

Does MEDIA VIOLENCE Hurt Your Children?

Children see a lot of violence on TV and on films and videos. Does this do them any harm?

Check your reactions. Fill in the questionnaire and then read the brochure!

		<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1	Children can learn to be aggressive by watching violent acts on TV	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Viewing violence can make children scared of the world in which they live	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	When TV violence is shown as funny, it doesn't hurt children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	As long as there isn't much blood and gore, TV violence isn't a problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Violent cartoons are okay for children of all ages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	It's good for children to watch TV news because it's real life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	TV violence only hurts young children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Now read on...

Yes... Media Violence Hurts Your Children

Overview

There's strong evidence that TV, film and video violence can affect the feelings and behaviours of children. In this pamphlet we'll mainly discuss TV, but much of the information applies to all screen media.

Children who watch violent TV programs can:

- learn to develop aggressive behaviour
 - children often copy violent characters and behaviours
 - children can remember aggressive ways to 'win' and use them later.
- become less sensitive to violence
 - children don't realise violent actions can hurt someone else, or themselves
 - children may not show caring when others are hurt or distressed
 - children may think violence is 'OK' because 'everyone does it'.
- become unnecessarily afraid of the world they live in
 - children may have unrealistic fears of being robbed, kidnapped, mutilated or shot at, which stops them doing things
 - children may fear that their family may be hurt by things they see in the news bulletins, such as fire, earthquakes, family massacres
 - children may have sleep problems after seeing pictures of fire, burglaries and deaths.

What sort of Media Violence hurts?

The types of violence that affect children depends on their age, but children of all ages are at risk of learning to be aggressive when they see:

- 'heroes' winning by being violent
- violence being presented in a humorous way
- violence not causing pain
- violence inflicted on children, adults and animals

Children can become less sensitive to violence when graphic violence is shown constantly and humorously.

Children can become fearful when violence does not seem justified ('innocent children' hurt), when it is repeated, realistic looking and unpunished.



What hurts Preschoolers?

Cartoons are often violent. Preschoolers watch cartoons closely and focus on what the characters do, not the 'story'. Preschoolers are attracted to programs with rapid movements, loud music, special sound effects or other vivid production features. Violent cartoon heroes have a powerful impact on preschoolers.

Strategies for Preschoolers

Parents can help preschoolers by:

- ✦ selecting programs appropriate for their age
- ✦ comforting them with a toy or a cuddle when they have been frightened programs appropriate for their age
- ✦ comforting them with a toy or a cuddle when they have been frightened by a program, turning the TV off and explaining why
- ✦ limiting the amount of TV watched
- ✦ watching TV with the child so violence or scary events can be switched off, or talked about. This can soften the effect
- ✦ encouraging the watching of programs which show people being caring
- ✦ encouraging and supporting caring behaviour and discouraging aggressive behaviour
- ✦ helping them avoid:
 - violent cartoons with superheroes
 - programs with realistic looking violence featuring human actors
 - programs with easily copied violent actions
 - programs showing children, animals or favourite characters being hurt

What hurts Primary School Children?

In the early primary school years children develop a greater awareness of the difference between reality and fantasy. By eight years, children are less likely to use aggressive actions if the violence they see is shown as evil, causing suffering or results in punishment or disapproval. Children five to eight years are more likely to be fearful if they see scary events on TV, especially if the people affected are like themselves or their family in some way.

Strategies for Primary School Children

The strategies outlined in the Preschoolers section can be used effectively for these older children. As a parent, you also can help children between five and 11 by:

- ✦ helping them to be critical viewers; ask them what they like and why; what they do not like and why
- ✦ helping them to understand and evaluate what they are watching
- ✦ helping them to select programs in advance that you agree with
- ✦ talking about the reasons you don't want them to watch some programs
- ✦ discussing and explaining the meaning of televised events. For example, that events are happening a long way away and are not going to hurt them or their family
- ✦ modifying your own viewing, since children often like to watch the things parents watch
- ✦ keeping viewing to under two hours if

possible to limit the amount of violent TV they might see. If children are frightened about something happening to them or their family, it is important to discuss with them the things they think are needed to keep them safe, such as installing smoke detectors in the house.

What hurts Adolescents?

For adolescents, watching TV can be a passive, relaxing activity requiring low concentration, and they are most likely to do it when they are tired, bored or lonely. It can be something they do when they want to 'keep up' with their friends. They may say they 'have to' watch something which you think unsuitable because 'everyone else is'. Even though they have new skills at understanding, they rarely use them when they are watching TV for 'relaxation'.

