

## Talking About Violence

Prepared by  
Susan McClanahan, Graduate Student  
Karen Debord, Child Development & Parenting Specialist  
and  
Members of the CEMP 09 Planning Team

November, 1998  
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences  
North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service  
North Carolina State University

# Talking About Violence

## Program Description:

Parents have three main roles, those of caretaker, nurturer, and protector. This curriculum focuses on the parental role of being a PROTECTOR. It is designed to help parents see how violence affects the lives of their children, and to help them become aware of strategies to protect children from the adverse effects of exposure to violence. If available, someone who is a parent should do this presentation. Due to the sensitivity of some of these issues, you may prefer to partner a mental health professional to co-present with you.

## Program Objectives:

- Participants will become familiar with how a child understands the world at different ages.
- Participants will assess how children are exposed to violence.
- Participants will become aware of strategies for talking to their children about violence and minimizing their children's exposure to violence.
- Participants will have a better awareness of risk factors, protective factors, and the importance of attachment in growing resilient children.
- Participants will become aware of the symptoms of trauma so that they will know when to seek professional help for children.

## Intended Audience:

New parents

Parents of preschoolers and kindergartners

## Materials Needed:

1. Name tags and pens
2. Light refreshments (optional)
3. Lined 5 x 8 inch index cards & extra pens

4. Easel, flip chart and markers, or Blackboard and Chalk
5. Easel paper and markers for small group activity, masking tape
6. Overhead Projector
7. Overhead Transparencies

## Supplementary Materials for the Presenter (Resources to Share):

List of Selected Children's Books

Address lists of TV networks to give out to those interested (Levin, 1998)

Toy Selection Guide (Levin, 1998)

NAEYC Position Statement on Media Violence in Children's Lives (1990)

Offering Alternatives to TV:

-Shoe Box Kit Ideas (Levin, 1998)

-TUNE-OUT WEEK ideas that parents did with kids (Levin, 1998)

## Topics and Suggested Time Frame

Participant Introductions .....	10 minutes
Group.... Activity.....	15 minutes
Group.... Discussion.....	10 minutes
How Young Children Think.....	15 minutes
Break.....	10 minutes
Four ways that children are exposed to violence...	15 minutes
Symptoms of Trauma.....	5 minutes

Resilience: Risk & Protective Factors.....	10 minutes
Small Group Activity: What can a parent do?.....	20 minutes
Group Discussion.....	15 minutes
Evaluation.....	10 minutes

## Handouts (HO)

HO 1: Memory of a Frightening Time  
 HO 2: How Young Children Think  
 HO 3: Letter to Parents about Media Violence  
 HO 4: Fact Sheet on Entertainment Violence  
 HO 5: Family Homework Activity:  
 HO 6: If Children Hear About Violence on the News  
 HO 7: Trauma Symptoms Garbarino Quote  
 HO 8: Resilience  
 HO 9: Helping Children Cope with Stress  
 HO 10: Worksheet on How Children are Affected by Violence & What Parents Can Do  
 HO 11: Key Elements of Peaceful Conflict Resolution  
 HO 12: Evaluation Form

## Overheads (OV)

OV 1: How Young Children Think  
 OV 2: Penny Overhead  
 OV 3: Pyramid of Violence  
 OV 4: Entertainment Violence  
 OV 5: If Children Hear about TV-Viewing Graph Violence on the News  
 OV 6: Children & Violence Statistics  
 OV 7: Early positive relationships  
 OV 8: Resilience

**As people are coming in the door, ask each one to fill out a name tag and an index card:**

## Name tag

Ask each participant to write his/her name and the names and ages of their children on the name tag. The presenter should fill out a nametag with this information too. This will give everyone a good overview of the ages of children of the parents represented in the audience.

## Index Card

Ask each participant to write down one issue or question that s/he would like to explore in today's session. If participants don't have one issue/question, then they can write why they wanted to come to this session.

## Participant Introductions

Introduce yourself and tell something about your background. Ask each participant to introduce her/himself and name one issue or question that s/he would like to explore in today's discussion OR tell the reason why s/he wanted to come to this session. Collect the index cards & look them over while participants are in their pair activity so that you can address as many of these issues as possible during your talk.

## Speaker Notes

In our society, children are exposed to violence in many different ways. Violence certainly gets a lot of coverage in the news media. Children can get the mistaken impression that violence is a part of normal, everyday life and thus it is an acceptable behavior. Parents are rightfully concerned about their children's exposure to our society's violence. The good news is that there is much that parents can do to reduce their children's exposure to violence.

We'll start off by doing an activity in pairs that will help us to remember what helped us to feel safe when we were frightened as children. We'll talk about how young children think, then we'll take a 10 minute break. After the break, we'll consider the different ways that children are exposed to violence; we'll talk about resilience; we'll learn about the signs of trauma so that we can know when to seek professional help for the child.

Then we'll do an activity where we brainstorm different ways that parents can

- protect their children from violence
- talk with children about violence.

## Activity

Distribute **Handout 1** *Childhood Memory of a Frightening Time*

Ask parents to divide into pairs, preferably joining with someone that they don't already know.

Please think about these questions for a few minutes, then describe to your partner your earliest memory of a frightening time from your childhood by answering all of these questions. At the end of our 15 minutes, I'll ask for volunteers who are willing to share their stories with the group. You may tell the story yourself, or you can ask your partner to tell the story to the group. Please focus on what helped you to feel safe.

Write on the easel or blackboard: Your earliest memory of a frightening time

Then discuss

- How old were you?
- Where were you and what happened?
- How did you feel, or what did you think about the experience at the time?
- What helped you to feel safe?

Ask for volunteers to share their FRIGHTENING memories:

Start with birth to 2-year-old memories first.

If there are no memories under age 2, why might this be?

(Lack of language. Brain not fully developed.)

Then discuss memories from ages 3-5.

Then discuss memories from older ages.

Speaker can summarize their comments by **writing three column headings on easel papers posted in front.**

FEELINGS

How did the children in these situations feel?

THOUGHTS

What did the youngest children think about the experience at the time?

MADE ME FEEL SAFE:

What helped you to feel safe? What did the older children think about it?

