

Common Sense on Media Violence

Media violence does affect kids

The typical 11-year-old has seen nearly 8,000 murders on TV. Yet most of us aren't shocked. That's because we've all grown used to seeing a lot of violence — especially in movies and video games. Studies tell us that kids who see a lot may be more aggressive. They may even learn that hurting others is OK. They need you to help them understand violence — real and virtual.

Some facts

It's not your imagination. Media has become more violent, graphic, sexual, and sadistic (*Media Awareness Network, 2010*).

Media violence is especially damaging to children under 8 because they cannot easily tell the difference between real life and fantasy (*American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995*).

Research indicates that when they are exposed to media violence, kids can become more aggressive, become insensitive to violence, have more nightmares, and develop a fear of being harmed (*American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001*).

A sample of 77 PG-13-rated films included 2,251 violent actions, with almost half resulting in death (*UCLA, 2007*).

What is media violence?

Media violence ranges from cartoon slapstick to bloody gore, and it's in everything our kids watch and play. If you've tried a T- or M-rated video game lately, or seen a cop show or music video, you've seen this kind of violence. It's in practically every form of kids' entertainment.

Video games allow players to attack and kill one another, sometimes in very graphic ways. Studies show that aggressive video gaming affects kids. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics says that "playing violent video games leads to adolescent violence like smoking leads to lung cancer."

Why it matters

When kids watch media and play games loaded with violence, studies show it can lead to harmful acts and bullying. And the more aggressive behavior kids see, the more it becomes an acceptable way to settle conflicts. They may even become less sensitive to those who suffer from real violence.

Younger kids are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of media violence — especially kids under 7, who often can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality. The younger kids are, the more longlasting the effects. These include nightmares and anxiety, and fearing that the world is scary and mean.

Parent tips for all kids

- » **Explain consequences.** What parent hasn't heard "but there's no blood" as an excuse for watching a movie or playing a video game? Explain the true consequences of violence. Point out how unrealistic it is for people to get away with violent behavior.
- » **Keep an eye on the clock.** Don't let kids spend too long with virtual violence. The more time spent immersed in violent content, the greater its impact and influence.
- » **Teach conflict resolution.** Most kids know that hitting someone on the head isn't the way to solve a disagreement, but verbal cruelty is also violent. Teach kids how to use their words responsibly to stand up for themselves without throwing a punch.
- » **Know your kids' media.** Check out ratings and, when there are none, find out about content. Content in a 1992 R-rated movie is now acceptable for a PG-13. Streaming online videos are not rated and can showcase very brutal stuff.

Advice by age

- » **2- to 4 year-old kids** often see cartoon violence. But keep them away from anything that shows physical aggression as a means of conflict resolution, because they'll imitate what they see.
- » **For 5- to 7-year-olds**, cartoon rough-and-tumble, slapstick, and fantasy violence are okay, but violence that could result in death or serious injury is too scary.
- » **8- to 10-year-olds** can handle action-hero sword fighting or gunplay as long as there's no gore.
- » **For 11- to 12-year-olds**, historical action is okay, including battles, fantasy clashes, and duels. But close-ups of gore or graphic violence (alone or combined with sexual situations) aren't recommended.
- » **Kids ages 13-17** can and will see shoot-'em-ups, blow-'em-ups, high-tech violence, accidents with disfigurement or death, anger, and gang fighting. Point out that the violence portrayed hurts and causes suffering. And limit time exposure to violence, especially in video games.
- » **Most M-rated games aren't right for kids under 17 years of age.** The kid down the street may have the latest cop-killer game, but that doesn't mean it's good for him. The ultra-violent behavior, often combined with sexual images, is not good for developing brains. Just because your child's friend is allowed to play violent games or watch violent movies doesn't mean they are okay for your child.

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