

Do You Know What Your Child Is watching?

The Effects Of Television Violence On Children By Brandi Green



Do you remember turning on your television the morning of April 20, 1999? Do you remember sitting and watching in horror as teenage children were being carried away on stretchers and others were sitting in the street sidewalks crying and praying? I do. I remember that event more clearly than the morning I woke up to hear people screaming that America was being attacked.

On the morning of April 20, 1999

Colorado State University. In fact, both of these boys, whose lives were changed drastically after the attacks, lived in my dorm last year.

In some ways I wonder if that's not what makes me feel so close to the shootings at Columbine High School. I lived with these people, seeing them everyday. I heard first-hand stories. The first question I always asked myself when thinking about it

" When your child wants to watch television... watch it with them... don't let them watch it alone, and definitely don't refuse to let them watch it... you'll be surprised at the benefits. "

I watched, along with the twenty-three other high school juniors and seniors in my high school Physics class, a young man named Patrick Ireland fall out of a second-story window. He's currently attending Colorado State University. Christopher Partridge, a soccer player who was lucky enough to avoid the aim of the gunmen, also attends

was, "What could possibly make a high school child want to kill another human being?"

Violence on television is a highly debated topic, but it doesn't get the widespread general acknowledgement that it really needs to become a "social problem." Not enough people are aware of the effects.

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

Why should you care?
According to the American
Academy of Pediatrics...

1. Media violence can lead to aggressive behavior in children. Over 1,000 studies confirm this link.
2. By age 18, the average American child will have viewed about 200,000 acts of violence on television alone.
3. Media violence is especially damaging to young children (under age 8) because they cannot easily tell the difference between real life and fantasy. What children see on television is real to them.
4. Media violence often fails to show the consequences of violence. This is especially true of cartoons, toy commercials and music videos. Children learn that there are few, if any, repercussions for violent acts.
5. The level of violence during Saturday morning cartoons is higher than the level of violence during prime time. There are 3 to 5 violent acts per hour in prime time, versus 20 to 25 acts per hour on Saturday morning.



The first time I had even heard of the idea that violence on the television is affecting kids in profound ways was the same day I watched Patrick Ireland fall out of the second-story window. Of course, I didn't know Patrick then, and I still don't. I just had to see him everyday and feel as if I should say something, but knowing that anything I could say would be inappropriate. I knew that there was not one thing that I could say that he had never heard before.

Why did it take a tragedy like Columbine for us to realize that there was something wrong in our society? Namely the quality of our television programs.

Recently I read an article by Joanne Cantor. In her article she reminisced about her family's first television set. In this article she remembered when, "For the most part TV producers behaved as though they were invited guests in America's homes." What's happened to that idea? The idea that we were the ones controlling what the television producers could bring into our homes. It seems as though where we were once inviting the networks into our homes, they've now invited us to watch their programs. The television producers tell us what we enjoy watching, and we go along with it. We go along with it because we're bored and there's nothing else to do.

What happened to the joyful afternoons in the park? I remember taking walks with my parents when I was younger. As a reward for being involved in my school and getting good grades my parents would buy me games and let me participate on a youth soccer league. My parents never rewarded me for good behavior with a television set or an extra hour of viewing. I grew up on books and music. Even today watching a television program for more than an hour gives me a headache.

Those times that I was permitted to watch television my parents would be sitting along side me on the sofa watching the program with me. They would explain to me

what I was seeing. They never shielded me from a particular program; they only educated me to insure

that one day I would be able to make appropriate viewing choices. Today I don't watch television. I don't even own a television. And I especially don't enjoy watching programs whose only catch or lure is violence.

According to Mark Singer, there is "...clear evidence of the prevalence of violence on television, especially in children's programs, and suggest that children are exposed to wide varieties of violent dialogue and images while they are watching television. The psychological and behavioral consequences of American children viewing such a high volume of violent television warrants serious consideration. The past 20 years of research on television violence has provided evidence of a correlation between children's violence viewing and aggressive behavior."

What can you do?

Amy Nathanson, author of the article, "Parents and Child Perspectives on the Presence and Meaning of Parental Television Mediation," that was published in the Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, points out the use of 'covieing,' or the active involvement of parents in their children's viewing habits, can significantly decrease the affect that violence on television has on children.

When your child wants to watch television, let them. Just watch it with them. Don't let them watch it alone, and definitely don't refuse to let them watch it. You'll be surprised at the benefits.

Not so sure? What are you thinking? Are you thinking that the parents who care are already practicing this approach? You're wrong. Most parents don't even know about the amount of violence on today's television programs. Most parents are completely

oblivious because they've been watching these programs all along.

Some people would also argue that parents need to change their parenting in order to make a difference. But this isn't true. They just need to change their ideas about parenting. They need to be more proactive in their children's daily activities while at home as well as while in others' homes.

Then, of course, there are people who feel that there is no problem at all. But there is a problem, and according to the Emory Report, "... there have been 3,000 studies of media violence in the past 45 years, 1,000 of which examined its effect on children..." Every study shows the same results, violence causes aggression in children and leads to aggression as adults.



Parents need to be involved in the everyday activities of their children. They need to be there when their child has questions. Otherwise, when children have questions, they'll go to people who might have the wrong answers or they'll come to a conclusion themselves. When parents are there, their children will get the right

answers, or at least an answer that you'd approve.

Petitioning the networks is not the answer. You can't stop the source when the source is making billions of dollars a year on programs with violent content. They won't listen. They'll probably even site a few sources that help their case, stating that aggression in children is not related to what children watch.

Parents need to help their children to understand what they're seeing on television, as well as understand the implications of what they're seeing if they want to decrease the overall impact that violence on the television has on their children. If parents do this, then their children will come to understand and dislike the violence their children are seeing.



Initially, when a child grows up watching violence and not knowing the implications of this violence, they don't comprehend the effects that it has. They begin to enjoy it. If children are told what they are seeing, then they will be able to put it into context and understand it. Children will know that violence outside of entertainment is inappropriate.

If we want to ensure that the children of today will grow into healthy, functioning adults tomorrow, we need to

take a stand. We need to stand up to the networks. In order to really make a difference, we need to tell them what we want to watch and when we want to watch it, and stick to our decisions.

I can't change the idea that television is one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century, but I do hope to change the idea that parents can't change their children's ideas of television. I hope to challenge the idea that children are what they watch. Through the use of Amy Nathanson's coined term, coviewing, I think that America can once again regain control of the television networks. I believe that with a little practice and time, America will be proud of what's on our television sets. Maybe enough to be able to relax and enjoy watching a program without having to worry that something offensive or inappropriate will grace the screen.

NEED MORE PROOF?

A Canadian Study as reported by Jane Ledingham for [The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence](#)

In an important study carried out in Canada, children were found to have become significantly more aggressive two years after television was introduced to their town for the first time. Children who prefer violent television shows when they are young have been found to be more aggressive later on, and this may be associated with trouble with the law in adulthood. Strong identification with a violent TV character and believing that the TV situation is realistic are both associated with greater aggressiveness. In general, boys are more affected by violent shows than girls are.