vulnerable adults from potentially harmful content

To empower consumers, particularly parents and those with responsibility for children, to make informed viewing decisions

To enable content to reach the widest possible audience appropriate for the theme and treatment

To support the right of adults to choose their own entertainment as long as it remains within the law and is not potentially harmful

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[bbfc.co.uk/about-classification](https://www.bbfcc.co.uk/about-classification)