

# Crisis Connection

## The Impact of Media Violence

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[http://www.common sensemedia.org/parent\\_tips/common sense\\_view/index.php?id=264](http://www.common sensemedia.org/parent_tips/common sense_view/index.php?id=264)

### What is it?

Media violence ranges from cartoon slapstick to graphic gore and it's omnipresent in our kids' entertainment. If you've played a T- or M-rated video game lately, or watched a copy show, if you've seen an action movie or checked in on one of the many celebrity or sports star smackdowns, you've seen some of what our kids play on video games, or see on TV, in movies, online, or in music videos. Violent and aggressive behavior shows up everywhere. And it's not simply passive; as video games take center stage, they allow players to maim, kill, and create all kinds of anti-social havoc. In fact, that's how games are won. Studies show that aggressive video gaming affects kids --- so much so that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) concluded that ""playing violent videogames leads to adolescent violence like smoking leads to lung cancer."

### Why You Should Care

Because the studies don't lie. Lots of violence affects kids' behavior. Period. When kids marinate in media steeped in acts of aggression, it can increase antisocial activity and bullying and decrease empathy for victims of violence. The more aggressive behavior kids see, the more it becomes an acceptable way to settle conflicts. Movies with scary images, intense peril, loud noises, and, above all, blood and gore, create all sorts of disturbances, including increased anxiety, sleep disruption, and wicked nightmares. And those first-person-shooter video games? The intimacy of the mayhem and murder pack such a huge emotional punch that they alter brain chemistry.

## **Some Facts You Should Know**

- A 2007 study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health concluded: *"Media violence increases the risk significantly that the viewer or game player will be have more violently in both the short and long run."*
- Children in the U.S. spend between 3 and 4 hours a day viewing TV and 60% of programs contain some violence and 40% contain heavy violence
- Video games are now present in 83% of homes with children. 8-10 year olds play an average of 65 minutes a day. Most games are violent; 94% of T rated games contain violence.
- Nearly 2 out of 3 TV programs contain violence, averaging 6 violent acts per hour.
- The average child who watches 2 hours of cartoons per day may see more than 10,000 violent acts a year.
- There are more than twice as many violent incidents in children's programming than in other types of programming.
- Teens who watch more than 1 hour of TV per day are 4 times more likely than other teens to commit aggressive acts in adulthood.
- In a study of third and fourth graders, reducing TV and video game consumption to less than 1 hour per day decreased verbal aggression by 50% and physical aggression by 40%.
- According to the AAP, violence is a leading cause of death for children, adolescents, and young adults — more prevalent than disease, cancer, or congenital disorders.
- By the time kids enter middle school, they will have seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 more acts of violence on broadcast TV alone.
- Younger kids are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of media violence — especially those under 7 who can't easily distinguish between fantasy and reality.
- The younger kids are when they see a violent or scary movie or TV show, the longer-lasting the effects — particularly in nightmares and increased anxiety

## **Common Sense Says:**

- **Explain consequences.** What parent hasn't heard "but there's no blood" as the justification for seeing a movie or playing a video game? Explain the true physical consequences of violence. Point out how unrealistic it is for people to get away with the kind of mayhem modeled in media. Explain how games, in particular, actually

encourage and reward violent acts (how else can you win?).

- **Teach conflict resolution.** Kids know that clocking someone on the head isn't the way to solve a disagreement, but verbal cruelty is also violent. Teach kids how to disengage, use their words, and stand up for themselves without throwing a punch.

### **Be age appropriate:**

- **Kids ages 2-4** 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 would reasonably 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. Violence should have consequences.

- **For 11- to 12-year-old tweens**, 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 (and with HDTV, they will really see things!). Point out that the violence portrayed is hurtful and causes suffering. And limit time exposure to violence, especially in video games.

- **No M-rated games for kids younger than 16 or 17.** Sure, the kid down the street has the latest cop-killer game. But these games are ultra-violent and often sexually violent. That's not good for developing brains and social development.

- **Don't let kids immerse themselves in violent content.** Keep an eye on the clock. The more time spent with violent content, the greater its impact and influence.

Crisis Connection has presenters available to facilitate media impact trainings for students, parents and/or educators.

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