

“How to Conduct... Program & Project” Series It’s as Easy as 1, 2, 3 !

Number 4

Break Free of TV

How to Conduct a Break Free of TV Program



Step 1: Learn about the program.

What is a Break Free of TV Program?

Break Free of TV is a collaborative initiative with Georgia PTA and the Georgia Association of School Psychologists (GASP) to reduce the impact of children’s exposure to media violence. In a joint resolution signed in August, 2001, this initiative strives to increase the level of awareness of the harmful effects of exposure to media violence and develop alternatives to foster positive mental health among children and youth. Break Free TV suggests that each school psychologist consider how he/she can respond to this challenge by working closely with their local PTA in designing their own local campaign.

What research shows:

- U.S. Surgeon General’s Report on Youth Violence, 2001, states that “A substantial body of research now indicates that exposure to media violence increases children’s physically and verbally aggressive behavior in the short term. Media violence also increases aggressive attitudes and emotions, which are theoretically linked to aggressive and violent behavior.”
- Heavy TV viewers are less imaginative, more impulsive, more aggressive, and have poorer concentration.
- Viewing violence in the media teaches aggressive attitudes and behaviors, desensitizes viewers to violence, and produces fear of violence.

- While we know no single cause accounts for violence in our schools, exposure to media violence is regarded as a risk factor for youth violence.

Interesting Facts About TV

- Number of 30 second commercials seen in a year by an average child: 20,000
- Number of minutes per week that parents spend in meaningful conversation with their children: 38.5
- Number of minutes per week that the average child watches television: 1,680
- Percentage of children ages 6-17 who have TV’s in their bedrooms: 50
- Percentage of day care centers that use TV during a typical day: 70
- Hours per year the average American youth spends in school: 900 hours
- Hours per year the average American youth watches television: 1,500
- Percentage of Americans that regularly watch television while eating dinner: 66
- Children now average 35 hours per week watching TV and playing video games.
- Percentage of children that worry about getting stabbed/shot at home/school: 70%.
- Number of youth under 18 arrested for violent crimes in 1994: 125,000
- By age 18, number of years children have spent watching TV: 7+
- By age 18, children will have spent at least 7 years watching TV.
- Number of murders and other acts of violence children have seen by the end of elementary school: 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence.



Step 2: What PTA Can Do To Address the Challenge

Conduct a school-wide campaign to Break Free of TV.

Ideas for your campaign:

1. Letter writing – Students can express feelings about TV violence by writing letters to broadcasters, producers, and government officials. *See sample letters. (Addresses: www.nctvv.org/NCTV)
2. Poster Contest – Students compete against other classes by designing posters to promote awareness and visibility of Break Free of TV.
3. Essay Contest :
 - *What My Family Did Break Free of TV Week*
 - *I Won't Become a Couch Potato Because.....*
 - *Instead of Watching TV, I...*
4. Sponsor “Alternatives to TV” events at your school such as reading, art, music, games, exercise, storytelling, etc.
5. Design a **Break Free of TV** pledge. Plan a school-wide signing day.
6. Have students make daily announcements about alternatives to TV.
7. Provide information via newsletter, PTA presentations, etc., regarding the benefits of positive TV programming and the negative impact of violent programming.
8. Provide parents and guardians with alternatives to TV. See sample list.
9. Check out the National PTA website, www.pta.org/programs/tvevaluate.htm, ***Taking Charge of Your TV, A Guide to Critical Viewing for Parents and Children*** and, the “***Evaluating TV Violence: At-Home Activity Sheet,***” a tool to assist parents in identifying programs or movies that might be harmful to children.
10. Ask parents to call local TV stations to express their opinions. Provide a list of phone numbers to keep by the phone.
11. Participate in the National TV-Turnoff Week, a nationwide effort to re-think the role of television, what-why-how we use it, and to assess its impact on students, teachers, parents, and children.

- Ask your school to make a commitment to become a partner in this initiative.
- Designate a specific week to launch the event.
- Publicize the program in your newsletter, at PTA meetings, on bulletin boards.
- Decide if you will award and/or recognize students who participate in your campaign. If so, when, where, how?
- Provide and promote information that teaches children how to resolve conflict without violence.
- Share information with parents to assist in Home-Based efforts.

While most psychologists are convinced that children can learn aggressive behavior from television, they also point out that parents have tremendous power to moderate that influence. We cannot expect our children to monitor their own TV watching. We, as adults, must do it for them. Parents need to set limits on the amount and kinds of programs that their children watch.

