

Do video games promote violence in the culture?

Another school killing was in the news recently—this one in Germany. Again violent video games are being blamed. This 17-year-old killer played a game called *Far Cry 2*, one that has sold 2.9 million copies world wide, where the player takes on the role of the killer. The real killer used many of the same tactics as the game killer. And then killed himself. Opinions about the effects of the video game on his killing spree are being debated around the world.

As much as I hate violent video games and want to haul the producers of them to the carpet to take responsibility and use more ethical thinking, I understand that they are in the business of making money and only follow the law of supply and demand. And there are plenty of non-violent games on the market. And I believe that if video games motivated school killings, the killers would not shoot themselves. 99% of gamers know the difference between fantasy violence and real violence. Other factors play a much larger role.

I do believe that the strategies and weapons used in video games can give the already distraught person ideas to as to *how* to carry out the plan. But the desire to kill comes from a far deeper place of serious turmoil, isolation, and hopelessness. The German Chancellor called for tighter gun control. I am all for that. But that doesn't come close to getting at the root of the problem. The real question is how do we insure that our children do not go down that road of self-loathing and self-abuse dead-ending in disrespect, abuse, and even murder?

My answer is connection. And that entails everything from talking to and remaining involved in your child's life to examining your role, your expectations, your old stuff and taking responsibility for it. It means finding a better way to discipline than using a tactic that only angers your child and creates a gap between you. Connection means teaching children to take responsibility for themselves from the get-go and trusting their capabilities to do so. It means not asking them to take responsibility for what is your responsibility. It means understanding that your child has an agenda that is just important to her as yours is to you and being considerate of it, especially if it has to be dropped. It means understanding that each child has unique drives and desires and allowing each of them to find their way with your support and guidance rather than forcing them to do it your way—to be who they are, not who you want them to be.

Above all it means instilling self-confidence in your child so she is armored for the world with a strong sense of self to take on the knocks that life inevitably brings.

When it comes to the intense desire, especially among boys, to play video games, be prepared. This is hard since this entertainment is relatively new in our families and took the culture by storm. Make sure you have strict parameters around computer time as soon as you introduce a computer or a video game into your child's life. Unless these limits are well established and agreed on in earlier childhood, your teen may decide your new rules are laughable.

As with everything else in your young child's life, be involved. Play the video games with your child, learn how to play the game or at least be an active observer. Talk about the strategies—what your child likes to do in the game and why. Most of us buy games to appease our child's demands and then do little else than disparage them. We spend more time yelling at them to get off the computer, with little understanding of what that means to the player and the game, so they are prepared to do battle by the time they begin. And they have way more staying power than we do. Think about it—how do you feel toward anyone who disapproves of what you love to do?

Make sure you follow the age-appropriate guidelines on the games even if it means dealing with anger and the “everyone else has it” argument. Allow your child's anger. He has a right to it. Just don't let it suck you into a place of reaction. When your child is old enough (whatever that means!) and adamant about getting a game that includes violence, use it. Get into with your teen as much as he will allow (if playing together has been a habit, it will likely continue to some degree). Without getting preachy or overbearing, you can use what the game illustrates to talk about values. It will be easy to find out what your teen thinks about the violence. The most passive child often loves to get out that aggressive energy through a game, and the technological advances can be enough to grab their interest. My son, who has written advice for parents on video game use, loves violent games but cannot bring himself to throw out a sick plant. You may be surprised to learn that you can put your fears about your child becoming the next school killer aside so that you can connect and communicate.