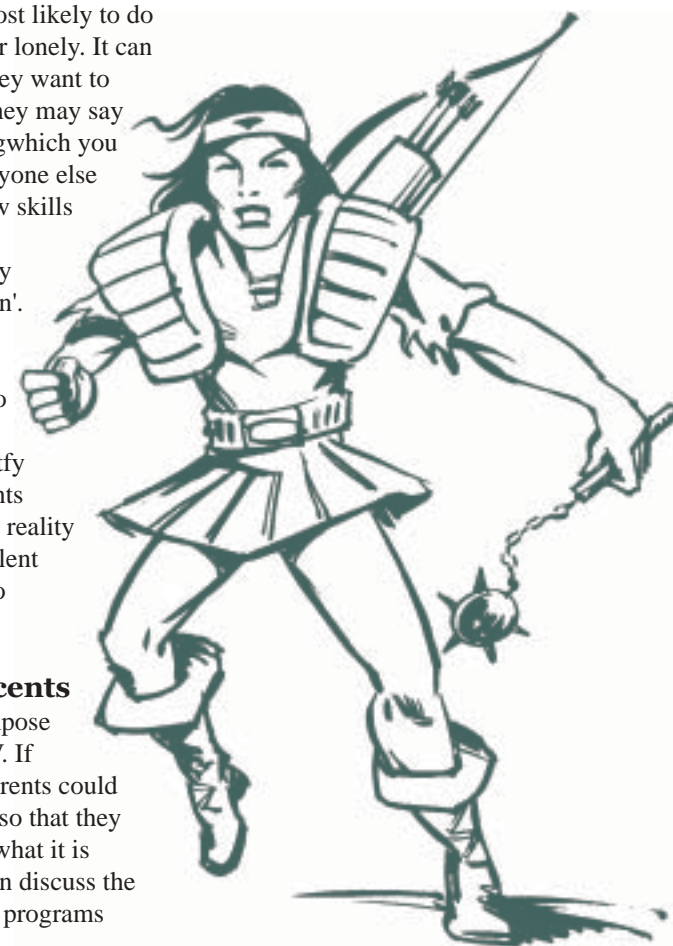
However, they are much more likely than younger children to question the reality of TV content and less likely to identify with TV characters. Adolescents who continue to believe in the reality of TV and to identify with violent heroes are those more likely to behave in aggressive ways.

Strategies for Adolescents

Parents need to continue to impose some rules about watching TV. If adolescents resist the rules, parents could watch the program with them so that they can see that parents do know what it is about, and also that parents can discuss the program with them. Watching programs

together can be good for family cohesion. However if violence and aggression are not discussed and analysed, it can seem that parents are approving the violence shown. Questioning the TV content has been found to reduce adolescents' fears and aggressiveness.

Helping children of all ages to be critical viewers is one of the best ways of reducing the risk of hurt to children.



News and Current Affairs

Children may be encouraged by some people to watch news or current affairs programs so that they see "what the world is really like". But these programs are not balanced. They tend to show disasters, or people being hurt. This can be frightening to children who have little idea about where these events are happening. They do not know the outcomes. Will anyone be punished? Just as adults are frightened and may change their behaviour (such as not going out, turning their houses into fortresses etc), children are also vulnerable to fear and may limit their own activities. If your child watches a news or current affairs program or segment, watch with them so you can explain what's happening and how likely or unlikely it is to happen to them or your family.

Watching TV can be good too

Children's viewing can be positive when it provides them with programs that help them understand the world better; when you encourage co-operative behaviour; help them develop a sense of trust and safety; help them appreciate differences in people; and help them develop a sense of competence. Parents can help by looking out for such programs or experiences. Look for P (preschool) and C (primary school) classified programs on TV; visit your local public library or local ABC shop for a selection of children's videos; be active and make connections with your children and their programs while they are watching; don't be afraid to practise 'off 'n' on' (turning the TV off and on as planned instead of having it "often on").

Want to know more? You could read some of these

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- Van Evra, Judith (1997) *Television and Child Development*. 2nd edition. US: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishing.
- Wartella, Dr. Ellen; O'Keefe, Dr. Barbara and Scantlin, Dr. Ronda (2000) *Growing up with Interactive Media*. US: Markle Foundation.
- Young Media Australia (1995) Off 'n' On kit. SA, YMA

Want to change things?

Your views about violent programs can be made known to the station you're watching, or to the Australian Broadcasting Authority on 1800 226 667. Written complaints are most effective. Be sure to note the station or network, the date and time, and give a brief explanation of what it was that concerned you. Contact Young Media Australia for advice.

Young Media Australia



YMA is a national, non-profit, community-based organisation providing information, advocacy and research on the impact of media on children and young people. Its membership includes major national and State children's interest organisations, local community groups and individuals.

For information on membership and other Young Media Australia services, call 1800 245 959.

Young Media Australia
P O Box 447
GLENELG SA 5045
Tel: 08 8376 2111
Fax: 08 8376 2122
Email: info@youngmedia.org.au
Web site: <http://www.youngmedia.org.au>

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