## Speaker Notes

We have been thinking about our own frightening memories from childhood, so that we can remember how we thought as young children. As children grow, they are more able to understand the more mature ideas that are listed on the right side of this overhead. Young children from ages two to six tend to think in the ways listed on the left side: Change in their thinking occurs as children have many chances to try out their ideas, see how they work, and then change their ideas based on what happened. As we look at these lists, I'm going to give you some examples to illustrate the ideas on the left, **but if you would like to share examples, please do so.**

Speaker notes for Overhead 1 & Handout 2 - *How Young Children Think*

Younger -->

Older

(means children in the 2-6 year range) (means children older than six)

- focus on one thing at a time.
- focus on two or more ideas at the same time.

## Speaker Examples:

A young child can only think about one feature of the ball at a time (big or little), s/he cannot think about two or more features of the ball at the same time until she gets older; then she can ALSO consider its color, it's roundness, whether it's soft or hard, etc.

## Penny Overhead (Overhead 2)

If you show a 4 or 5-year-old child two rows of pennies and each row has the SAME number in it, but one row LOOKS longer than the other, what do you think s/he will say when you ask: "Which row has more pennies?" She'll probably say the longer row has more, because she can only focus on the length of the row, not yet on its length and number.

## How Young Children Think (Overhead 1)

### Younger -->

- consider things mainly from their own point of view.

### Older

- can consider things from another person's viewpoint.

### Speaker Example:

You are at home with a family that has two boys, ages one and three, and you ask the 3-year-old:

"Do you have a brother?" He'll say, "Yes."

But, if you point to the baby, and ask the three-year-old:

"Does he have a brother?" The older child will probably say, "No."

because he can't see things from his baby brother's point of view yet.

- often think in rigid, either/or categories.  
A person is either all good, or all bad.
- can begin to consider shades of grey;  
a person can have good & bad points.

**Speaker:** This is why super-heroes are so popular with young children.

- usually focus on what stands out, on what they can easily see. Seeing is believing.
- able to imagine what cannot be seen, they begin to think of meaning or why something might be so.

**Speaker:** Just like our Penny Overhead showed us, the child would focus on what stood out, that is, she'd notice the length of the row rather than the number.

- do not understand cause and effect.
- begin to understand cause and effect.

### **Speaker Example:**

Ask a young child:

He'll answer something like:

"Why does it get dark at night?"

"So I can go to bed."

"Why are the clouds in the sky?"

"So they can follow me."

"Where does the wind come from?" "The trees."

This is why it is hard for young children to think about how their actions might affect another person.

### **Younger --> Older**

**Younger -->**

**Older**

- tend to see things one moment at a time -- in the present.
- begin to see things as part of a past-present-future continuum.

### **Speaker Example:**

If I'm 3, and my best friend hurts my feelings today, then she is not my best friend.

The child thinks only in the present rather than thinking of the past when they have enjoyed each other's company or thinking of the future when they might make up and be friends again.

### **Younger children**

- have a hard time figuring out what is real and what is pretend (especially on television).

### **Speaker Examples:**

A four-year-old hears about a war on the news. He tells his parents that his favorite superheroes can go finish the war. No matter how many times his parents tell him that the Superheroes are pretend, he doesn't seem to understand.

A five-year-old wakes her mother up in the middle of the night. The neighborhood kids have told her that the old woman next door is a witch. The child can't sleep because she's afraid of the witch.

### **Younger children**

- when they hear about violence on the news, they are afraid that it will happen to them.

**Speaker Example:** Refer to current media events for examples.

**Speaker:** Let's take another look at some of our own frightening memories in order to consider how young children think.

## Activity

Go back into pairs to discuss. Ask pairs to share their thoughts with the group pertaining to these questions:

- Do any of the young child examples that we summarized before show how a young child's thinking might fit into this framework?
- Think about your own case, or these examples, and tell me if the way that the child was thinking would fit into any of these ideas.

## Let's Take a 10-minute Break

### Speaker Notes:

Let's take a ten minute break and start back promptly at (name the time). We have done our memory activity and talked about how young children think, after the break, we'll consider the different ways that children are exposed to violence; we'll talk about resilience; we'll learn about the signs of trauma, and we'll do a small-group activity where we brainstorm different ways that parents can

- protect their children from violence
  - talk with children about violence.
- See you at (name the time).

## Four Ways That Children Are Exposed to Violence

**Write these questions on three separate easel papers.**

Brainstorm as a group or by having them walk around the room to write on each easel during break.

-How are young children exposed to violence?

-How can we reduce their exposure to violence?

-How can we help them to heal from this exposure?

**Speaker Notes**

**Pyramid of the Continuum of Violence in Children's Lives** (Overhead 3)

Refer to Overhead, Talk about the 4 levels of violence exposure and ask for discussion:

**Level 1: Media Exposure** (Most children affected by this)

Parents can do the most at the lowest two levels. **At this level, children are exposed to entertainment violence and violent toys in the popular culture.** In 1984, the Federal Communications Commission deregulated the television industry. This led to a dramatic increase in the amount of violence on TV. It also led to program-length commercials for violent toys like the Power Rangers, and others. "Air time for war cartoons jumped from 1 ½ hours per week in 1982, to 43 hours per week in 1986." So TV has changed a lot since we were children. (Carlsson-Page, & Levin, 1987; Tuscherer, 1988). (NAEYC Position Statement 1990)

Between the ages 3 and 6 children watch an average of four hours of TV per weekday; and on weekends, they watch for longer hours. (Groves, 1997)

(Ask) What hours do you think are the most violent hours on television?

According to a 1991 study, the most violent hours are from 6:00 am - 9:00 am and from 2:00 - 5:00 pm, the hours that most young children are watching. Cable TV has the most violence. Public TV has the least. (Groves, 1997)

**Media violence harms children** (Overhead 4)

More than 3,000 research studies have proven that media violence affects children in harmful ways. (Groves, 1997) Research identifies three main problems:

1. "Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others;
2. they may become more fearful of the world around them;

3. and they may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others.

