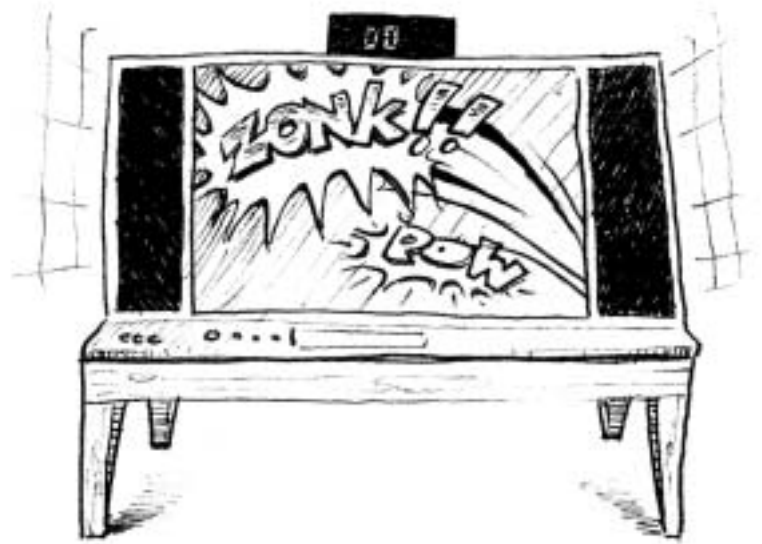


Strategies To Reduce the Impact of Media Violence in Young Children's Lives

ACT AGAINST VIOLENCE TRAINING PROGRAM

<http://www.ActAgainstViolence.org>

MEDIA VIOLENCE- HANDOUT 3



Families can play an important role to reduce the impact of media violence on young children.

The following strategies can help families accomplish their important role:

- Monitoring what children watch and play
- Teaching children to become educated media consumers
- Showing with their own behavior as media consumers
- Sharing their rules with other adults in the family or in the neighborhood
- Being an advocate for change

MONITORING

Parents should supervise what young children are doing and viewing.

They can monitor TV and video games by:

- Keeping an eye on what your kids are watching or playing.
- Limiting the number of hours your children watch TV and play video games each day.
- Keeping TVs, computers, and video

games out of bedrooms because it makes supervision more difficult.

- Enforcing family nonviolence-viewing rules and selecting TV programs designed to promote children's positive development and learning.
- Watching TV or play video games together as a family when possible.
- Praising children for good viewing habits.
- Requiring that homework and family responsibilities be done before permitting TV or playing a video game is permitted.
- Learning to understand and use the rating system for films, videos, and video games to be certain their child is watching something age appropriate.
- Asking older people in the family to watch programs intended for mature audiences after the younger children are in bed.

They can monitor play with violent toys by:

- Guiding children away from selecting violent toys as presents for themselves or others.
- Correcting children when they use pretend violent language (You're dead. Stop or I'll shoot.)
- Enticing children away from violent pretend-play by providing nonviolent alternatives (e.g., puzzles, drawing materials, building blocks, books to read or color).
- Acknowledging that these violent toys seem exciting. Then talk about how toy guns, violent video games, and superhero models give kids the idea that violence is fun and violence is not fun!
The truth is that violence hurts.
- Explaining that often when children play with violent toys, they get rough with their playmate and someone gets hurt.

Teaching Media Literacy

WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY?

Media is the ability to think critically to analyze and evaluate media messages.

It means helping children understand that TV, video games, and cartoons are not real and that media messages influence how a person may think, feel, or behave.

Remember,

Children are very vulnerable to media messages because they do not yet have the intellectual tools to understand what they may see, hear, or read. As the most

important teachers of young children, families should teach children about what they see in the media, especially about violence.

MEDIA LITERACY CONCEPTS

Remember that very young children—under ages 3 or 4—probably will not understand these concepts because they may not have the language and cognitive abilities to do so. Because children develop at different rates, families should select the concepts they believe their children are ready to learn.

Children should understand:

- There is a difference between fantasy or make-believe that is shown on TV and video games and real life.
- Violence on TV, in movies, or in video and computer games is fantasy (make-believe or pretend) and should never be copied by real people.
- Real-life heroes should be people who are looked up to for qualities such as courage, bravery, intelligence, good problem-solving skills, and doing good things to help others (as opposed to superheroes on TV who kill, fight, and destroy).
- Real-life violence hurts the person who gets hurt (e.g., kicked, punched, or hit).
- Real-life violence hurts the person who does the hurting (e.g., gets punished, loses friends, may feel bad after hurting others).
- Real-life violence hurts people who watch the violence (makes them afraid, mad, angry, sad, upset, confused).

