

Children of all ages are heavy media consumers. Research indicates that children under the age of 6 spend close to two hours a day watching television, using computers and playing video games with a steady rise to over six hours a day for children eight and older. And just what are they viewing? Unfortunately programming is often riddled with violent and sexually explicit material. In fact, by the age of 18, the average young person will have viewed an estimated 200,000 acts of violence on television with the perpetrators going unpunished in 73 percent of all violent scenes.

As many say, children are like sponges. They learn from their experiences and by watching what others do – and that includes what others do and say in the media. The implications of regularly witnessing violence in the media are widespread.

Research indicates that children often become desensitized to violence and the pain of others when they are frequently exposed to violence at an early age. Once violence becomes commonplace, it also becomes an acceptable method by which to relieve stress and solve problems. Overall level of fear also increases - fear of society, fear of other people... These effects range from a general sense that the world is dangerous to full-blown anxieties, nightmares, sleep disturbances and other trauma symptoms.

A University of Michigan study found that both males and females who were heavy TV violence viewers as children were significantly more likely to engage in serious physical aggression and criminal behavior later in life. In addition, the heavy violence viewers were twice as likely as the others to engage in spousal abuse when they became adults.

Each day, lives are destroyed because of violence. As we work toward the prevention of violence it is critical that we challenge every element, both small and large, that perpetuates the continuation of this devastating cycle – which includes the media. The media, just as each of us, shares in the responsibility of creating a community that fosters the growth and development of children. As a result of this dialogue that has started here tonight, I hope to see improved children's education programming, a reduction in the extent of violent and sexualized material, particularly during prime time and more examples/models of healthy relationships and strong female roles.

Rosalynn Bliss, MSW, CSW

Director of Prevention Services at the Child and Family Resource Council  
Chairperson for the Kent County Domestic Violence Community Coordinated Response Team