



Violent video games

If you're a parent, you're most likely worried about just how much time your children spend playing video games – especially if those games involve machetes, guns and a whole lot of blood and guts.

Albeit a fantasy onscreen world, Professor Craig Anderson, an expert on the effects of violent video games, insists that they can indeed cause lasting effects on your child.

Professor Anderson argues that there is scientific evidence that exposure to media violence increases aggression in both the short-term and the long-term and that we need to reduce the exposure of our youth to media violence.

While only occasionally playing a violent video game may not produce long-term harmful consequences, repeated exposure to any form of violent entertainment media is an important risk factor for later aggressiveness. Furthermore, Professor Anderson's most recent studies have discovered that violent video games ultimately prevent us from helping others - violent games and movies appear to desensitise you to pain and suffering of other people.

According to Professor Anderson, violent video games include the following negative ramifications on children:

Increases aggressive behaviour

Short-term damage

- Aggressive thoughts increase – this increases the chance of a mild provocation to be interpreted in a hostile manner.
- An increase in the individual's heart rate, which usually results in dominant behaviour.
- Children will learn new aggressive behaviours by observation. If they see that the aggressive act reaped a reward, or produced a desired result, they will in turn re-enact them almost immediately.

Long-term damage

- Repeated exposure leads to positively attributing attitudes, beliefs and expectations in relation to these aggressive solutions to one's interpersonal problems.
- The development of 'aggressive scripts' – these are ways of thinking about how the social world operates. These scripts influence how somebody interprets events and behavioural decisions. Individuals who are heavy consumers of media violence tend to see the world in a more hostile fashion and tend to respond accordingly.
- People are less able to generate and carry out nonviolent solutions.
- It produces an emotional desensitisation to aggression and violence. Normally, people have a fairly negative

emotional reaction to conflict, aggression and violence, and this can be seen in their physiological reactions to observation of violence (real or fictional, as in entertainment media). Repeated exposure to violence reduces this negative emotional reaction.

→ Practice makes perfect - repetition increases learning, including learning how to aggress.

How to identify a potentially harmful video game

1. Play the game yourself, or have someone else demonstrate it for you.
2. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Does the game involve harming others?
 - Does this happen frequently, more than once or twice in 30 minutes?
 - Is the harm rewarded in any way?
 - Is the harm portrayed as humorous?
 - Are nonviolent solutions absent or less "fun" than the violent ones?
 - Are realistic consequences of violence absent from the game?

If you discover that two or more answers are "yes," then think very carefully about the lessons being taught before allowing your child access to the game.

Tips for worried parents:

1. Be aware - Examine the video game content before allowing your child access. Be sure to consider more than the age-base rating as it does not always accurately reflect the content.
2. Restrict playing time - Remember, repeated exposure is damaging.
3. Don't allow access - Don't buy violent video games in the first place! There are plenty of fun and educational video games that are healthy alternatives.
4. Communicate - Explain to your kids why such games are harmful.
5. A good habit - Always teach non-violent problem solving.

Professor Anderson is set to meet with the Australian Council on Children and the Media about the current push to have an R18+ classification introduced for games in Australia.

The current classification system does not allow video games that would fall into R18+. Games with this type of content are effectively banned, but there is pressure to allow them on our shelves, with many arguing that adults should be allowed the freedom to see, hear and read what they want. The Australian Council on Children and the Media opposes the introduction of R18+ games, firmly believing that it will pose an even bigger challenge for parents' who are attempting to find healthy media experiences.