What parents can do:

1. Because there is a great deal of violence in both adult and children’s programming, just limiting the number of hours children watch television will probably reduce the amount of aggression they see.
2. It is not enough to say “no” to certain programs. Provide alternatives such as games, reading, art projects, playing outside, or park district classes. Once your children learn that there are other ways to have fun, they won’t feel deprived by limited TV.
3. Keep the TV out of your child’s bedroom.
4. Know what programs your children are watching, rather than allow the TV to be a passive baby-sitter.
5. Watch TV with your children. Provide dialogue and discussion, including asking your children what the people on the show are feeling to promote empathy.
6. Present a good role model by limiting your own TV viewing.
7. Give your children a TV allowance. They must make decisions on how to spend the hours they are allotted. Misbehavior will result in reduced TV allowance.
8. Rule out TV at certain times, such as before breakfast or during homework.
9. Encourage your children to watch programs in which the characters are helpful and caring toward each other.
10. Carefully monitor cartoons. These are often the worst offenders in terms of violence.
11. Protect younger children from the violence on the news. If they do become aware, talk to them about what is happening and how the problem might be solved.



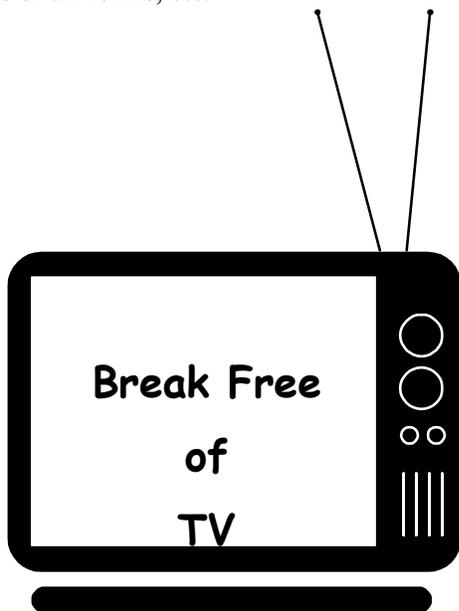
Sample Letters to Broadcasters...

Step 3: Conduct and evaluate the program..

1. Decide what type of program or campaign you will use.
 - Do you want to sponsor television alternatives?
 - Do you want to provide parents with TV alternatives?
 - Do you want to publish information about the effects of TV violence in your PTA publications?

After you decide:

2. Develop a timeline.
3. What supplies do you need? Ribbons, games, music, prizes, paper?
4. Publicize your campaign to **Break Free of TV** at general meetings, newsletters, etc. Ask for teacher support. Teachers can help by talking to students about participating and by sharing information such as that enclosed.
5. Upon completion of your campaign, discuss with others how it went; what worked, what didn't? Leave a legacy. Document for others what you did and what you learned. Include a timeline, a budget, copies of all forms, etc.



Dear [TV Broadcaster]:

I recently watched an episode of []. I found this [program] highly violent and bad for children because of the lessons it teaches children about violence.

As a [parent/guardian/educator/concerned citizen, etc.], I am deeply concerned about the escalating violence in our country and the role your program plays in promoting it. Please know that I will tell at least ten others about my concerns with your program and urge them to protect their children from it.

I hope you share my concerns about violence and children. I urge you to play your role in helping to reduce the epidemic of violence in homes, schools, and the wider society by reducing the violence in your program.

Sincerely yours,

Help Children Voice Their Ideas:

Dear [Broadcaster/Producer]:

My [grade level] class at [school name] is discussing ways to resolve conflict intelligently and peacefully.

I am writing to you to talk about [show/video].

I think it is [good/bad] for children because.....

Thank you for reading my letter.

Sincerely,

**Joint Resolution Signed by the President of the Georgia PTA and
the Georgia Association of School Psychologists (GASP),
August 2001**

Whereas there is an increasing concern about violence in schools and communities and....

Whereas research indicates that exposure to violence in media can have a negative impact on children's learning, development, and behavior and, in fact, can cause them to behave in aggressive and harmful ways toward others and....

Whereas parents have the most control over their children's television viewing and media listening habits and....

Whereas there is a need to increase awareness of the impact of exposure to violence in media among parents and teachers and children...

Therefore, The Georgia Association of School Psychologists and the Georgia Parent Teacher Association hereby agree to commit their energy and resources to collaborate on a multi-year initiative to develop and implement practices which increase the level of awareness of the harmful effects of media violence on children and to encourage the development of alternatives to such activity in an effort to foster positive mental health among the children and youth of the State of Georgia.

Be it resolved that this joint resolution commits the parties to developing a broad statewide plan to assist local communities and schools in initiating a variety of innovative practices and activities that increase levels of awareness regarding the impact of harmful media exposure; help promote positive alternatives to such exposure; and focus on efforts to influence public policy and the media.

In testimony whereof, we have affixed our signatures in acknowledgement.

Cherie Eastburn

President, Georgia Parent Teacher Association

Georgia Wrensen

President, Georgia Association of School Psychologists

