

Dear Parents

“Bang! Bang! You’re dead!” My favourite presents as a boy were all “weapons” and we had such fun fighting. Cowboys and Indians, knights, soldiers, pilots, Matabele warriors... We were forever “killing” each other. It was such fun laying ambushes or creeping up on each other and then launching the attack. Bullets, spears or arrows would fly or swords would swing and the enemy would end up dead (for a count of 100 anyway). Our parents bought us cap guns, bows, crossbows and swords - and we made spears, “bombs”, clay slingers etc. Hours and hours of fun. Of course by “us” I mean all the boys in the village. The girls took no interest at all. I have no idea what they did – even though I have two younger sisters. My younger sister joined my world once and I shot her with my pellet gun (by mistake!). After that she was less keen...

There is a lot of chat about the effect of violent computer games on young people thanks to some recent tragic events. However there does not seem to be any conclusive evidence that they are a significant cause of violent behaviour. In fact some suggest that the games allow for a harmless outlet for aggression. Many games are hugely violent with blood spraying all over the place and “people” being slaughtered in their droves. Most boys (girls are, on the whole, not interested) are playing these games, if not at home then with friends, and enjoying the entertainment. Are they more violent boys as a result? No, I do not think so. Normal boys seem quite able to separate the fantasy from the reality in their minds – like young people of every age. Does this mean we do not need to worry about the games our sons play? Of course not! Like everything else we need to take responsibility as parents for what our children do. The games industry has made some effort to advise parents about the suitability of games. If it is labelled as “18” then it is probably not suitable for a 14 year old. The problem with games and movies is that it is not necessarily the overt violence which is of concern but the message around the violence. For instance, violence in a war game may be more overtly horrible but less emotionally hurtful than on-screen domestic violence and less likely to be copied.

Generally, though, violence amongst teenagers has increased (although I think it has generally decreased at Bishops over the last 10 years). However, how much computer games contribute to this (if at all) has not been shown. It is nigh impossible to isolate any effect they may have from the myriad personal and societal problems. Usually, when they (games) have been implicated, the person involved has many other reasons for his destructive behaviour. It is a gross over-simplification to blame the games.

So what is our advise? Firstly, take an interest in the games your son plays. Ask him to show you. You will be amazed at the complexity of some of them and your son’s ability to hold a whole lot of ideas and facts in his head at once as he conquers the world or wins the soccer league. You may also be shocked by the violence (and possibly language) of some. Be prepared! A discussion can then follow. There may need to be a confrontation but I hope not. Secondly, buy him good wholesome games. There are lots of these – especially on the sporting side. If you do not buy them then he is likely to get pirated games from friends. He may do this anyway but at least all his time will not be spent on them. In the end if he wants to deceive you he will but at least from your side look to

engage your son in this part of his life (for some a huge part). If you take no interest you are giving him carte blanc.

Like so much else in parenting we need to be engaged, wise, discerning and courageous.

Yours sincerely

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