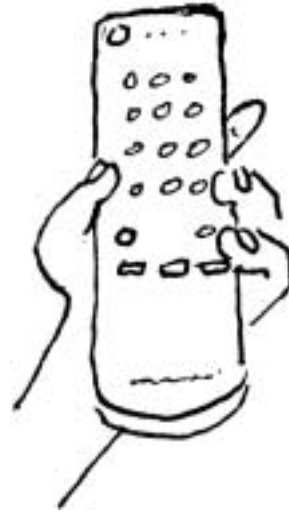


Strategies for Reducing the Impact of Media Violence on Young Children

ACT AGAINST VIOLENCE TRAINING PROGRAM

<http://www.ActAgainstViolence.org>

MEDIA VIOLENCE- HANDOUT 4



1. Teach media-literacy concepts.

Young children are susceptible to media messages because, in general, until the age of 4 or 5, they do not yet have the intellectual tools to fully understand what they see, hear, or read. Although families generally have the greatest impact on a child's development, the school and the teachers have a profound influence in teaching children cognitive and prosocial skills. Teachers can help reduce the impact of media violence on the lives of young children by integrating media-literacy concepts into their instructional program and taking into consideration different stages of development and readiness to learn.

Teachers can teach young children the following concepts (as children become developmentally ready to learn them) through planned classroom activities and teachable moments:

Real Life versus Fantasy

- There is a difference between real life and the fantasy or make-believe that is shown on TV, movies, and video and computer games.
- Violence in TV, movies, and video and computer games is fantasy (make-believe, pretend) and should never be copied by real people.
- The costumes and special effects on TV and in the movies were created to fool people.
- Real-life violence hurts the person (victim) who gets hurt (e.g., hit, kicked, punched).
- Real-life violence harms the person who does the violence (the person gets punished, loses friends, may feel bad after hurting someone else).
- Real-life violence hurts people who have to watch the violence (makes them angry, afraid, sad, mad, upset).
- Bullets shot on TV shows, in movies, and video and computer games are not real.

- Real bullets hurt or kill people.
- Guns and knives used on TV shows, in movies, and in video and computer games are fake and are not really able to hurt people. Real guns and knives can hurt or kill people.

Things to Remember

- Even though you see guns and other dangerous things on TV and in video and computer games, you should never touch a gun, razor, needle, or knife. Show an adult where these things are located right away, so they can put them where they won't hurt anyone.
- If you see violence on TV, don't watch it. Change the channel because there are many good shows on TV, or go do something else.
- If you are confused, scared, or afraid about something you see on TV, in a movie, or in a video or computer game, go tell an adult about it.
- TV sometimes makes all people of a certain type seem to be the same, for example, 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."

About Violence

- Violence is never the best way for people to solve a problem; it only creates more problems.

2. Integrate curriculum activities.

The following suggested activities can be used by the teacher with the class and be integrated into the language arts instructional program. They can be used to teach many violence-prevention, media-literacy skills. The activities are developmentally appropriate.

Children Ages 3-4

Cartoon Violence

Ask the children to name some of their favorite cartoon characters. Talk to children about the difference between pretend or make-believe and what is real. Tell the children that one thing that makes cartoons funny is the pretend parts that could never really happen. Ask if they can think of anything they've seen in a cartoon where someone gets hurt. Ask what kinds of bad things they try to do to each other. Talk about how real people should never hit people over the head, run over them, or push them off a cliff. Talk about how the cartoon characters can come back to life because they are just pretend. Talk about how people in real life should not do these things to other people, even when they are angry.

Children Ages 5-6

Story Endings

Use the following story or other stories or scenarios to teach media literacy concepts that promote nonviolence.

Tamika and Shawn were watching a Saturday morning cartoon show on TV. They saw the monkey drop a flowerpot from the window. It hit the raccoon on the head. The raccoon cried, "Yipes," and ran away.

Ask questions to help children understand the following concepts.

- Violence in cartoons is pretend or make-believe.
- Cartoon characters can't be hurt or killed because they are not real.
- Real people would be hurt or killed if the same hurtful things happened to them.
- In real life, it is never okay to hurt someone on purpose.

Possible questions to ask related to understanding the above concepts.

- Was what Tamika and Shawn saw real or make-believe? How do you know?
- What other things have you seen on TV that are make-believe? What things have you seen that are real? How can you tell?
- Was the raccoon hurt when he was hit with the flowerpot? How do you know? Why do you think the raccoon could get up and run away?
- Would you be hurt if someone dropped a flowerpot out of a window and it hit your head? Why?
- Have you ever copied anything you saw on TV? Tell us about it? When is it not okay to copy something you

see on TV or in a movie? When is it okay to copy something you see on TV or in a movie?

