

TV & Movie Violence

Why watching it is harmful to children

Watching violence in movies and on television is potentially harmful to your child.

As early as the 1960s, studies reported that watching violence can make children more aggressive. In fact, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the National Institute of Mental Health have all linked violent TV and movies with aggressive behavior in some young people.

Watching violence can also leave children fearful or make them less sensitive to real violence and its consequences.

American children watch a great deal of television, and much of it is violent. It is estimated that young people see about 10,000 violent acts on television each year.

As a parent, you should understand the risks and take a few simple steps to make sure violence in movies and on TV does not affect the way your child thinks and behaves.

On Back

How violence in movies and on TV can affect your child.

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You & Your Child



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Plenty of violence to watch

The recent National Television Violence Study, which reviewed 10,000 hours of television programming, reported that:

- 60 percent of the programs it sampled contained violent scenes.
- One-third of the violent scenes showed villains who were never punished.
- 70 percent of these “bad” characters showed no remorse when committing violence.
- 40 percent of the violence in the scenes was done by the hero.
- Fewer than 5 percent of the violent programs had anti-violent messages.

Watching violence encourages aggressive behavior

Many studies report that watching violence in movies and/or TV tends to make children more aggressive. For example, preschool-aged children who watched Batman and Superman cartoons were reported in one study to be more physically-active and aggressive than children who watched Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood or other non-violent programs.

Three kinds of programs encourage aggressive behavior more than others:

- Action-adventure and police programs that show realistic violence.
- Violent cartoons. Children under the age of 7 may imitate cartoon violence because they may not be able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality.
- Action/fantasy shows like Power Rangers and Teenage Mutant Ninja turtles.

The effects may be long-lasting

Watching a lot of violent television as a child may affect the way a person thinks and behaves later in life, even as an adult.

For example, one study reported that children who liked to watch violent TV programs when they were 8 years old were more likely to behave aggressively at age 18 and as adults were also more likely to be convicted of violent crimes, such as child abuse and murder.

Watching violence can affect attitudes

Watching violent movies and television programs also affects children’s attitudes toward violence and the world around them. Studies report two ways in which watching violence can lead to unhealthy attitudes.

- **Desensitization.** Children who watch a lot of violent television programs may become less sensitive to violence in the real world. If children are not shocked by violence or its consequences, they may be more willing to accept high levels of violence in society or even commit an act of violence.
- **Mean World Syndrome.** Children who watch a lot of violent television programs may come to believe that the world is a mean and dangerous place. This tends to make them fearful of the world around them.

Seeing violence go unpunished is not healthy

Too often, violence in movies and on television is portrayed without consequences.

When children see violence without remorse, criticism, or punishment they learn that doing bad things is okay – there are no consequences. But that is not true in the real world.

What You Can Do

As a parent, there are simple steps you can take to make sure that violence in movies and on television does not influence your child’s attitudes or behavior.

- Control the number of hours your children watch television.
- Control the programs they watch.
- Discuss the programs your children see. Even if your children watch a program that you disapprove of, discuss it. Discuss what happens in the program and how it compares to your values. Talk about what would happen if your child was to act in a violent way similar to what he or she saw in the movie or television program.