(NAEYC Position Statement, 1990)

Teachers have expressed concerns about children watching too much television because

--they see increased interaction problems at school when children imitate what they have seen Super-heroes or others do on TV, and then classmates get hurt.

--watching many hours of television is not good for a child's development. Just like adults, children learn best by doing. Many hours of watching TV denies children many chances to learn.

--young children often have trouble figuring out the difference between what is pretend and what is real, so teachers are also concerned because media violence teaches children that violence:

- is a good way to solve problems.
- happens often; it is a common, normal part of everyday life.
- is fun and exciting.
- makes the world a dangerous place, and so you must fight to protect yourself.

Five different professional organizations have adopted written position statements against media violence because they feel that it is harmful to children. These are: The American Pediatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the Association for Childhood Education International, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the Parent-Teacher Association of America (PTA).

Most teachers and others feel that one hour per day of TV at most is best, with 2 hours at most on the weekends. Children should be watching quality children's shows, not adult shows. (According to one study, children spent about 10% of their time watching children's shows, and the remaining 90% watching programs designed for adults. NAEYC Position Statement, 1990)

### **Level 2: Exposure to real-world violence through the news media**

The news presents real violence. We adults know that the news focuses much more on the bad things that happen in the world, than on the many good things that happen. But young children don't know this, so by watching the news, children can become fearful that such awful things are likely to happen to them or their loved ones.

### **Level 3: Isolated, traumatic, direct exposure to violence in home and/or community**

**Level 4: Chronic exposure to violence in home and/or community (fewest children are affected at this level)**

"According to testimony before the 1993 Joint Senate-House Hearing on Keeping Every Child Safe: Curbing the Epidemic of Violence, the United States is the most violent nation on earth. It leads the world in assaults and rapes, as well as murders, with at least three killings every hour. That is equal to more than 25,000 murders a year, or half the number of US deaths in the whole Vietnam War.

The figures on children and violence are especially appalling.

- An estimated 100,000 children carry guns to school every day.
- One child is murdered every three hours.
- A child growing up in urban Chicago is fifteen times more likely
- to be murdered than a child in Northern Ireland.
- In 1991, 2.7 million children were reported to child protection agencies as victims of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional maltreatment; nationwide the number of children reported abused or neglected has tripled since 1980.
- And this year over 3 million children will experience or witness parental abuse -- ranging from hitting, punching, or slapping to attacks with guns and knives.
- All too often this violence enters the lives of very young children.
- Research at Boston City Hospital found that one in ten children who attended the hospital's pediatric primary care clinic had witnessed a shooting or stabbing before the age of six -- half in the home, half on the streets.
- Another recent study found that all of the children in a Chicago public housing project had witnessed a shooting by age five." (Levin, 1994, pp. 11-12)

**Distribute HANDOUTS 3, 4, and 5**

A Letter to Parents About Media Violence and Children

Fact Sheet on Entertainment Media and Violence

Family Homework Activity: TV-Viewing Graph

**If children hear about violence in the news (Overhead 5 and Handout 6)**

**FOLLOW THE CHILD'S LEAD:** Do not try to persuade the child to talk about violence, instead listen carefully when the child brings up the topic on his or her own.

Children need to know that it is OK to talk about violence.

**LISTEN CLOSELY** to what the child says so that you can understand what she knows and what she is worried about. Begin with the child's concerns.

- Be an ear to listen.
- If needed, clarify any important information that s/he may have gotten wrong.

- Don't tell him or her more than she wants to know.
- Help children to talk about their fears.
- Comfort the child.
- Reassure the child that you as a parent or teacher will do everything you can to protect him/her.
- Listen to hear if s/he is comparing the news experience to his or her own experience.
- Allow children to stay close to you after frightening events.
- Provide as much of a regular routine for children as possible; knowing what to expect (order of activities) each day is very reassuring to children.
- Tell children that the news reports bad things more often than good things, and that there are many good things that happen in the world every day that go unreported.
- Allow children to work through their ideas about what happened through their play:
- Children may act out a situation that they have heard about in the news. Let them pretend to act out the situation as long as no one actually gets hurt. This is a healthy way for children to gain some control and understanding of the situation.

*Example:* Preschoolers pretending to experience the Oklahoma City bombing at school (from Levin, 1998, p. 103). (Levin, 1994, 1998; Groves, 1997)

### **How do young children feel when they witness violence in person?**

- 1) Forced to learn about loss, death, and body injury before they are able to understand.
- 2) Unsafe to explore, so that their natural curiosity & desire to learn is thwarted.
- 3) Very anxious, because they realize that adults cannot protect them.
- 4) Overwhelming helplessness; incompetent and worthless.
- 5) Sometimes children turn to aggression and hostility as a means of coping with their own vulnerability.

*Children remember every detail, as if they had taken a photo of the event. (Groves, 1997)*

## Trauma

Children can be traumatized or deeply hurt by frightening life experiences: by being in a car accident, or by being in a natural disaster like a tornado or hurricane. Children (and adults) who witness violence can be traumatized. They may even show signs of a psychological disorder that used to be known as "shell shock" but that is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Young children can be harmed by witnessing any type of violence, but it is repeated episodes of violence within their own home or community that hurts children the most.

There are many myths surrounding children's exposure to family or community violence:

- Many adults think that infants & toddlers are too young to notice violence, and so they will not be harmed by it. This is wrong. Young children who see violence ARE affected by it. The impact generally shows up later in their behavior. (Groves, 1997)
- Adults may think that the best way to handle a violent situation is to forget about it: "If we don't talk about it, then we can pretend that it didn't happen, and children will forget about it." This is also wrong. Children need the chance to talk about the incident, work through it through re-enactment play, and make sense of what happened. (Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1996; Groves, 1997)
- Adults may think that the children won't hear or know about family violence because it happens after children are in bed. This is wrong. One study at Boston City Hospital found that most children knew about their family violence, even though their parents thought that their children did not know about it. (Groves, 1997)

Parents need to know that:

- [Even] "Babies and toddlers who witness or experience domestic or community violence may suffer severe, lasting psychological harm.
- Prompt evaluation, counseling for families, and treatment of traumatized children can substantially reduce damage to the child's ongoing development." (Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1996)

### **How to know if your child needs professional help to overcome trauma?**

Children under the age of 11 who experience traumatic events are three times as likely as older children to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If your child has been exposed to a traumatic event, it is always a good idea to seek professional help.

