Why A Toy Trade-in?

Today's children are constantly invited to play with violence. In fact, many children's toy chests have been transformed into war chests full of action figures, toy guns and swords, war toys, laser guns, and other implements of destruction. At every turn, children are faced with violent arcade games, video games, computer games and virtual-reality games. They see violence on television, in the movies, on video.

Children are not born violent -- research shows that violence is a learned behavior. And it is a behavior that we are teaching to younger and younger children.

Growing numbers of parents and teachers find that when children have violent toys -- such as swords, toy guns, and action figures -- they play violently. Violent toys do not teach the kinds of values most parents and teachers encourage -- values such as cooperation, taking turns or problem-solving.

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, a military historian and author of On Killing, argues that "the inflicting of pain and suffering has become a source of entertainment and vicarious pleasure rather than revulsion. We are learning to kill, and we are learning to like it."

In fact, 25,000 Americans are murdered each year -- more people than were killed at the height of the Vietnam War. This increased violence is also seen in schools, playgrounds and even church yards. Children under the age of eight have a hard time distinguishing between fantasy and reality: they receive very mixed messages from a society that glorifies violence through toys, movies and other entertainment -and at the same time tells them that violence is "bad."

Violent Toy Trade-Ins are events which bring attention to this issue -- and demonstrate a community's desire for change. Basically, toy trade-ins invite children to donate one of their violent toys as an expression of their desire for a less violent world.

At the trade-in, children work together to help transform a collection of violent toys into a dramatic Peace Sculpture. In addition, they can participate in a number of creative and nonviolent games and activities -- reminders of how much fun they can have without resorting to violence as a theme.

In exchange for contributing a violent toy, all children receive a Lionhearted Certificate entitling them to discounts or free gifts from local merchants specializing in nonviolent children's toys and entertainment -- and some children receive exciting door prizes.

The most important thing about these events is to have fun! In today's popular culture, "violence" is assumed to be "fun" -- and "not violent" is thus assumed to be "not fun." For this reason, it's important to offer activities that both boys and girls will enjoy -- activities not based on violence.

Putting together a toy trade-in does take time -- but the rewards far outweigh the costs. The looks on children's faces, their excitement as they become engrossed in new games and activities, are things you will not soon forget.

The old saying is true -- the more energy you put into the event, the more energy will be created. Successful events don't happen by themselves: they do require work. But if many people each contribute a little bit of time, no one person need feel overwhelmed by the tasks involved.

Action Suggestions

If there is a YWCA in your community, please call them and urge them to organize a Violent Toy Trade-In as part of their Week Without Violence. (They should have already received a how-to manual for organizing such an event.) If possible, offer to help the YWCA with the event in some way—publicity, volunteers, etc. If the week has passed for this year, offer the idea for the next year.

If you can organize a trade-in through your school or church, please call Lion & Lamb and we will send you a step-by-step guide for putting this event together.

Collect Toys toward our 10,000-toy goal. If possible, send a few of the violent toys to Lion & Lamb to be incorporated into our National Peace Sculpture, which we will build from toys contributed from all over the country. Also let us know how many toys you collected in your community so we can add them to our national total.

To make this work we have to build a grassroots movement with real momentum. Please let us know how we can help you and what is happening in your community visit www.lionlamb.org or snail mail at The Lion & Lamb Project, 4300 Montgomery Ave #104, Bethesda MD 20814. Information in this flyer is from the website.

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