

Family Tapestries Strengthening Family Bonds



Fact Sheet

Your Child and Violent Media

Urvia McDowell, Graduate Student, and **Ted G. Futris**, Ph.D., Family Life Extension Specialist and Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Science, The Ohio State University

Technology has given us access to powerful media such as the television, computers, and videogames, but what effect do these information and entertainment media have on our children? Television affects the value systems of those who watch it. Nearly all American households have televisions and on average, children view between 3 and 5 hours per day and 21 to 23 hours of television a week. In many families, television is a substitute for quality time with parents.

Some of the behaviors that children model in part come from what they view on television. Unfortunately, children are exposed to nearly 26 violent acts per viewing hour. Violence or aggression is seen in commercials, sitcoms, and most children's programming including cartoons. But children aren't watching children's programming only. Prime-time television draws the largest number of viewers from every age group. Aggression is also the main theme of many videogames and popular toys.

Effects on Children

Until the age of 3 or 4, children are not able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality in television programs. Young children tend to copy what they see on television or videogames. This may have a negative effect on their behavior. In fact, a large number of studies have found a relationship between televised violence and aggressive behavior in children. Some of the other effects that are associated with repeated viewing of television and videogame violence include:

- **Desensitization.** Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, and how they view life and its values may be negated.
- **Acceptance of violence.** Children may come to accept violence as both a societal norm and as an acceptable way to solve small and large conflicts.
- **Fearfulness.** Children who watch a lot of television may feel that the world is a dangerous place and it may increase their fear about becoming a victim of violence.

Choosing Nonviolent T.V. Shows

Children need guidance in all areas of their lives especially in the forms of entertainment that they watch. Jan Arnow (1995) presents a checklist that may help in choosing nonviolent television shows.

- ✓ Does violence drive the storyline? Would there even be a story without violence?
- ✓ Would it be hard to sum up the story in this program without making at least one reference to violence?
- ✓ Is anyone ever shown mourning when a person is killed or seriously injured?
- ✓ Do the "good guys" always win?
- ✓ Do the "bad guys" have family or friends who will care if they get hurt or killed?

What Parents Can Do

Studies have also shown that a reduction in the amount of time children spend watching television and playing videogames helps to decrease aggressive behavior. You can moderate or reduce your child's exposure to violent television or videogames by:

- ✓ Watching television with them and teaching them the difference between reality and the created world of television.
- ✓ Monitoring what they watch and setting limits on the amount of time spent in watching television or playing videogames.
- ✓ You may also want to offer alternatives to watching television such as reading a book, or playing with siblings or friends. Encouraging activities that allow your child to be active or creative such as playing sports or spending time on a hobby may also help to steer your child away from the passive act of watching television.

There are two ways that you can monitor or prevent your child from viewing violence on television. First, the V-chip is a device that can block transmission of violent programs into homes and helps you to monitor what your children watch. The V-chip is already built into some new television sets and all you have to do is turn it on when setting up your television set. You can call 1-877-2VCHIP-TV for more information or visit the web site at www.vchippeducation.org.

Second, the TV ratings system can help you figure out which programs are inappropriate for your child because of sexual or violent content or obscene language. The ratings are as follows:

- **TV-Y and TV-G:** this rating is for shows that are acceptable for all ages.
- **TV-7:** this rating is for shows that have some violence or other material unsuitable for children under seven.

- **TV-PG:** this rating suggests that parental guidance is needed while viewing the program.

- **TV-14:** this rating is for shows that are not suitable for children under the age of 14.

- **TV-MA:** this rating is for shows that are not suitable for children at all.

The amount of time that children spend watching television or playing videogames should be moderated because it keeps children from other activities that may benefit them more such as reading and playing with friends. Setting limits and providing alternatives may be a positive step in preventing desensitization and acceptance of violence.

References and Resources

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