



Media Violence

and Children's Play

Handout #27

Healthy Children, Strong Families, Caring Communities

Exposure to Violence

When tragedies occur, a major mistake some parents make is to assume or hope their children haven't heard about it. Children are exposed to television, radio, the internet, print media, video games and talk among friends. This exposure can lead them to imagine awful possibilities. The trick is to find a balance between saying too little or too much.

Preschoolers

A starting point may be to find out how much they know. Ask, "Did you hear anything today that scared you?" If the answer is no, then you could say, "If you hear anything, be sure to ask me about it."

If the answer is yes, here are some suggested responses:

- "It happened far from here. You are safe."
- "This news makes us sad."
- "We don't know why this happened, but people are doing all they can to prevent this from happening again."

School-agers

Even if the tragedy was discussed, begin a conversation again to find out what is being said among their friends. Children between the ages of six to 12 years may not want to spend much time talking about the tragedy.

It may be too threatening to talk about the subject for long periods of time, but don't be surprised to find them coming back to the topic on another day expressing fear or anger. Be sure to acknowledge their feelings and emotions.

Consider the following talking points:

- "I don't blame you for being angry/ upset/sad. I am too."
- "I know some kids worry about bad things happening at their school."

Answer honestly when you can, but feel comfortable saying, "I don't know all the facts right now. If I hear more, I'll tell you."



Teenagers

They may not say anything, but they need to hear you express your values and your point of view.

Remarks about not going to school anymore may hide real fears and worries. Parents can make a simple response like, "I know how you feel, this is very scary."

Together, parents and teenagers can watch television news, read articles or visit websites. This can be the starting point for future discussion.

Fantasy vs. Reality

Children under the age of seven years are especially influenced by video games, television, movies, videos or super-heroes. This age group has difficulty determining what is real and what is fantasy. Parents should monitor what their children are watching and what video games they are playing.

Points to consider:

- When children see characters win by using physical force or weapons, They begin to see violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflict
- Young children repeat the language they hear. As they are exposed to lewd or violent language, their vocabulary will mirror what they hear
- Talk to them about real life heroes and explain how everyday people demonstrate acts of courage and kindness

- Build on their interests. If the superheroes fly, learn more about what else does
- Praise children for their real accomplishments and abilities.

Television Viewing Suggestions

- Think about how much, when and what is being watched. Watch programs that are consistent with your values. Be a role model and avoid random viewing. If programs or videos are based on a book, then consider reading aloud the original versions.
- Watch programs with children and commenting on what is "real" and what is "fake."
- Describe how people can be "hurt" or "die" in one scene and appear again in another program
- Discuss commercials and how advertisers exaggerate claims to encourage people to buy their products
- Limit news shows (including car radio news or talk shows) and "real" TV. The live action can leave children feeling anxious.

Do what's best for your family or child care program. Experts on violence reassure us that viewing a movie or watching television will not turn a happy, passive child into a violent person. It is the child who experiences depression, feels rejected, appears angry and has access to weapons who may be most influenced by the media. Having peers who fight and carry weapons impacts behavior more than the media alone can.

Children Online

Many parents worry that their children are going to be exposed to inappropriate information. Here are some guidelines developed by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry to help your children have a safe and rewarding online experience:

- Limit time spent online
- Remember that communicating with "screen names" in a "chat room" is the same as talking to strangers
- Don't give out personal information online and never agree to meet someone they met online
- Never give a child a credit card or password that will enable online purchases or gain access to websites
- Remind them that not everything they read or see online is true
- Use the parental control feature from your online service provider or purchase software that restricts access to certain websites
- Teach children to communicate with the same courtesy online as they would when speaking directly to a person
- Insist that children follow these guidelines on computers outside of the home as well, such as at school, the library or a friend's house.

Initially, spending time online with a child, exploring and periodically participating, gives parents an opportunity to monitor and supervise the activity. It is also an opportunity to learn together.

For More Information

There are many websites which provide further information, including details of content. The table below lists some websites which rate music and video games and help you guide your child's use of the internet.

Website	Information Provided
www.parentalguide.org	Parental media guide produced in collaboration with the entertainment industry. Provides a central resource for parents and caregivers seeking more information about media ratings.
www.parentreviews.com	Movie ratings and family movie reviews.
www.kidsinmind.com	Movies are rated on sex & nudity, violence & gore, and profanity. Instances of each of these are listed. Topics you may want to discuss with your child are included.
www.getnetwise.org	This site includes an online safety guide, computer security tools for families, and links to appropriate web sites for kids.
www.mediafamily.org	National Institute on Media and the Family is a research-based organization on the positive and harmful effects of media on children and youth. Its MediaWise® movement encourages parents to "Watch What their Kids Watch," to guide parents in media choices for kids.

