

Media Violence

This discussion guide will help you facilitate a conversation with parents about the impact of media violence on kids. Use the following questions and stories to get parents thinking and talking about this issue. You may also want to show the Media Violence parent tip video and hand out the Media Violence parent tip sheet to help spark the discussion.

What's going on with your kids?

Questions to encourage parents to share experiences, concerns, and solutions

1. Where do you think kids encounter the most media violence?
2. How do you classify whether something is violent or not? How might this change as your children get older?
3. Do you remember a scary or violent scene from a movie you saw as a child?
4. Have your children ever experienced anxiety due to something violent or scary they saw?
5. What is often missing from violent content in movies, TV, and video games?
6. What are your top concerns or challenges with media violence and your kids?

What would you do?

Stories to discuss, role play, and deepen conversation

Elementary school child

Jane and her family rented the second *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. Jane trusts anything made by Disney, and they all had watched and enjoyed the first *Pirates* movie. Her daughter was scared during some parts of the movie, so Jane told her to just cover her eyes. Every night since they watched the movie, her daughter has had nightmares and wants to sleep with the light on. She thinks she sees things in the dark, like the scary characters from the movie. She's had nightmares that she's been captured on a pirate ship and tortured.

- » Some kids can be really affected by scary or violent scenes on screen. What can parents do to help kids deal with scenes that could scare them, besides telling them to cover their eyes?
- » How can Jane work with her daughter to "pull back the curtain" on the movie, helping her understand what is real and what is fantasy?

Middle school preteen or teen

Sixth-grader Juan has a weekly school assignment where he has to look up current world events from several news outlets and write a short report comparing the different angles taken on the same story. At first, this assignment inspired him to watch more TV news and seek out online news. But soon, Juan lost interest in the assignment. "What's the problem?" asked his mom. "It's just that... there are so many people dying and getting shot in the war with suicide bombers and stuff. I didn't know all these people were dying... It's sad."

- » Online news outlets, local news, and other TV news include many violent stories. How can parents deal with the violence kids see in the news? How can they help children understand why TV news reports include so much violence?
- » What kinds of on-screen violence bother you? Shoot-'em-up scenes? Blood and gore? What about TV news? Are televised sports violent? What is okay with you, and what isn't?

High school teen

Jessica, who is seventeen, and her friends love the Kill Bill movies. Her parents decided to join her friends to watch Kill Bill: Vol. 1. They aren't really into those kinds of movies, but they wanted to see what all the fuss was about. "You're going to LOVE it — it's so cool," said Jessica. A couple times during the fight scenes Jessica and her friends would laugh or repeat the lines. Although her parents found the story and special effects entertaining, they were somewhat shocked at the amount of fighting, blood, and gore. When they asked the teens what they thought, the kids explained that the violence was fantasy, like violence in a comic book. And it was so over the top it was even funny at times. Jessica's parents thought that this kind of violence desensitized people to real-life violence.

- » What is the purpose of mixing violence with humor?
- » How can a fascination with violence on screen be problematic for teens, who are in a developmental stage where they are more inclined to take risks?

High school teen

Frank's seventeen-year-old son Anthony likes to mess around online. He searches YouTube for fun, keeping track of the latest funny surveys and trends and watching random videos. Frank is concerned that Anthony is coming across footage of real-life violence and aggression. He's heard news stories about a new trend called "happy slapping" — kids filming their physical assault on a stranger or peer with the intention of posting the video online. Frank has also heard news stories about Web videos that depict torture cases overseas, animal abuse, and even suicide. Anthony has always stayed out of trouble, but Frank worries he will be desensitized or disturbed by what he sees online.

- » Parents can point out the dramatization of violence in TV shows, films, and video games, but it seems that online videos fall under a different category. How might parents talk to their kids about depictions of real-life violence on the web?
- » Have you ever used news media — reports, articles, radio, talk shows — as springboards for discussions about family values regarding aggression, violence and respecting others? If so, what did you do and what was the result?