### **Handout 7: The 5 Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in children:**

#### **Speaker Notes:**

#### **1) Re-experiencing the Trauma in Various Ways**

- Post-traumatic Play (Seen in children as young as 22 months)
  - repetitive, monotonous play
  - child seems dazed or trance-like
  - blunted emotions -- shows few feelings
  - child seems "stuck" -- repeats the same play sequence many times
- Re-enactment Play (More commonly seen with trauma in young children)
  - an adaptive sign that the child is actively working on trying to understand the traumatic experience
  - child plays out some aspect of the experience, but the play changes over time

Example: 29 month old child who saw his father shoot himself in the head:  
At 40 months, child pretends to shoot people and dolls in the head.

- Nightmares that began after the traumatic event.
- Dissociative reactions

Mild: dazed expressions, repetitive motions/behaviors

Intermediate: episodes of extreme withdrawal when the trauma topic comes up, episodes of unresponsiveness

Severe: episodes when the child withdraws completely:

child stares blankly, fails to make eye contact, and will not respond to voice and touch

## **2) Numbing of Responsiveness and Avoidance of Reminders of the Trauma**

emotionally subdued

socially withdrawn

constricted in their play

regression in talking

loses recently gained skills (such as toileting skills)

either child is generally subdued, or child has episodes of withdrawal

(may be as long as 10-30 minutes) when reminded of trauma

avoidance (For instance, avoiding a place if a frightening thing happened there.)

## **3) Hyper-arousal**

increased irritability

dramatic mood changes

temper tantrums that were not present before the trauma

more night waking

less able to concentrate

very easily startled

## **4) Development of New Fears That Weren't Present Before the Trauma**

new fears of  
the dark  
toileting alone  
separation from primary care-givers; clinging behavior  
strangers  
trying activities that they had mastered before the trauma

### **5) Development of Aggressive Behavior That Wasn't Present Before the Trauma**

child hurts her/himself  
head-banging  
scratching the face  
child attacks others  
other children  
brothers and sisters  
care-giving adults

### **Resilience**

Write this on the board: What can I do now?

Discuss what can be done to protect children from exposure to violence and help children to be *resilient* if s/he ever witnesses violence or another traumatic event?

### **Speaker Notes**

Soon we'll do an exercise in small groups where we brainstorm about what parents can do to protect their children from exposure to violence. But right now, I want to reassure you that you are probably already providing the single strongest protective factor that will help your child to be resilient when faced with potent stress -- that being, a stable relationship with at least one caring adult, preferably a parent.

Resiliency is a person's ability to bounce back after a stressful time. Because parents/guardians are the most important emotional protectors for their children, you can help your child to be more resilient. There are protective factors, or things that will help protect a child from the bad effects of stress. And there are risk factors, or things that

increase a child's vulnerability to stress. A child's healthy development is likely to be negatively impacted when s/he has **three or more** risk factors present in her life. However, not all children are equally affected by multiple risk factors. Some children are resilient in the face of adversity.

### **HANDOUT 8** *Resilience*

### **HANDOUT 9** *Helping Children Cope with Stress*, DeBord

Resilience (Overhead 8)

## **RESILIENCE**

Risk Factors Include:

Parental depression or other mental illness	Poverty
Lack of social support	Large family size
Rigid and punitive child-rearing styles	High parent anxiety
A child's early negative interactions with parents	Low parent education
Single parenthood	Substance abuse
Community violence	Family violence

A child's healthy development is likely to be negatively impacted when s/he has **three or more** risk factors present in her life. However, not all children are equally affected by multiple risk factors. Some children are resilient or bounce back in the face of adversity. (Garbarino et al., 1992) The following protective factors contribute to a child's resilience:

### **Protective Factors:**

#### **1) Stable relationship with at least one caring adult, preferably a parent.**

Early positive relationships teach you to trust and respond and feel and pay attention."(Garbarino, 1995)

Parents are very important people. Their relationship with their newborn from the very beginning colors the child's view of the world. When parents are responsive to the needs of their infants, this teaches children that adults can be trusted or depended upon to meet their needs. This is the basis for the idea of attachment or bonding. Children who are secure in their attachment to parents are confident. They've learned that their parents are a secure base, so that as children grow older, they can go off exploring within the safe confines of limits that you have provided, and then come back to you as their secure base when support is needed. Secure attachment is important for children to be able to meet challenges and master them. Spoiling is not really possible before 6 months old, because the child does not understand cause and effect or have the capacity to think ahead. As children grow older, their area of exploration will expand, but they will always need to know that you're there to support them if they need you. "A child who feels 'connected' to his or her parents, feels loved and cared for, is less likely to experience emotional stress. One way to build that all-



Finally, resilient children have the capacity to make sense of the stressful and traumatic events confronting them....This...ability to understand clearly what is occurring in their environment, helps children to master the stress." (Garbarino, 1992, pp. 102-103)

## Small Group Activity

### HANDOUT 10:

#### Worksheets on How Children Are Affected

#### What Parents Can Do

Break up into groups of three for 20 minutes to look over this list of how children are affected by exposure to violence, and then we'll brainstorm about what parents can do to protect their children from violence. Each group should choose a recorder and a reporter. Please post your notes, and then I'll ask each reporter to share your ideas with the large group.

#### Discussion

Ask groups to report their ideas about what parents can do. Listen to their ideas, then tell them any of the ideas listed below that have been left out. Write these ideas "left-out" ideas up on the board under each of the four areas.

#### How children are affected by What parents can do violence

*Provide an environment that feels safe:*

*Sense of trust and safety are undermined:*

- I am not safe.
- The world is a dangerous and a scary place.
- I have to fight and be strong to keep myself safe.
- I am safe here.
- Adults will keep me safe here. I can learn how to keep myself safe.
- I must not do things to make others feel unsafe, and others must not do things to make me feel unsafe either.

#### What parents can do:

-Provide an environment that feels safe.

