

Children and Violence

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Violence in our society has increased and is reported daily in our newspaper and on the T.V. I believe that the effects of violence on our children go underestimated. The basic needs of every individual are; first to have physical needs met, then to feel safe.

When children are surrounded by an unpredictable environment and bombarded by violence in the media, how can we then keep our children safe?

The largest percent of children affected by violence have seen it on T.V. Children affected with the greatest intensity are those exposed to chronic violence.

To understand how violence affects children it is important to understand child development. When physical needs are denied learning is affected. Children are products of their environment. Environmental situations affect the baby; happy cheery environment = happy baby, violent environment = scared and uncertain baby.

The brain provides many functions for learning; left side reading, writing, analyzing and processing information. Right side of brain governs; visual images, shapes, patterns, overall "big picture" thinking. This side of the brain dominates when watching T.V. Trauma is encoded on the right side of the brain. Those events are stored via images and sensations and are then later played back in a child's play. The experiences that a child has in their environment affect their brain development. When children are traumatized it is difficult to process information. It becomes difficult to follow direction, focus, attend to, retain and recall verbal information.

Does the way families manage conflict influence children? Children learn their first lesson about how to get along with others and handle conflict, anger and frustration from their family. If family conflict turns into domestic abuse children become at risk of physical and emotional abuse. They also learn that the way to handle conflict is to be violent.

Our culture promotes self-centeredness and in turn violence. We aren't focused on helping others. The mind set is we don't need to get along, so with that, we don't problem solve and learn how to get along.

T.V violence impacts children. T.V violence exposes children to violence, which leads to acceptance of violence. Children don't remember the plot, but remember the action of the characters instead. T.V violence promotes aggressive behavior, lack of caring about others and less sensitivity to the

suffering of others. It reinforces anti-social behavior, limits language development and introduces profanity into a child's vocabulary. It limits imagination and decreases social development.

What should parents do about the T.V violence? Know what your child is watching, limit their T.V watching, watch T.V together and offer alternative activities to do together as a family.

What should we as parents and child care providers do to help the children cope with the violence that surrounds them? Talking about violence gives the opportunity to sort out what they hear and to figure out what it means. When talking to children about violence first find out how much they know and respond to them at that level. Reassure children about their safety. Answer questions clearly but simply, give small pieces of information and see how they respond, then decide what to say next. Help children find alternatives to violence in their problem solving. Doing art- work is a wonderful way to express feelings. Some of the things that are helpful for children to deal with the violence around them are; daily routines, rituals (something they do every night, like a story before bed, prayer at evening meal), a peaceful household, limited exposure to media violence and adult conversation and above all, a child needs lots of time with a calm, loving and reassuring adult.