

# Dealing With Your Child's Exposure to Violence

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In 1992, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) designated October as Child Health Month. The purpose of Child Health Month is to focus the nation's attention on children's health issues. Violence is an issue that hurts everyone — especially children. With a few simple measures, you can help reduce the violence in our lives and our children's.



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## Take Charge of TV

Today, American children and teens are being exposed to violence in television, movies, video games and music. Reports show that by age 18, young people will have viewed an estimated 200,000 acts of violence on television alone. Much of our media today glamorizes guns and wrongly teaches youngsters that problems can be solved by violence.

What can you do to help reduce the violence? Begin by watching television and movies with your children and talking about what you see. Monitor which programs they watch and try to choose those that are nonviolent. If a violent action occurs, discuss it with the child and how the violent action might have been avoided. Teach children about gun safety. Teach them about the sadness and suffering caused by real life violence.

Limit how much time they spend watching television or video playing games. Although TV keeps children quiet while they are watching, it is associated with increases in fighting sleep problems, and increased demands for fast food. Children are not able to distinguish ads from programs until age eight. Videos give you somewhat more control but still are associated with low metabolism and weight gain. Televisions in the bedroom are a very bad idea because parents can no longer control content. With an older child, increased TV is associated

with poor body image, poor grades, inappropriate diets and substance abuse.

You may want to take a more active position on limiting violence in the media by writing letters to local television network and cable executives. Urge them to demonstrate sensitivity to the effects of media violence on young children. In addition, stress voluntary remedies such as responsible scheduling of

programs with violent content, parental advisories, programming guidelines and accurate rating systems.

## Effective Discipline

All children and teenagers misbehave at one time or another. As adults, we teach our children acceptable behavior through a set of rules and limits. The process of teaching children to behave is called discipline. Eventually, this teaching encourages children to make good decisions on their own. This self-control helps them to feel confident.

There are several guidelines that will ultimately benefit both you and your child. To begin with, parents have the responsibility to communicate household rules to children, as well as the consequences of breaking the rules. These rules should be simple and consistent. In addition, be sure that all care-givers understand the limits and consequences used to discipline your child. Consistency speeds the learning process. Changing rules or punishments will only confuse your child. If your child does not know what to expect, he or she will continue to test the limits in order to determine what is acceptable and what is not. This is part of their learning experience.

Consider the child's age and maturity level. For example, toddlers are naturally curious and often learn about their

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world through touching and handling objects. It's unrealistic to expect a two-year-old to not touch anything and everything. Danger may need to be blocked off by physical barriers such as safety plugs and gates. This will allow you to teach about dangers one at a time. When a child misbehaves, point out the error immediately so that the child can learn.

When misbehavior occurs and your young child is defiant, use a time out. A good rule of thumb is one minute for each year of age. Briefly explain what the time-out is for. When the time-out is over, talk calmly about your expectations for behavior and why it was wrong or dangerous to do whatever prompted the time-out. Let the child know you understand his/her anger, but that a new way is needed to handle the situation or problem. For example, teach sharing to children fighting for a toy or help a child to talk about his anger instead of hitting. Some children need to isolate themselves or "count to ten."

Make a conscious effort to spend time with your child. When your child behaves well, give brief praise, trying to reinforce but not interrupt the good behavior.

As your child grows and matures, you will need to change the rules and consequences. Clearly define the new rules, expectations and consequences. For example, let your teenager know that phone privileges will be lost if homework is not completed each night. "Grounding" might be a consequence of a missed curfew. Expect that they may be angry and complain that the rules are more lax at other houses.

Remember that you are a role model for your child. If you deal with problems in a loud and angry manner, your child will most likely pattern himself or herself after your actions. If you spank your child in anger each time a rule is broken, you're teaching him or her that it's okay to solve problems through violence. If you are more even and controlled, your child will learn positive ways of handling problems. You would

not expect your child to learn the alphabet in one lesson; likewise, you should expect that behavior lessons will have to be repeated.

Not all rules and discipline strategies work for all children. Watch what other parents do. Lots of parents have good ideas and it is great to watch them in action. High-energy children and children with rebellious personalities are particularly difficult to manage.

Raising children is hard work. If you are doing your best and yet misbehavior is causing severe tension between you and your child, please get help. There are many books and counselors available. Ask your pediatrician or health care professional if you are having trouble knowing where to find help.

For more information call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080 outside the Milwaukee metro area, or log on at [www.ah.com](http://www.ah.com).

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