-Provide a stable relationship with at least one caring adult (preferably a parent) who is responsive to the child's needs from infancy onwards.

- Childproof your home.
- Encourage close bonds with healthy family members, friends, teachers, and other social supports.
- Encourage children to seek help from adults when they need it.
- Choose quality child care programs that have low staff turnover rates.
- Model resilient behavior.
- Limit children's TV viewing; have family rules about the TV.
- Do not allow children to watch the evening news until they are older.
- Work with neighbors and others to provide a safe neighborhood.

**The child's independence and confidence are undermined**                      **Positive ways to be independent and confident**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I must be strong and powerful to be independent.</li> <li>• I must fight to make others do what I want them to do.</li> <li>• If I'm not strong, then I am helpless, and I hope that I'll be rescued.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are many ways that I can be independent.</li> <li>• There are many ways to convince others to try my ideas.</li> <li>• There are many ways that I can make choices in my life.</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

**What parents can do:**

- Provide positive ways to be independent and confident.
- Listen to and talk with children.
- Help children learn the words to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Give children chances to make decisions on a limited basis:
  - Do you want to wear white socks or blue socks today?
- Adults can choose several quality shows that they are willing to allow children to watch, then let the children choose which one(s) to watch from your list.
- Teach children age appropriate self-help skills so that they can feel successful and independent. (Helping sort laundry, learning to pour their own juice from a pitcher, etc.)

-Give children many chances to feel successful by doing.

-Teach children the steps in how to solve a problem through win-win conflict resolution.

## Key Elements of Peaceful Conflict Resolution

### Handout 13

#### **Respect and ability to rely on others are undermined    How to respect and rely on others**

- Everyone fights to get their own way.  
That's the way the world works.
- To need help, or to help others, is to be weak and vulnerable.
- We should each **ONLY** take care of ourselves; forget about the other guys.
- It is possible to be heard & respected by others, and to hear & respect them.
- There are many ways that people can work together and help one another. Helping is a sign of strength & caring.
- I belong to a community where people care about one another and help one another.

#### **What parents can do:**

-Teach respect and that it is good to ask for help when you need it.

-Listen to and talk with children.

-Help children learn the words to express their thoughts and feelings.

-Give children chances to make decisions on a limited basis:

-Do you want to wear white socks or blue socks today?

-Adults can choose several quality shows that they are willing to allow children to watch, then let the children choose which one(s) to watch from your list.

-Teach children to solve problems through win-win conflict resolution.

-Encourage close bonds with healthy family members, friends, teachers, and other social supports.

-Encourage children to seek help from adults when they need it.

-Model seeking help when you need it, and caring for others.

-Work with neighbors and others to provide a safe neighborhood.

-When children are in middle school, encourage them to secretly tell a guidance counselor or a teacher when they hear of a peer who is carrying a weapon or talking about committing suicide or other violence.

### **Ability to learn through meaningful play is undermined**

- I spend my play time imitating what I have seen on TV, and my toys will help me do it.
- Whenever I have free time, I choose to watch TV or videos or play Nintendo.
- There's no way that I can figure out the violence that I have seen; it just happens.

### **Learning through meaningful play**

- I play by using my own imagination, so I learn about the power that I have to create new ideas, to master challenges, and to understand the ideas of others.
- There are many wonderful things that I can do with my free time. (Playing with friends, reading books, dancing, drawing, helping my parents, etc.)
- There are ways that I can work through the violence that I have seen so that I feel safe and in control.

(Paraphrased from Levin, 1994)

### **What parents can do:**

- Foster creative play by buying toys that can be used in many ways. For example: blocks, modeling clay and playdough, duplos or legos or other construction sets, dolls, trucks and trains, balls, puzzles, etc.

-Limit TV watching to quality shows.

- Watch TV with your children, and talk about what you have seen.
- Help children look at what in the media is pretend and what is real:
- If a real person tried to jump from the top of that roof, they would be badly hurt.
- Help children understand that TV is trying to sell things.
- Help children learn about how TV programs are made.

- Offer alternative activities:

- Reading books, dancing, drawing, helping parents, etc.
- Shoe Box Kit Ideas & TUNE-OUT WEEK ideas that parents did with kids

- Limit super-hero play:

When they play super-heroes, **ask children for ideas** about nonviolent ways that they can interact with the bad guys (One idea: Make a jail, rather than kill them?) Or limit their super-hero play to a certain place (outside?) or time. Talk about what a real hero is like.

- If children see the TV news and act out a violent situation (like the Oklahoma City bombing), let them continue their play as long as no one is hurt. Listen to them and help them work through their thoughts about the situation.

-If children are exposed to real-life violence, get them professional help to help them recover from the trauma.

## Closing

We adults need to protect the children in our lives. There is much that we can do to speak up on their behalf. If you would like information about how to contact TV networks, toy manufacturers, or groups who are working to reduce violence, please come up to me afterwards and I'll share some addresses with you. I also have copies of the NAEYC Position Statement on Media Violence for those who are interested.

## Evaluation

I have an evaluation sheet that I'm hoping you'll fill out. I'd like to know what you thought about this workshop. Please take the time to tell me your thoughts. I would also like to know if you want follow-up workshops. Thank you!

## Resources to Share

Address lists (Levin, 1998)

Toy Selection Guide (Levin, 1998, p. 83)

Effects of media violence on children, Ibid, p. 14

Key elements of peaceful conflict resolution, Ibid, p. 54

Helping Children Cope with Stress, DeBord

NAEYC Position Statement on Media Violence in Children's Lives

Shoe Box Kit Ideas (p. 85)

TUNE-OUT WEEK ideas that parents did with kids (p.181)

(from Levin, 1998, Remote Control Childhood)

### Books for children

Mouse TV by Matt Novak

Arthur's TV Trouble by

### Videotape

*Violence & Young Children: Reducing the Risks.* Includes Discussion Guide and "Successful Strategies: Addressing Violence and Young Children." from Children's Advocate (news magazine). Produced by Action Alliance for Children, Oakland, CA. Available from Child Development Media, Inc. 5632 Van Nuys Blvd., Suite 286, Van Nuys, CA 91401. Tel. 800-405-8942. 18 min. \$40.

