



Becoming MediaWise

Don't let technology replace the human connection



Ways Video Games Affect Kids

- Cartoonish violence had the same size effect on children that graphic violence had on college students.
- Teens who played violent video games were more hostile, believed violence was common, and were generally more aggressive than those who did not play violent games.
- School-age children who played violent games at the start of the year had more aggressive thoughts and behaviors at the end of the year.

From *Violent Video Games Effects on Children and Youth* by Douglas Gentile, Ph.D.

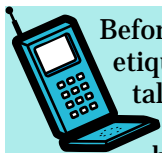
Today something like 200 million people own cell phones in the United States. Almost three-quarters of American households have at least one, and many have three to five. About half of teens aged 13 to 16 have one. It's pretty clear that cell phones aren't going anywhere. So what does that mean for our kids?

Cell phones have never been more popular with school-aged children. Having the coolest phone is a priority for many kids across the country. Parents also appreciate being able to be in touch with and keep track of their kids – it's never been easier to communicate with our kids while on the run.

Despite the benefits, cell phones are now posing new challenges for parents. Some kids run up enormous bills, disturb classes with inopportune calls, and use phones to bully other kids. As more forms of media continue to converge in cell phones, perhaps the greatest challenge will be monitoring and keeping track of our kids' media use. Small, hand-held screens make it harder to "watch what your kids watch." That's why it's important to stay ahead of the trends and talk with your kids about how, when, where (and if) they use their cell phones.

A MediaWise® Parent Guide – Cell Phones and Your Kids (excerpt)

Make sure your kids know not to share their cell phone number online, especially to people they don't know—even if they have been talking with them for awhile in a chat room or Instant Messaging.



Before you give your kids their own cell phone, teach them some basic etiquette. First, make sure they know what's inappropriate, such as talking in a library, elevator, movie theatre, restaurant or other place where they might be disruptive to others. Let them know that it's bad manners to have a phone conversation with a friend while hanging out with someone else. Teach them to turn their ringer to silent or vibrate when in a doctor's office or other quiet place. And the best way to teach your children polite cell phone usage is to follow these guidelines yourself.

www.FamilyFirst.net

Here's a riddle for you: *What fits in your pocket and can wreck your marriage?* Your cell phone! Staying connected 24/7 with cell phones and Blackberries can leave you feeling *disconnected*—not more connected—and unhappy at home and at work. **A two-year study of over 1300 people found that the most frequent users of cell phones and pagers were the most likely to report feeling distracted and tired at home.**

Why? It's rarely good news when the boss calls you at home—or when your kids call you at work. It's typically not just to say "hi." There's usually something wrong—which ratchets up your stress. That can make you snap at your family or check-out emotionally.

Dr. Chesley's advice? **For working parents, establish specific times when you'll check in with your kids, or they'll call you. And don't be afraid to tell work that less-than-urgent matters can wait until you're on the scene.** If work calls at home are a problem, talk to your supervisor or human resources about setting boundaries. Face it, your grandpa—and probably even your father—wasn't bothered at home by the boss. But now that we can stay in touch so easily, we take advantage of it—which can damage our most important relationships. Take great care to keep those you love as your highest priority. **Don't let technology replace the human connection.**

Dr. Noelle Chesley, professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin

Vocabulary Corner



Does all the new technology have you confused? Here's a brief glossary of some

common terms:

MP3 MP3s are essentially compressed music files. You can download MP3 files online using programs like iTunes or Napster and then listen to them on MP3 players, like iPods

Ring tones A ring tone is a customizable sound to indicate incoming calls on cell phones, ranging from a "phone bell" to full-length songs downloaded from the Internet.

Bluetooth® Bluetooth devices allow you to connect and exchange information online via a secure, short-range frequency, enabling you to send emails and interact online within a short range. It also allows calls on a hands-free headset.



Fast Facts About Media Violence

◆ **Media violence can lead to aggressive behavior** in children. Over 1,000 studies confirm this link.

