

Battling Media Violence

By LINDA LANTIERI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER FROM TEACHERS FOR
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Media violence is an unwelcome visitor in many homes and schools. If we neglect teaching peace, then television, music, video games, and toys will give our children clear direction in terms of values to adhere to, behavior to follow, and ways to think.

Taking Action

So, what can parents and educators do? We must begin by pulling ourselves out of our numbness, ignorance, and denial. We must make a commitment to looking at what is going on in the media and how it is influencing our children. We must work together to create a society where readily available technologies nurture, rather than damage, our children.

Talk about what you believe.

One of the simplest yet most important things we can do is to tell children what we believe about these issues, rather than leaving a vacuum in their lives for the media to fill. Our kids cannot avoid all violent toys or TV shows, but we can engage them in critical debate about the issues they raise.

Help young people gain media literacy skills.

Media images bombard children at such a rapid-fire pace that they often don't have time to sort through the real messages behind the images. Furthermore, TV shows and video games emphasize immediate gratification of desires, short-term solutions, and quick fixes. Children need to know that in real life, we must sometimes wait, make compromises, or think about others in order to get our needs met.

Find positive uses of the media.

Help children find examples of

constructive, nonviolent conflict resolution in our modern society. Children of all ages need to see that conflict resolution works out in the real world.

Model alternatives to violence.

Let young people know that the violent "solutions" to problems that they see on TV or in movies are not the only way to resolve conflicts. We can show our children how to manage this conflict peacefully by developing the skills of conflict resolution.

Work together.

Set aside time for family or classroom meetings, when you discuss problems and come up with mutually agreed-upon solutions. Some families write down conflicts or family problems and place them in a "conflict jar," to be discussed during the next family meeting.

Be a voice for nonviolence.

We've got to let producers, advertisers, and TV stations know that we will not continue to associate with them or buy their sponsors' products if they continue to participate in making violence glamorous to our children. We must also advocate for regulations that will help us control our children's viewing. We must urge public leaders to make safe communities a priority.

Create peace.

We must counter every violent or destructive image that children are exposed to with a response that lets them know that they are safe and that peace is possible. A home or classroom that is nonviolent in its structure and day-to-day life can serve as a crucial safety net for children. When parents and schools work together, a very powerful alliance is created on behalf of children. Meet with teachers and other parents to find ways to create safe, peaceful

learning environments for kids.

Conclusion

The powerful negative influence that the media has on our children is frightening and angering. We need to feel our fear and our anger, to wake up from our numbness, ignorance, and denial about the role of the media in promoting violence to our children. By taking action, we as parents and educators can send our children a powerful message: that our lives do not have to be ruled by television, advertising, and media hype. The influence of the media is pervasive, but our way to counter this influence is simple and close to home. We must simply spend time with our children, listen to them, and show them that "it is possible to live in peace," as Gandhi reminded us.

Ideas for Teaching Media Literacy Skills

By J. LANGREHR

Explain to your children or students that we all draw conclusions, or *inferences*, after viewing advertisements. The innocent, unthinking viewer draws a "nice"

inference. This is the conclusion the advertising agent hopes for. The cautious, thinking reader draws a "mean" inference. This inference is usually correct or is the real situation. The "mean" inference can still be true even

though it is extreme. Show or watch three commercials that make true statements but are meant to give rise to inferences as well. Have the children brainstorm the "nice" inferences and the "mean" inferences.

Example

Michael Jordan drinks Pepsi.

What did you infer about -	Nice inference	Mean Inference •possibly the truth
How often Michael drinks Pepsi?	Regularly	Once a year
Why Michael chose Pepsi?	Because he likes the taste	Because he is paid to drink it

Example

Four out of five dentists recommend Trident for their patients who chew gum.

What did you infer about -	Nice inference	Mean Inference •possibly the truth
How many dentists were surveyed?	Maybe 100 dentists chosen at random, 80 of whom chose Trident	Only five dentists
Why the dentists chose Trident?	They compared it favorably to other gums on the market	They own stock in the company

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