



CANADA'S CENTRE  
FOR DIGITAL AND  
MEDIA LITERACY

## Talking to Kids about Media Violence

Talking to kids about violence in the media they consume – television, movies, video games, music and the Internet – can help them put media violence into perspective and perhaps diffuse some of its power. The following "discussion starters" are designed to help kids develop the critical thinking skills they need to understand and question the use of violence in media.

- **Ask kids: what is violence?**

Once kids understand what violence is, they can then start to put media violence into context. Ask them to consider both physical and emotional acts of violence in their definition. Can emotional violence be as harmful as physical violence? Yelling, put-downs, name-calling and threats are what kids are most likely to experience in the school yard. Talk about how these kinds of acts can begin a cycle that leads to physical violence. How do they feel when someone call them names or threatens them?

- **Discuss how violence is used in different media.**

With a definition of violence in mind, kids can start to examine its use in the media they enjoy. Is violence used gratuitously or is it integral to the plot? Is it used in a humorous way and does the humour make it less harmful? Is it there to teach a lesson? Is violence shown to be the only possible solution to a situation which the audience expects?

- **Discuss the consequences of media violence.** Ask kids to think about the realistic consequences of the violence they see in the media:

- How would the people involved in the conflict feel in real life?
- What would be the results of the violence? What injuries may have occurred? What property damages would have resulted?
- How would the perpetrators of violence be punished or made accountable for their actions?

Look for examples in different media (video games, music videos, comic books, TV or movies) where there are no consequences to violence.

- **Discuss why there is violence in media and why people are attracted to it.**

Producers create violent media because it sells both at home and abroad. Many people want their entertainment to be action-packed, but the industry also creates an appetite for violence through marketing – especially to young people. Ask kids if they feel they are being targeted as consumers for violent media.



- **Consider whether people become increasingly de-sensitized to media violence.**  
Do kids feel that they need to see graphic violence? Talk about what they expect to see in the next action movie they go to. What does it take to scare them or keep them on the edge of their seat, and why. If people do become desensitized to violence, could that be a problem. Why?
- **Compare psychological suspense to gratuitous violence.**  
Can a well-made suspenseful movie be more frightening than a violent action film? Talk about the excitement generated by shootings or explosions in an action movie sequence versus a suspenseful scene that builds tension using music, tempo, camera angles and facial expressions.
- **Look for creative solutions to conflict in media.** Ask kids to look for examples of anger with and without violence in the media. Is there a difference between the two? Does the non-violent approach seem more realistic? Discuss alternative ways to resolve conflict.
- **Talk about media violence and stereotyping.**  
Media violence is often used to perpetrate myths and stereotypes about people. Ask kids:
  - Who is committing the acts of violence – men, women, white people, minorities?
  - Who are the victims of violence – men, women, old people, children, white people, minorities?
- **Discuss violence in the news.**  
War and acts of terrorism need to be put into a historical and cultural context for kids. Random acts of violence and criminal activity need to be discussed and de-sensationalized so children don't become overly fearful of their community or the world in general.