This tape presents the major concepts addressed at the conference "Violence and Young Children: Reducing the Risks." The tape provides an overview of issues relating to the impact of violence on children and was developed to stimulate questions and problem solving among viewers. Issues explored include: 1) root causes of and risk factors for violence; 2) developmental effects on children and opportunities for intervention; and 3) the role of policy in reducing violence. This program is designed for parents, daycare providers, health and social service workers, teachers, administrators, therapists, community advocates and policymakers.

(The complete description above was taken from: Evaluation of Posttraumatic Symptomatology in Infants and Young Children Exposed to Violence, in Bulletin of Zero to Three, April/May, 1996, Vol. 16, No. 5 --Islands of Safety: Assessing and Treating Young Victims of Violence. Zero to Three, Washington, DC.)

## References

Trainers are especially encouraged to read the asterisked (\*) titles. The Levin books & the Zeanah article provide many examples that may be helpful during your presentation.

Anselmo, S. & Franz, W. (1995) *Early Childhood Development: Prenatal through Age Eight*. 2nd edition. Merrill, an imprint of Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

\* Garbarino, J., Dubrow, N., Kostelny, K., and Pardo, C. (1992) *Children in Danger: Coping with the Consequences of Community Violence*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA.

Garbarino, J. (1995) *Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment*. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, CA.

Groves, B.M. (1997) *Growing Up in a Violent World: The Impact of Family and Community Violence on Young Children and Their Families*. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 17 (1), 74-102.

Jarvis-Samuels, Dr. Valerie. *Class on Early Childhood Development*, Fall 1995.

\* Levin, D.E. (1994) *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times: Building a Peaceable Classroom. Educators for Social Responsibility*, Cambridge, MA.

\* Levin, D.E. (1998) *Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture*. NAEYC, Washington, D.C.

*NAEYC Position Statement on Media Violence in Children's Lives* in Levin, D.E. (1998) *Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture*. NAEYC, Washington, D.C.

Simeonsson, Dr. Rune. *Class on Exceptional Child Development*, Spring 1997.

Smith, Sheperd (President of Institute for Youth Development) (1998) "*Media Need to Show Restraint in Covering Schoolyard Violence.*" Herald-Sun Newspaper, Durham, NC: July 27, 1998, p. A9.

\* Zeanah, C.H. and Scheeringa, M. (1996) *Evaluation of Posttraumatic Symptomatology in Infants and Young Children Exposed to Violence*, in *Bulletin of Zero to Three*, April/May, 1996, Vol. 16, No. 5 --*Islands of Safety: Assessing and Treating Young Victims of Violence*. Zero to Three, Washington, DC.

Describe your earliest memory of **A Frightening Time**



- 1) How old were you?
- 2) Where were you and what happened?
- 3) How did you feel, OR what did you think about the experience at the time?
- 4) What helped you to feel safe?



## How Young Children Think (Ages 2 to 6)

### Younger -->

(means children in the 2-6 year range)

- about one thing at a time.
- mainly from their own point of view.
- often think in rigid, either/or categories. A person is either all good, or all bad.
- usually focus on what stands out, on what they can easily see. Seeing is believing.
- do not understand cause and effect.
- tend to see things one moment at a time -- in the present.
- have a hard time figuring out what is real and what is pretend (especially on television).
- when they hear about violence on the news, they are afraid that it will happen to them.

### Older

(means children older than age six)

- about two or more ideas at the same time.
- can consider things from another person's viewpoint.
- can begin to consider shades of grey; a person can have good & bad points.
- begin to think imaginatively, wondering what something might mean, or why it might be so.
- begin to understand cause and effect.
- begin to see things as part of a past-present-future continuum.

(Adapted from Levin, 1994)

## **A Letter to Parents about Media Violence and Children**

Dear Parents:

[I am/We are] concerned about how media violence and toys marketed with violent TV shows are teaching violence to children. [I/We] hope you will read this letter to learn more about why [I'm/we're] concerned and how we can begin to work together on this vital issue.

### **Facts about Media Violence in Children's Lives**

- By the end of elementary school, the average child will have seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 other violent acts in the media.
- Children's cartoons and action programs average more than 20 acts of violence per hour, compared with 5 acts per hour during prime-time hours.
- The sale of *Mighty Morphin Power Ranger* products (based on the extremely violent children's TV show) surpassed \$1 billion in 1994.
- More than \$3 billion of products related to the *Star Wars* movie have been sold worldwide.
- In one survey, more than 90% of teachers thought the *Power Rangers* led to increased violence among the children they taught.

### **Media Violence Teaches Children That**

- Fighting is the acceptable way to solve conflicts
- Violence is a common, normal part of everyday life
- Violence is fun and exciting-, and the world is a dangerous place, so fighting is necessary

### **Let's work together to reduce the harm media violence is doing to our children.**

For too long, parents have been told it's their job alone to deal with the problems created for their children by media violence. [I/We] think this places an unfair burden on parents. Media violence is creating problems too serious and complex in homes, schools, and the wider society for any one group to be able to solve on its own.

Many groups, including coalitions of physicians, educators, and parents, have begun to work together to create a community-wide effort to deal with this serious public health issue. As part of that effort, [I/we] will be working with the children in [my classroom/our school].

[I/We] will keep you posted about what we do and how you can help. [I/ We] welcome your ideas and input. The more closely we can work together, the more we will be able to help your child resist the problems created by violence in the media. In the meantime, here are a few ideas to help you begin to think about what you can do.

### **How Families Can Work on Media Violence Issues**

- Keep TV sets out of children's bedrooms and in a more public place.
- Work out limits on the amount of TV viewing.
- Try to plan in advance what programs will be watched.
- Try to select programs designed to promote children's positive development and learning (for instance, those on public television).
- Limit viewing of violent (and other non-educational) programming as much as possible.
- Watch TV together as a family when you can.
- Talk about what your child sees on TV-including such topics as what is real and what is not, distinguishing between ads and shows, solving conflicts without using violence, what you and your child liked and did not like about a show.
- Try not to buy products directly linked to violent TV shows or that are advertised heavily during violent programs.
- Choose toys that promote creativity, can be played with in many ways, and will stay interesting over a period of time.
- Work outside the home to reduce the levels of violence in children's media. Involve others too, including your children, other family members, and other parents.
- Call local TV stations to express your opinions. Make a list of phone numbers to keep by the phone.
- Ask us, your child's teachers and school, for help and support.

