Dear Parent2Parent,

Yours and David’s love to play video games like many other kids. Videogames are fun and relaxing, and the games are designed to keep the players engaged. But is it healthy for kids to play too much? What if this happened to your kid? What if your kid were experiencing violence in the game? What if there’s a voice telling your kid to hurt other kids, or follow orders? Do you know what a ‘voice’ is in a game? A ‘voice’ is an audio file that’s played as part of the game. The voice may be from a character within the game or from a person outside the game.

Let’s talk about video games and violence. Video games can be an opportunity to build trust and explore your child’s experiences. They can help make a safe environment for kids to talk about their feelings and experiences. But what if those feelings are not positive? What if they involve violence?

Parent2Parent:VIDEOM VIOLENCE

Dear Parent2Parent,

We support your efforts to keep your child safe and happy. But we also want to acknowledge that sometimes kids may need to talk about issues that are difficult for them. Sometimes kids may need to talk about violence they’ve experienced or witnessed. What if your child comes to you and says they’ve experienced violence in a video game? How do you respond? Do you talk to them about it? Or do you ignore it? What if you don’t talk to them about it? What if you don’t even notice? What if you don’t even care? What if you don’t even think it’s a problem?

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changed Lives
A new relation caregiver reflects on the challenges—and triumphs—caring for her niece’s two children
By Emily Brady

For 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

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.”

“To protect their identity, all names of family members 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 (e.g., 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.
- Taking care of foster children is not an easy task. If you feel overwhelmed, seek help and support for yourself.

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:

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 at 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