

Social Issues

War Toys (and the simulation of violence by children)



Definition:

These are toys which replicate weapons of war, or violence, and could, through their use, cause harm to others. Children may use these toys to simulate killing or injuring others. These toys may illustrate or describe violent acts.

Examples:

- Toy guns or knives being used by children to pretend killing each other
- Children playing video games involving fighting and violence
- Children reading magazines or comics depicting and glorifying battles and warfare

Why the situation occurs?

Children are influenced by their environments - their parents, families, friends, teachers and peers and how these people behave. They are also influenced by the media - radio, newspapers, television - as well as by books, magazines, comics and films. They see violence every day on the television, on the news, in films, at home even and can then act out this violence in their daily lives when playing.

Children may not realise the implications of their actions and this can lead to serious accidents when children come across a real weapon and uses it unwittingly, resulting in injury or death.

Companies produce 'violent toys' and know that they will sell, but these toys are contributing to a culture of violence. However, children and parents still have a choice, and there are plenty of 'non-violent' toys available on the market.

In some countries (for older children, adolescents and adults) there are games that simulate warfare, using laser guns and paint pellets. One view is that these games may be exciting group activities but another view is that they simulate activities which are 'real' to many people around the world and result in disability, death and the complete breakdown of normal life.

How you can make a difference:

Tackle the issue - learn to recognise the difference between violent and non-violent toys, and why children chose these. What are the alternatives and what are the influencing factors at play here? How can you help to change the attitude of society, parents and children towards these toys?

Have a debate with older Scouts and leaders on the ethics of 'laser' and 'paint-ball' games. Some of the young people may have tried them. What are their views? Are these activities more acceptable in countries that have not experienced conflict for many years?

Use the materials and tools provided to follow the process of:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Developing Awareness and Empathy
3. Taking action
4. Measuring the change

Resources and Links:

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) website (English, French and Spanish) contains more information on this subject: <http://www.unicef.org>

UNICEF's website MAGIC - "Media Activities and Good Ideas by, with and for Children" includes a great deal of information on how to use the media for good with children, and also contains documents on child protection and the internet: <http://www.unicef.org/magic>