

Children's Trust Fund Program Summary

This Is Your Brain On Television

Aid to Women, Men and Children in Abuse and Rape Emergencies (AWARE)
P.O. Box 307
Hardwick, Vermont 05843
802-472-6463

This Is Your Brain On Television is a book and media literacy curriculum written by AWARE's Youth Services Coordinator, Amy Hornblas. The purpose of the book is to teach young people and others about what the fast-moving images on the screen can do to our brains, thoughts and behavior. By describing brain development the book takes a public health approach to media. While we fully realize that violent media is not the only cause of real-life violence, we feel that it is one we can universally address. Due to the prevalence of violent content in shows and movies, we are surrounded by opportunities to teach youth to recognize and evaluate violence in a safe manner. By raising awareness about our cultural tolerance for media violence, we can compare it to how bullying and violence are handled in the real world and thoughtfully decide what kind of culture we would like to create for the future.

This is Your Brain on Television describes how the brain interprets images from the screen. Through examples and activities youth are encouraged to keep their *forebrains* awake so they can critically examine the values that are being taught to their brains as they watch. What values does the TV teach to young brains? What does it teach our brains when we laugh at bullying? How do images of "cool" people with their "cool" cars and "perfect" bodies affect our self-image? How do our beliefs about ourselves and the products we see influence our consumer decisions?

Thanks to funding from the Children's Trust Fund Grant, the "This is Your Brain on Television" curriculum has been presented to numerous area schools, and we will continue to do this into next year. The book's illustrator, John R. Toohey, is currently finishing the watercolor pictures for the book. We hope to have it published in 2006. Look for it in bookstores, or call AWARE if you are interested in getting some copies for your school, family or friends.

Following is a page from the book which helps readers figure out what stress responses have been programmed into their own *core brains*, the part that handles emergencies and sudden decisions. When we were babies, our brains were wired to handle emergencies by crying and grasping with our hands. Unless that is how you would respond to the situation below, your brain has since been "re-wired". Decide how you would respond, and then ask yourself where you learned that response. Who in your life has modeled that response for you? Most students tell me that they would get angry, seek revenge, "kick the person's butt"

or just want to. Even if they say they would ask for an apology, they tell me “I wouldn’t believe them.” Where have these young kids seen people modeling so much anger, revenge and distrust? Could it be the TV?

Imagine you were suddenly pushed from behind in the cafeteria and you found yourself face-first on the floor with food spilled all around. You didn’t know who pushed you, or why. How would you feel? What would you feel like doing about it? What would you actually do?



Just like math skills, socializing with others must be learned and practiced too. When we are taught to say “please” and “thank you” we are building neural pathways which get stronger with practice. This is how we learn to make it a habit to be polite. If we have made it a habit, saying “please” and “thank you” will be like a reflex. What types of responses are programmed into your brain? Does your brain have a reflex to be polite and respond with kindness towards others? Is your brain programmed to be defensive and aggressive? Is your brain afraid of other people? How would you respond to the situation above if you didn’t have time to think it over, and what does that tell you about the responses programmed in your core and middle brain?