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- Violence is never the best way to solve a problem; it only creates more problems (consequences).
 - Bullets shot on TV shows and in video or computer games are not real. Real bullets kill or hurt people.
 - Guns and knives used on TV are not really able to hurt people. Real guns and knives can hurt or kill people. A child should never touch a gun, bullets, knife, razor, or needle. If they find one, they should stop, leave it alone, and tell an adult. Show the adult right away where it is so that they can take it away and stop someone from getting hurt.
 - If they see violence on TV, they should not watch it. They should change the channel or go do something else.
 - If they are confused, scared, or afraid about something you see on TV, ask them to tell an adult about it.
 - TV sometimes makes people of a certain type all seem to behave the same ways. (e.g., men are strong and hurt people. Women are weak and don't hurt people. Bad guys wear black clothes, good guys do not.) This is called "stereotyping."
- who care for children should talk about are:
- Why viewing certain violent TV, video, and computer games is not allowed in your family.
 - Which shows and games they are not to watch or play.
 - What media and games they are encouraged to watch or play.
 - Why they are encouraged to do other things rather than watch TV or play video or computer games.
 - What rules or limits on TV, computer, and video game time you have for your children.
 - What a hero is. Describe a hero for children as someone who is brave, kind, and helps people—a person with good qualities who never gives up trying to do the right thing. Ask the child to tell you who they see on TV that they think of as a superhero. Talk about how that person is make-believe and uses force by fighting and killing the bad guys. Talk about someone you know that is a real-life hero. Talk about other ways the TV character could have solved part of his or her problem. Talk about what real-life heroes do to solve problems with other people in nonviolent ways.

MEDIA LITERACY TEACHABLE MOMENTS: FAMILY DISCUSSION.

Watching TV, movies, or playing video or computer games with your child gives you the chance to talk about media and media violence in terms children can understand. Some topics family members and other adults

Open-Ended Questions

Ask children open-ended questions to see if they understand the difference between which violence in the media is real and which is pretend. Use the following examples:

Reality vs. Fantasy

- Do you think that the man in Star Wars is really killing the bad guys with that light saber? What would happen in real life as a result of this violence? Who would be sad?
- Are the people on TV pretending to fight and kill? How do they pretend?
- Who would be hurt if real people acted like the people who are pretending on TV and in video and computer games?

Consequences of Violence

- When you see real-life violence on the TV news, do you think that hurting someone is a good way to get what you want? Why? Why not? Who was harmed when the man was shot? (The person who got shot is the victim. The family is mad and sad at the loss of a family member. The shooter is the perpetrator and will go to prison. Those who saw the man get shot are bystanders who might be afraid that they will be hurt.)
- Do you think hurting someone solves the problem? What are some better things to do?

Good Guys, Bad Guys, and Heroes

- Why do the bad guys kill and hurt people? Why do the good guys kill and hurt people?
- What happens in real life to people when they hurt someone on purpose?
- Why is it okay on TV for the good guys to hurt the bad guys? In real life who are the good guys? Is it okay if they hurt the

bad guys? What should they do?

- What are the names of fake or pretend heroes on TV and in video and computer games?
- What are the names of some real-life heroes? What is the difference between real-life and pretend heroes?

Other Things Adults Can Do

Show by Example

Young children learn most things by example, imitating the behaviors they observe. Using violent language, acting aggressively, or watching TV programs with violent content when they are present gives young children the impression that these actions are okay. Here are some examples you can model for children to show that you value nonviolence:

- Schedule limited TV viewing hours.
- Show the child by thinking out loud and saying something like "I am not watching this program; it is violent," or "I don't like to watch people hurting each other even when it is pretend," then change the channel to a nonviolent program.
- Turn off the TV when violence in a program becomes apparent and entice your child to do something with you that he or she would enjoy.
- Show them by example that active play is more fun than a passive activity like TV, where they just sit and look.
- Show them by example that time spent

looking at books, drawing, doing puzzles, singing, and listening to nice music are more constructive alternatives to watching TV.

- Think about the aggressive words or actions your children may observe in your family. Remember children do, indeed, learn what they live. If you want your children to handle stress and problems peacefully, you must try hard to show them how to do this by your example.

Share Your Rules with Other Adults

The more support and reinforcement you get from other people that exposure to violent media is not good, the more powerful your message to your children will be. Share your views and rules for reducing the exposure of your children to media violence by:

- Telling babysitters, caregivers, and relatives what TV, video and computer games, and other media rules you have for your children. Include when, for how long, and what they are allowed to watch or play.
- Clearly communicating family media rules to children. Ask children who are old enough to repeat the rules and why each one is important.
- Sharing with other family members, neighbors, and friends what you have learned about media violence, and encouraging them to support your family's desire to not expose your children to media violence when they visit.

BE AN ADVOCATE FOR VIOLENCE-FREE MEDIA

Advocacy is voicing your concern to people in government and in the private sector who have the ability to act to support or change something you feel strongly about. Examples of advocacy actions to reduce the exposure of children to media violence are:

- Writing a letter to the Federal Communications Commission, 1919 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20554, to complain about something you saw on television during children's prime viewing-time.
- Expressing your concern by writing to a manufacturer of violent toys and video games.
- Working with other adults (e.g., PTA, church group, neighborhood group) to combat the hazards of media violence in children's lives by disseminating information, holding meetings, or planning workshops for families in the community.
- Contacting other organizations through the Internet or other methods, and working on the issue of media violence to find out what you and other adults in your community can do to make a difference.
- Asking your video store to require parental approval before a violently rated video game can be rented by children.

