



# Connect

Helping caregivers talk to kids about violence against women

[www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)



Dear P2P,

**M**y foster son, David, loves to play video games like many teenagers. I think many of the games are too violent and that the craze around buying these expensive video game systems sends a dangerous message—materialistic aggression. I try to limit the amount of time he plays, especially weekdays, when schoolwork is the priority. For years, David was suspended repeatedly for fighting in school and I'm afraid violent video games may encourage such behavior. I want him to have fun, but most of all, he needs to understand that what happens in the game should not be played out in real life. What should I do?  
 – Concerned Foster Father (CFF)

Dear CFF,

You're not alone. Many parents and caregivers worry about the effect violent video games and violence in the media have on kids. It's definitely something to monitor and I'm glad to see you're trying to keep perspective. David does need to have fun, but not at the expense of his or anyone else's safety.

First of all, you'll want to speak with him directly about your discomfort with the games. I suggest watching or playing along with him and then raising questions, such as: What if this happened in real life? What happens to victims and their families in the real world? Parents who talk to their kids about violence and, in this case, violent games, are far more effective in raising non-aggressive children than parents

who simply forbid the games.

Use this as an opportunity to build trust with your foster son and as a way in to talk about the experiences he had before living with you. The goal here is to show him that you care for and respect him and that you are available to talk anytime he wants. Be patient and supportive. David might not open up right away as teenagers rarely do, but, your consistent presence and mentoring will send a clear signal that you're watching—and that speaks volumes.

– P2P

*P.S. Check out [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)—a resource for parents, educators, and mentors that reviews kids media (TV, movies, books, games, etc.).*

# Changed Lives

A new relative caregiver reflects on the challenges—and triumphs—caring for her niece's two children

By Emily Brady

**F**or Sarah, there was never any question that she would care for the kids. In June 2004, Sarah's 22-year-old niece, Jenny, had called the police during a violent fight with her boyfriend. When the police and children's services discovered Jenny's boyfriend had been hitting her and that both were using drugs, they placed Jenny's two young children, Ben and Maria, in foster care.

Sarah had a close relationship with the children and missed them terribly after they were taken from Jenny. "With them gone, it felt like a huge gaping hole," she said. So, at the age of 49, Sarah, a college professor who never had children of her own, became a foster mother to her great niece and nephew. In doing so, Sarah joined a growing

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number of relative caregivers. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that one-third of all children in foster care in the United States live with relatives.

In the two and half years since Ben and Maria first came to live with her, Sarah has learned that healing takes time, particularly in children who have been exposed to domestic violence. In the



beginning, Sarah remembers Ben and Maria needed a lot of attention. Ben, 8, had trouble maintaining interest in school. At home things were worse. "He was carrying a lot of anger," Sarah recalls. "He would try to punch holes in the wall. He'd throw stuff around his room and call himself stupid." Meanwhile, two-year-old Maria was very needy. She didn't like to be alone; she missed her mother and cried a lot.

Both Ben and Maria displayed typical signs of distress for children exposed to domestic violence. According to the Boston Medical Center's Child Witness to Violence Project, common symptoms in children who have been exposed to violence include difficulty sleeping, increased aggressive behavior, angry outbursts, withdrawal, trouble concentrating at home or at school, and separation anxiety.

It's important to keep an eye on children for warning signs of serious trauma, says Lonna Davis, director of the

children's program at the Family Violence Prevention Fund. "Families shouldn't be ashamed to ask for help." Just as children are affected by violence in different ways, there are various ways to help them based on their individual needs.

The most powerful way to help a child heal from trauma is through consistent support and love from a caring, stable adult.

What worked best with Ben and Maria was a combination of love, counseling and physical exercise. Sarah found a counselor that Ben liked and visited regularly. With Maria, Sarah created little games to keep her engaged, like kicking a mini-soccer ball around in the backyard. Both kids began to thrive. Sarah marvels at how the children have positively changed her life. "When you have kids that are facing the kinds of issues these children are, you tend to be more compassionate," Sarah reflects. "They've softened my heart."

*\*All names have been changed*

## Things caregivers can do to help their foster children:

- Talk to your foster child's social worker about available services.
- Provide opportunities for your foster child to be successful and feel competent (i.e., sports, art, music).
- Talk to your foster child's teachers, school counselors, and principal about what is going on to ensure there is a support system in place for him/her even when you're not around.
- If needed, seek appropriate trauma-informed counseling for your foster child.



As a new kind of Founding Father, you can set a positive example for generations of young men who follow you. Your foster son, grandson, nephew, younger brother—all the boys in your life need your time, energy, and advice to help them grow into healthy young men.

## **TAKE ACTION:**

1. Sign the Declaration. *Visit: [www.founding-fathers.org](http://www.founding-fathers.org)*
2. Coach Boys into Men. *Talk with the boys in your life about violence against women and girls being wrong.*
3. Become an Advocate. *Increase awareness among the men in your network.*
4. Build the Network. *Enlist others to join you as new Founding Fathers.*

## **Sign the Founding Fathers Declaration:**

*I, proudly pledge my support to become a new Founding Father and join with other men in building a new kind of society – where decency and respect require no special day on the calendar, where boys are taught that violence does not equal strength and where men stand with courage, lead with conviction and speak with one voice to say, “No more.”*

For more information on each of the 4 action steps, visit [www.founding-fathers.org](http://www.founding-fathers.org)

## Resources:

**National Domestic Violence Hotline:**  
(800) 799-SAFE (7233)

### **National Foster Parents Association**

Provides support to foster parents in achieving safety, permanence and well-being for the children and youth in their care.

[www.nfpainc.com](http://www.nfpainc.com)

(253) 853-4000 or (800) 557-5238

### **Break the Cycle's Safe Space for Youth**

Programs to engage, educate and empower youth to build lives and communities free from domestic and dating violence.

[www.thesafespace.org](http://www.thesafespace.org)

### **Recommended Reading:**

**When Children See Too Much: Lessons from the Child Witness to Violence Project**

by Betsy McAlister Groves

**What Parents Need to Know About Dating Violence: Advice and Support for Helping Your Teen**

by Barrie Levy

**Para leer Connect en español,**

**por favor visite: [www.nomasabusos.org](http://www.nomasabusos.org)**

# **Family Violence Prevention Fund**

[www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)

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