

## **Media Violence**

*The University of Pittsburgh  
Office of Child Development*

Rob's son wanted nothing to do with the animated movies that earned a G-rating. The video he wanted to rent was an action movie, the kind filled with special effects and wholesale slaughter.

It was R-rated. And Rob, who had seen the promo for this film a few months earlier, recalled how, in the span of some 30 seconds, the automatic-weapon-toting hero killed roughly a dozen terrorists in front of an unblinking camera. "I'm sorry," he said to his son. "That's too violent."

"But all my friends have seen it," his son replied, adding that one of his schoolmates claims to have gotten the video for his birthday.

Rob stood firm. No violent films, and no R-rated films.

His son didn't like it. He sniffed at the G-rated video Rob rented. He pouted and stomped. Rob didn't like disappointing his son, but took comfort knowing he did the right thing.

Nearly four decades of published research clearly shows that a steady diet of violent television, movies, and other media is unhealthy for children.

As early as the 1960s, studies suggested violence on television contributes to children behaving more anti-socially and aggressively. Since then, The American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the National Institute of Mental Health have gone on record warning that exposure to media violence contributes to the development of aggressive behavior.

Studies also report that a diet of violent programming can render people numb to the consequences of real violence and less sympathetic to its victims. Another side effect, the "Mean World Syndrome," can result in children becoming unreasonably fearful of the world around them.

As a parent, you should control the hours your children spend in front of the television as well as the programs they watch. Don't allow young children to watch violent programs or play violent electronic games. Remember, cartoons are among the most violent type of programming on TV.

Use film and television rating systems to help select the programs and movies your children watch, or screen them yourself. Use the V-chip if you have it. If you allow your child to watch a violent show, watch it together and discuss it with him or her, especially the distinction between make-believe and reality. And encourage your children to watch socially positive programs, perhaps together.

It's up to you to make sure that violent television, movies, and games do not influence your child's attitudes or behavior.

*This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.*