◆ By age 18, the average

American child will have viewed about 200,000 acts of violence on TV alone.

- ◆ The level of violence during Saturday morning cartoons is higher than the level of violence during prime time. There are 3-5 violent acts per hour in prime time, versus 20-25 on Saturday morning.
- ◆ Media violence is especially damaging to young children (under age 8) because they cannot easily tell the difference between real life and fantasy. **Violent images on TV and in movies may seem real to young children, and can traumatize them.**

Media violence affects children by:

- ✓ **Increasing aggressiveness** and anti-social behavior.
- ✓ **Increasing their fear** of becoming victims.
- ✓ **Making them less sensitive** to violence and to victims of violence.
- ✓ **Increasing their appetite for more violence** in entertainment and in real life.
- ✓ Media violence often **fails to show the consequences of violence**. This is especially true of cartoons, toy commercials and music videos. As a result, children learn that there are few (if any) repercussions for committing violent acts.

Parents can reduce the effect of media violence by:

- ◆ **Limiting the amount of television** children watch to no more than 1 to 2 hours a day.
- ◆ **Monitoring programs** children watch and restricting children's viewing of violent programs.
- ◆ **Monitoring music videos and films** children see and the music they listen to, for violent themes.
- ◆ **Teaching children alternatives** to violence.

Parents can foster media literacy skills by:

- ◆ Helping children **distinguish between fantasy and reality**.
- ◆ Teaching children that **real-life violence has consequences**.
- ◆ **Watching television with children and discussing** the violent acts and images that are portrayed. Ask children to think about what would happen in real life if the same type of violent act were committed. Would anyone die or go to jail? Would anyone be sad? Would the violence solve problems or create them?
- ◆ **Asking children how they feel** after watching a violent TV show, movie, or music video.

Sources: "Media Violence," AAP Committee on Communications, in *Pediatrics*, Vol. 95, No. 6, June 1995; "Suggestions for Parents: Children Can Unlearn Violence," in the Center for Media and Values' (now the Center for Media Literacy) *Media and Values*, No. 62, 1993; "Media and Violence: Part One: Making the Connections," from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Make Surfing Safer for Children

The Internet, initially the domain of adults, has rapidly become a place where all ages surf for information and fun. Children increasingly have access through school, the library, and home computers. The world of information is at a child's fingertips for school projects, homework, interests, hobbies, and play. Many children create their own space on the Web with homepages they construct.

The Internet has responded to this with thousands of sites geared to children, from teenagers to the youngest preschooler. Many educational institutions, organizations, and corporations have their own kidpages, or linked kidpages with information geared for parents. Children can experience the world in a whole new dimension with connections to real people. Some sites offer the opportunity to "visit" with children from other countries, exchanging news, ideas, pictures, and writings. Whole classrooms link up with other classrooms around the world.

Because the Internet is unregulated, it's up to parents and caregivers to supervise its use. Four areas deserve attention:

- Children are able to visit webpages with information, pictures or conversation that the parent recognizes to be offensive, racial, violent, or sexual
- In chat rooms children can become the target of unwanted attention from adults, older teens, or other children
- Children are a marketing target, with companies offering prizes, games, etc. in exchange for family information
- Some commercial sites offer what seems to be educational information or entertainment but are actually advertisers



What Can a Parent Do?

- ✓ Use Internet blocking or filtering software or programs
- ✓ Talk to your child about Internet safety
- ✓ Establish family rules about Internet use
- ✓ Instruct children never to give out personal information without your consent

www.mediafamily.org (adapted)



What's *media convergence*, anyway?

Media convergence is when the lines separating different forms of media disappear. We already see a lot of this happening—for example, video games are now Internet compatible, cell phones host mini-cameras, and you can watch movies on your iPod. Current technology promises that we are going to see media convergence accelerate dramatically. This will create a world where most forms of media are accessible in a cell phone that can fit in the palm of your hand. Learn how this will affect your kids, and what to watch out for as a parent.