Thank you for working with [me/us].

[Your name and/or your school's name]

## Fact Sheet on Media Entertainment & Violence



Between the ages 3 and 6 children watch an average of four hours of TV per weekday; and on weekends, they watch for longer hours. (Groves, 1997)

According to a 1991 study, the most violent hours are from 6:00 am - 9:00 am and from 2:00 - 5:00 p.m., the hours that most young children are watching. Cable TV has the most violence. Public TV has the least. (Groves, 1997)

By the time children enter kindergarten, they will have seen 4,000 hours of TV.

[Older] children average 35 hours per week of screen time, which includes TV, movies, video and computer games, and videotapes.

The average child sees 20,000 advertisements a year.

By the end of elementary school, children will have witnessed an average of 8,000 murders and 100,000 other violent acts.

Children's cartoon/action programs average more than 20 acts of violence per hour, compared with 5 acts of violence per hour during prime-time television.

Half of US households with children aged 6-14 years have video-game systems --and a majority of video games contain violent images.

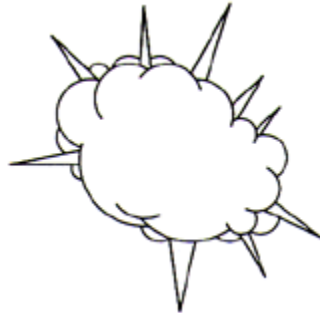
Half of the toys sold in 1994 were linked to movies or TV programs (up from 10% in 1984).

(From Groves, 1997 and Levin, 1998)



<b>1/2 hour</b>							
<b>1/2 hour</b>							
	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

## If Children Hear about Violence in the News



### **FOLLOW THE CHILD'S LEAD.**

### **LISTEN CLOSELY**

- Be an ear to listen.
- If needed, clarify any important information that s/he may have gotten wrong. Don't tell him or her more than she wants to know.
- Help children to talk about their fears.
- Comfort the child.
- Reassure the child that you as a parent or teacher will do everything you can to protect him/her.
- Listen to hear if s/he is comparing the news experience to his or her own experience.
- Allow children to stay close to you after frightening events.
- Provide as much of a regular routine for children as possible; knowing what to expect (order of activities) each day is very reassuring to children.
- Tell children that the news reports bad things more often than good things, and that there are many good things that happen in the world every day that go unreported.
- Allow children to work through their ideas about what happened through their play: Children may act out a situation that they have heard about in the news. Let them pretend to act out the situation as long as no one actually gets hurt. This is a healthy way for children to gain some control and understanding of the situation.

# Trauma Symptoms

The 5 Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in children:

**1) Re-experiencing the trauma in various ways**

- Post-traumatic Play (Seen in children as young as 22 months)
- Re-enactment Play (More commonly seen with trauma in young children)
- Nightmares that began after the traumatic event.
- Dissociative reactions

**2) Numbing of responsiveness and avoidance of reminders of the trauma**

**3) Hyper-arousal**

**4) Development of NEW fears that weren't present before the trauma**

**5) Development of aggressive behavior that wasn't present before the trauma**

**How do young children feel when they witness violence in person? They feel...**

- 1) forced to learn about loss, death, and body injury before they are able to understand.
- 2) unsafe to explore, so that their natural curiosity & desire to learn is thwarted.
- 3) very anxious, because they realize that adults cannot protect them.
- 4) overwhelming helplessness; incompetent and worthless.
- 5) they should turn to aggression and hostility as a means of coping with their own vulnerability.

*Children remember every detail, as if they had taken a photo of the event (Groves, 1997).*

## Resilience

### Risk Factors

Parental depression or other mental illness	Poverty
Lack of social support	Large family size
Rigid and punitive childrearing styles	High parent anxiety
A child's early negative interactions	Low parent education
Single parenthood	Substance abuse
Community violence	Family violence

A child's healthy development is likely to be negatively impacted when s/he has **three or more** risk factors present in her life. However, not all children are equally affected by multiple risk factors. Some children are resilient or bounce back in the face of adversity. The following protective factors help a child to be resilient:

### Protective Factors:

- **stable relationship with at least one caring adult**
- **Parent(s) who model resilient behavior.**
- **Close bonds with another family member.**
- **Support from friends, neighbors, teachers, and from a community that acts to protect its children.**
- **Religious beliefs**

Compared to vulnerable children, [resilient children] are able to

- **tolerate frustration**
- **handle anxiety, and**
- **ask for help when they need it.**

Handout 9

**Use Extension Publication**  
**#FCS-457**  
*Helping Children Cope with Stress*

## Handout #10

### **How Children Are Affected by Violence**

#### **Sense of trust and safety are undermined:**

- I am not safe.
- The world is a dangerous and a scary place.
- I have to fight and be strong

#### **The child's independence and confidence are undermined**

- I must be strong and powerful to be independent.
- I must fight to make others do what I want them to do.
- If I'm not strong, then I am helpless, and I hope that I'll be rescued.

#### **Respect and ability to rely on others are undermined**

- Everyone fights to get their way. That's the way the world works.
- To need help, or to help others, is to be weak and vulnerable.
- We should each **ONLY** take care of ourselves; forget about the other guys.

#### **Ability to learn through meaningful play is undermined**

- I spend my play time imitating what I have seen on TV, and my toys will help me do it.
- Whenever I have free time, I choose to watch TV or videos or play Nintendo.
- There's no way that I can figure out the violence that I have seen; it just happens.