In 1985, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) reached an agreement with the National Parent Teacher Association and the Parents Music Resource Center. That agreement specified that music releases which contain explicit lyrics, including explicit depictions of violence and sex, be identified so parents can make intelligent listening choices for their children.

"The Parental Advisory is a notice to consumers that recordings identified by this logo may contain strong language or depictions of violence, sex or substance abuse. Parental discretion is advised."

Once the determination is made that a recording warrants a Parental Advisory Label, the label is to be plainly displayed

in a nonremovable form on the album cover. In general, the label is placed on the bottom left corner of the album cover itself (not the cellophane wrapper).

**PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENTS**

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) ratings are designed to provide information about video and computer game content, so you can make informed purchase decisions. ESRB ratings have two parts: rating symbols suggest age appropriateness for the game, and content descriptors indicate elements in a game that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern. To take full advantage of the ESRB rating system, it's important to check both the rating symbol (on the front of the game box) and the content descriptors (on the back of the game box).



RATING PENDING

Titles listed as RP (Rating Pending) - have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Titles rated EC - (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



EVERYONE

Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



EVERYONE 10+

Titles rated E10+ (Everyone 10 and older) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.



TEEN

Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood and/or infrequent use of strong language.



ADULTS ONLY

Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.








MATURE

Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language.







Motion Picture & Television Rating Guide

Movie and TV ratings are defined below. These provide general guidelines for the suitability of shows for different age groups.

MOVIE RATINGS

SYMBOL & AUDIENCE	EXPLANATION
G GENERAL AUDIENCES All Ages Admitted 	All ages admitted.
PG PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED SOME MATERIAL MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN 	Some material may not be suitable for children.
PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13 	Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13 yrs. old.
R RESTRICTED UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN 	Under 17 yrs. old require accompanying parent or adult guardian.
NC-17 NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED 	No one under 17 yrs. old and under admitted.

TELEVISION RATINGS

SYMBOL	AUDIENCE	EXPLANATION
	Ages 2 - 6 yrs. old	All Children: This program is designed to be appropriate for all children. Whether animated or live-action, the themes and elements in this program are specifically designed for a very young audience, including children from ages 2 - 6. This program is not expected to frighten younger children.
	Ages 7 yrs. old & up	Directed to Older Children: This program is designed for children age 7 and above. It may be more appropriate for children who have acquired the developmental skills needed to distinguish between make-believe and reality. Themes and elements in this program may include mild fantasy violence or comedic violence, or may frighten children under the age of 7. Therefore, parents may wish to consider the suitability of this program for their very young children.
	All ages	General Audience: Most parents would find this program suitable for all ages. Although this rating does not signify a program designed specifically for children, most parents may let younger children watch this program unattended. It contains little or no violence, no strong language and little or no sexual dialogue or situations.
	Parental guidance	Parental Guidance Suggested: This program contains material that parents may find unsuitable for younger children. Many parents may want to watch it with their younger children. The theme itself may call for parental guidance and/or the program contains one or more of the following: moderate violence (V), some sexual situations (S), infrequent coarse language (L), or some suggestive dialogue (D).
	Ages 14 yrs. & up	Parents Strongly Cautioned: This program contains some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age. Parents are strongly urged to exercise greater care in monitoring this program and are cautioned against letting children under the age of 14 watch unattended. This program contains one or more of the following: intense violence (V), intense sexual situations (S), strong coarse language (L), or intensely suggestive dialogue (D).
	Mature audience only	Mature Audience Only: This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17. This program contains one or more of the following: graphic violence (V), explicit sexual activity (S), or crude indecent language (L).

AUDIENCE: Indicates the audience for which a television program is appropriate.

CONTENT LABEL: To help parents identify the specific content in a program, the TV ratings system includes additional labels that are added.



The Content Labels

TV Parental Guidelines may have one or more letters added to the basic rating to let parents know when a show contains fantasy violence or higher levels of violence, sex, adult language or suggestive dialogue.

- D** - Suggestive Dialogue
- L** - Coarse Language
- S** - Sexual Situations
- V** - Violence
- FV** - Fantasy Violence