

Violence in the Media

Just as you want your children to eat healthy food for their growing bodies, you also want them to get wholesome messages from the media for their developing minds.

Are your children receiving the healthy messages you want them to receive? A child may not clearly perceive the distinctions between the fantasy world offered by various media (television, movies, computer games, the Internet, music videos, even magazine and billboard advertisements)

and the complexities of the real world. Involvement by parents and adult caregivers is key to providing guidance in this area and a wholesome entertainment "diet" for children.

An article in the May 24/31, 2000, issue of *JAMA* reports on the prevalence of violence in G-rated animated movies. The researchers suggest that parents and caregivers not overlook the possibility of children being exposed to violent content even in movies and videotapes rated G.



GETTING INVOLVED:

Television and other media often provide opportunities to discuss important issues with your children

- Watch the programs with your children whenever possible
- Know the content of the shows, videotapes, and movies your children are watching and the Internet sites your children are visiting; give your approval or disapproval and discuss the reasons for your decisions
- Choose programs that are appropriate for your child's age and level of maturity
- Be an active viewer: discuss the programs you are watching and Internet sites you are visiting with your children; let them know what you find useful and what you do not agree with and why
- Set a good example by limiting your own television viewing and Internet use
- Do not use television, videotapes, or computer/video games as a babysitter

CHANGING ATTITUDES:

- Encourage discussion with your children about what they are watching; give them guidance on questioning the appropriateness of the behavior they are seeing and how it relates to your personal and family values
- Do not allow children to see shows known to contain violent content; when you encounter violence or material you find offensive, change the channel or turn the television set off and explain why you chose not to watch
- Explain the consequences of violence; for example, "Although the actor was not hurt, if this happened in real life the person would be in extreme pain for many months."
- Explain that violence is not the best way to resolve conflicts or to solve problems
- Point out positive behavior, like examples of kindness, cooperation, and friendship

LIMITING EXPOSURE:

- Limit television and Internet use to 1 or 2 quality hours per day with adult supervision
- Do not watch television or videotapes during mealtimes
- Set limits on when television can be watched and the Internet can be used (for example, not before school in the morning and not before homework is completed in the evening)
- Keep television, video player machines, and computers out of children's bedrooms or other areas where they cannot be easily observed when they are in use

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES:

There are many alternatives to using media for entertainment:

- Social and family activities (such as walks, picnics, parties, or camping)
- Sports
- Playing games (such as cards, board games, or outdoor games)
- Reading
- Hobbies (such as painting, drawing, playing an instrument, or woodworking)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American Psychiatric Association
Psychiatric Effects of Media Violence
1400 K Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005 or
www.psych.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics
Understanding the Impact of Media on Children and Teens
www.aap.org
- The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
(800) 333-7636, extension 124
www.aacap.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: American Psychiatric Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, The AMA Physician Guide to Media Violence

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