### **What Parents Can do**

#### **Provide an environment that feels safe**

#### **Positive ways to be independent and confident**

#### **How to respect and rely on others**

#### **Learning through meaningful play**

(Paraphrased from Levin, 1994)

Handout #11

## Key Elements of Peaceful Conflict Resolution

### Teaching Respect

#### Parents can:

- Teach that it is good to ask for help when you need it.
- Listen to and talk with children.
- Help children learn the words to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Give children chances to make decisions on a limited basis:
  - Do you want to wear white socks or blue socks today?
- Adults can choose several quality shows that they are willing to allow children to watch, then let the children choose which one(s) to watch from your list.
- Teach children to solve problems through win-win conflict resolution.
- Encourage close bonds with healthy family members, friends, teachers, and other social supports.
- Encourage children to seek help from adults when they need it.
- Model seeking help when you need it, and caring for others.
- Work with neighbors and others to provide a safe neighborhood.
- When children are in middle school, encourage them to secretly tell a guidance counselor or a teacher when they hear of a peer who is carrying a weapon or talking about committing suicide or other violence.

### Learning Through meaningful Play

#### What parents can do:

- Foster creative play by buying toys that can be used in many ways. For example: blocks, modeling clay and playdough, duplos or legos or other construction sets, dolls, trucks and trains, balls, puzzles, etc.
- Limit TV watching to quality shows.
- Watch TV with your children, and talk about what you have seen.

- Help children look at what in the media is pretend and what is real:
- If a real person tried to jump from the top of that roof, they would be badly hurt.
- Help children understand that TV is trying to sell things.
- Help children learn about how TV programs are made.
- Offer alternative activities:
- Limit super-hero play: **ask children for ideas** about nonviolent ways that they can interact with the bad guys or limit their super-hero play to a certain place (outside?) or time.
- Talk about what a real hero is like.
- If children see the TV news and act out a violent situation (like the Oklahoma City bombing), let them continue their play as long as no one is hurt. Listen to them and help them work through their thoughts about the situation.
- If children are exposed to real-life violence, get them professional help to help them recover from the trauma.

## Evaluation Form

Thank-you for your comments and suggestions.

1. What I liked about the session: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Suggestions I would like to offer for improving the session: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. I gained knowledge about... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. My attitudes changed about... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. I think what I will remember the most is... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_







## How Young Children Think (Ages 2 to 6)

### Younger -->

(means children in the 2-6 year range)

- about one thing at a time.
- mainly from their own point of view.
- often think in rigid, either/or categories. A person is either all good, or all bad.
- usually focus on what stands out, on what they can easily see. Seeing is believing.
- do not understand cause and effect.
- tend to see things one moment at a time -- in the present.
- have a hard time figuring out what is real and what is pretend (especially on television).
- when they hear about violence on the news, they are afraid that it will happen to them.

### Older

(means children older than age six)

- about two or more ideas at the same time.
- can consider things from another person's viewpoint.
- can begin to consider shades of grey; a person can have good & bad points.
- begin to think imaginatively, wondering what something might mean, or why it might be so.
- begin to understand cause and effect.
- begin to see things as part of a past-present-future continuum.

(Adapted from Levin, 1994)

What do you think a 4 or 5-year-old child will say if you ask:

Which row has more pennies?



Overhead #2

# Pyramid of Violence

## The Continuum of Violence in Children's Lives

Click here for Overhead # 3, [Pyramid of Violence, The Continuum of Violence in Children's Lives.](#)

Source: Reprinted with permission from D. Levin, Teaching Young Children in Violent Times:

Building a Peaceable Classroom (Cambridge, MA: Educators for Social Responsibility, 1994)

Overhead #3

# Media Violence Harms Children

Three main problems:

- Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.
- Children may become more fearful of the world around them.
- Children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others.

(NAEYC Position Statement, 1990)

Overhead #4

# If Children Hear about Violence in the News

## FOLLOW THE CHILD'S LEAD

### LISTEN CLOSELY

- Be an ear to listen.
- Clarify any important inaccuracies
- Help children to talk about their fears.
- Comfort the child.
- Reassure the child that you will do everything you can to protect him/her.
- Listen to hear if s/he is comparing the news experience to his/her own experience.
- Allow children to stay close to you after frightening events.
- Provide a regular routine.
- Explain to children about the news.
- Allow children to work through their ideas about what happened through their play.
- 



(Levin, 1994, 1998; Groves, 1997)

Overhead #5

## Real-Life Violence Statistics

- An estimated 100,000 children carry guns to school every day.
- One child is murdered every three hours.
- A child growing up in urban Chicago is fifteen times more likely to be murdered than a child in Northern Ireland.
- In 1991, 2.7 million children were reported to child protection agencies as victims of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional maltreatment; nationwide the number of children reported abused or neglected has tripled since 1980.
- Over 3 million children will experience or witness parental abuse -- ranging from hitting, punching, or slapping to attacks with guns and knives.
- Research at Boston City Hospital found that one in ten children who attended the hospital's pediatric primary care clinic had witnessed a shooting or stabbing before the age of six -- half in the home, half on the streets.
- Another recent study found that all of the children in a Chicago public housing project had witnessed a shooting by age five."

**Early Positive Relationships  
teach you to trust, respond,  
feel, and pay attention.**

Garbarino, 1995

# Resilience

## Risk Factors :

- Parental depression or other mental illness
- Poverty
- Lack of social support
- Large family size
- Rigid and punitive child-rearing styles
- High parent anxiety
- A child's early negative interactions with parents
- Low parent education
- Single parenthood
- Substance abuse
- Community violence
- Family violence

## Protective Factors:

- Stable relationship with at least one caring adult
- Parent(s) who model resilient behavior.
- Close bonds with another family member.
- Traits of the child: Children are more resilient when they
- Age Eleven or older
- Support from friends, neighbors, teachers, and from a community that acts to protect its children.
- Religious beliefs

Overhead #8

## Selected Children's Books with Annotations

[resources page 167](#)

[resources page 168](#)

[resources page 169](#)

[resources page 170](#)

[resources page 171](#)

[resources page 172](#)

[resources page 173](#)

## Appendix A

NAEYC Position Statement on Media Violence in  
Children's Lives

[page 174](#)

[page 175](#)

[page 176](#)

[page 177](#)

[Toy Selection Guide](#)

[Shoe Box Kit Ideas](#)

What Did You Do During the Tune Out?, [Families Share Their Successful Ideas.](#)