



The Middle Years: Popular Entertainment Media

American children today are immersed in the popular media—music, television, movies and videos, video games, computers, and the Internet. The average American child spends 38 hours each week using a combination of all types of entertainment media. These forms of media are powerful teachers!

The media can have both positive and negative influences on your child's healthy growth and development. They can offer a broad range of ideas, provide information that is useful in school, and promote your child's ability to understand other cultures in our world. On the other hand, the popular media can expose your children to violent images and adult material that are potentially harmful to their healthy development.

Some of the harmful messages are subtle. They may encourage aggressive and/or disrespectful relationships by making such relationships appear funny and attractive. Other messages in the lyrics of songs or scenes in movies or TV shows are openly violent. They have graphic images of angry outbursts, bloodshed, suicide, or torture that, over time, can contribute to less caring and sensitivity to real acts of aggression. Boys and girls hear the same media messages but feel the impact differently. Boys may learn that being violent is the same as being strong or macho. Girls may learn that sex and violence are always linked. As parents, you play an important role in guarding your children from violent media and the messages they can teach. You can help by:

- *Setting limits.* Involve your child in setting a total daily or weekly time limit for use of all entertainment media, including TV, videos, computer and video games, and music.
- *Setting family guidelines for media content.* Explain clearly to your child what TV programs, videos, or music are allowed. Remove or turn off violent, graphic, or adult media that are potentially harmful for children. Involve your children in setting the guidelines.
- *Keeping entertainment media out of your children's bedrooms.* Put TV sets, computers, video game systems, and VCRs in a family area of the house and out of children's bedrooms where use is difficult to monitor.
- *Turning media use into a family activity.* Make time to watch TV or surf the Internet with your children and discuss what you are viewing.

Parents can also add their voices to the larger organizations that work to prevent the harmful impact of media on children. If you are concerned that your child may have been unusually affected by violent media programming or has difficulty breaking away from TV, you may wish to talk with your child's school counselor or a psychologist.

The information contained in this summary is taken from the Middle Years chapter of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).

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