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Teachers and Parents

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Understanding Media Effects

Children Imitate What They See

In fact, new research shows that just watching someone do something is like practicing it yourself (because of "mirror neurons" in the brain). So:

- Watching a behavior is like practicing it yourself.
- Watching violence is like practicing violence.
- Watching disrespectful behavior is like practicing disrespectful behavior.
- Just as bad, feeling rewarded for violent behavior creates "violence=pleasure" connections in the brain.
- Watching smoking on television increases likelihood that an adolescent will smoke.
- Watching sexual talk or activity on television increases the likelihood of early sexual behavior.

Children of Different Ages Perceive Media in Different Ways

- Children under 5 have problems distinguishing reality and fantasy in media.
- Children 5-8 tend to focus on individual images in what they see, not the whole story (and therefore miss out on intended educational messages).
- Children under age 8 usually are unable to put all the pieces of a story together.

- Children under 8 are not good at distinguishing advertising from television programs.
- Children under 7 are usually scared by spooky fantasy.
- Children 8-12 are most frightened by realistic violence.

Brains of Infants Under 2 are Structured for Life by their Experiences in Those Years

- They need lots of tender holding and carrying, and safe exploration of their environment.
- Parents should be responsive, give lots of eye contact and face-to-face time.
- Children under 2 should NOT watch television, videos, or computers.

What is Wrong with Children Watching a Lot of Television?

The worst thing about watching television for every age is that it displaces other activities like playing outdoors, playing with friends, and playing “make believe” and using imagination.

- Increased television viewing is related to aggressive behavior, like bullying, and other social problems.
- Increased television viewing is related to obesity- in part because 2/3 of Saturday morning commercials are for unhealthy foods.
- Increased television viewing is related to ADHD, particularly in the very young children.
- Extensive television viewing in children and adolescents is related to sleeping problems.
- Excessive television viewing in childhood is related to poor educational outcomes at age 26.

What About Video Games?

- Video games are more involving and vivid than TV. The images, scenarios and characters are more real and more frightening for children. They allow even greater practice of behaviors than watching.
- Video games prime players with involving, vivid and aggression-inducing scenarios. These can lead to feelings of aggression, aggressive acts and violent problem-solving strategies.
- Because vividness is so captivating, watching others play video games, like older siblings, leads to the same aggressive feelings and behavior as if you were playing (surprisingly, it's actually a greater effect: researchers attribute this to the added frustration of being unable to act.)
- While watching violent acts on TV is like practicing violence, playing video games is like practicing the same violent acts over and over again, with rewards for improvement
- There is no evidence that video games are cathartic, allowing players to release their anger and aggression in a harmless way.
- There is some preliminary evidence that video game play stimulates the same systems

as narcotics and amphetamines (dopamine, etc.)

Playing a lot of violent video games is related to:

- More aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviors
- Less caring and helpful behavior towards peers
- And it doesn't matter whether you are an aggressive child or not

Violent video games increase aggression because:

- There is active involvement in aggressive activities
- Aggression is rewarded
- Aggressive acts are rehearsed over and over

Warnings

- 1985: American Psychological Association passes resolution warning public of dangers of children watching violent TV
- 1992: APA Task Force on Television and Society further documents ill effects of violent TV on aggression
- 2003: 15-year longitudinal study shows ill effects on everyone who watches violent TV
- Three Major Effects of Seeing Violence on Television
- More likely to become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others
- More likely to be more fearful of the world
- More likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others

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The 4 Component Model

1. [Ethical Sensitivity - Evidence of concern for others and awareness of the consequences of one's actions.](#)
2. [Ethical Judgment - Shows characters deliberating about ethical choices.](#)
3. [Ethical Focus - Addresses the ethical demand in the situation, prioritizing moral goals and responsibilities over selfish interests.](#)
4. [Ethical Action - Has a character who takes several steps to reach a moral goal and perseveres to complete the ethical action.](#)

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