- What are some things you should never copy? What are some good things to copy?
- When the monkey and the raccoon have a problem, how could they solve it without hurting anyone?

Have the children write a sentence or draw a picture of one thing they have seen on TV that they should not copy and one thing they have seen that they should copy.

Have each child show his or her pictures and tell about them.

Superheroes

Explain that a superhero is someone who, on TV, or in movies and computer or video games, fights the "bad guys." Ask the children to name some superheroes (e.g., Power Rangers). Tell the children that the people who make up these superheroes want to make money by selling toy weapons (e.g., laser lights, swords.), action figures, and costumes to children so that children can pretend they are the superheroes when they play. This means the children will do play-fighting, like trying to kill the bad guy. Explain how aggressive play can accidentally hurt children because it might make some children think that fighting and killing are okay ways to act. Explain that it is safer and healthier not to copy the behavior of

superheroes even in play. Have the children list violent toys advertised on TV that kids should not play with. End by having the children talk about neat pretend games that are not violent.

Ages 7-8

Family Homework

Send a letter home telling families that children are learning about violence in the media. Request that one family member sit with the child and watch the child's favorite TV show with him or her. During the viewing, have the family record the number and types of violence shown. Have the child bring the results back to class. Use this information to talk about what violence is, what types are shown on TV, and why it is important to understand that real violence hurts people. It hurts the person who does the violence, the person who gets hurt by the violence, and the people who see the violence or care about the people involved in it.

Violent Video Games

Explain that playing violent video games can give children a weird view of things. It can make them think that (1) hurting people is a normal way for people to act to solve problems they have with others; (2) hurting and killing people is fun and cool to watch; and (3) the world is a scary, dangerous place. Talk about why the children think some kids like the games. Talk about things kids could be

doing that are fun, safe, and productive instead of watching violence. Ask each child to agree to try and convince a friend, brother, or sister who plays violent video or computer games to do something else instead.

Create a Nonviolent Toy

Have children work in pairs to invent a nonviolent toy they would enjoy playing with. Have them draw the toy and describe it. Collect the children's work and send all to a toy manufacturer with a cover letter explaining that your class has talked about and decided to stop buying toys that encourage violent play. Contact Lion and Lamb organization (www.lionlamb.org) and TRUCE at the Wheelock College (www.wheelock.edu) for more information and orientation.

3. Other Things Teachers Can Do

1. Contact the principal, PTA president, or governing body for the school. Request that a parent and teacher meeting be planned to focus on the topic of reducing the exposure of young children to media violence.
2. Develop a nonviolent media and materials checklist to distribute to all teachers. Ask all teachers to survey their classrooms to ensure that books, toys, videos, and other materials promote nonviolence, cooperation, tolerance, empathy, equality, and compassion.

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3. Use teachable moments (e.g., when children interject aggressive words or actions into their play) to talk about more appropriate problem-solving or imaginative play themes.
4. Write a letter to parents telling them that watching violence on TV and playing violent video games too much have been shown to be harmful to children. Ask them to try to supervise the programs their young children are allowed to watch and the games they can play. Explain that there are many TV shows that are appropriate for children and can contribute to healthy emotional, social, and cognitive development (e.g., Sesame Street and Barney). Suggest alternatives such as (1) watching the children's shows on public television and the family and Disney channels, or taping nonviolent shows such as Sesame Street for children to see; and (2) providing toys that promote nonviolent play (e.g., puzzles, board games, and clay). Thank them for helping their children to reduce the exposure to violence in their lives.
5. Ask parents and families to select Halloween costumes that are nonviolent in nature and are not associated with TV violent superheroes. Be sure to give them examples of what types of costumes (violent TV heroes) seem to cause the children wearing them to act out aggressively, and what inexpensive alternatives could be chosen.
6. Inform families that they are encouraged to trade in toys that encourage aggressive and violent play. Provide an opportunity to do so at a table set up at a school fair, production, assembly, or PTA meeting. Ask a local service organization like the Lions Club, or a business with a vested interest in nonviolence, like an insurance company, to donate money so that the school can provide a book to replace each violent toy that is traded in by a child.
7. Suggest that teachers in the school sign a petition to present to local theaters (or other places young children go where they see violent video games) that have violent video games accessible to young children in their lobbies. Make this petition available for families and children to sign. Say that unless the violent games are removed, the community will boycott the theatre.
8. Contact the Lion & Lamb Project (www.lionlamb.org) for information about how to conduct a trade-in for violent toys and games.

For more about ACT, visit
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