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**Violent Games Marketed To Kids:
'M'-Rated Products Show Up On Teen Channels**

by

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Our everyday lives are enhanced in countless ways by today's technological revolution: from smart phones to smart homes to smart automobiles. E-health allows us to have access to health-care experts thousands of miles away. Distance learning and e-books provide opportunities for our children we could never have imagined. However, there are also examples of technological development that confound us as parents and can have an extremely negative and even dangerous impact on our children. From cyberbullying to texting while driving, there are deleterious consequences that can also be deadly.

A long line of research has found that violent media can lead to aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviors, and that violent video games may be more harmful than violent TV and movies. Because games are interactive, they enable the player to BE the aggressor. Which is why the new advertising campaign launched for *Dead Space 2* — a new, ultra-violent video game involving heinous attacks, beheading, vomiting on victims — is especially irresponsible.

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The ad campaign is extremely clever. Hundreds of moms were filmed while watching the video game. Their responses vary from horror, to disgust, to covering their eyes to avoid watching. The ad closes with the tagline: "Your mom hates this."

Talk about enticement for young adolescent males to want this game! As criticism for the ad campaign has grown, some have argued that the moms featured in the ads are older, so their children probably aren't children. That's where the marketers may be a bit too clever. Ask yourself: How many 23-year-old gamers care whether their mothers hate the games they play? And look where the ad campaign is placed: on channels that are popular teen destinations like MTV and online, where *Dead Space 2* videos uploaded to YouTube (accessed by kids any time of day) have been viewed millions of times.

For years, the entertainment software industry has fought any type of government oversight by pointing to its stringent rating system and the high rate of compliance regarding the sale of violent video games to children. In fact, the industry's own self-regulatory body, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rated *Dead Space 2* as "M" for mature, meaning that it is not appropriate for children under 17.

Board should sanction EA

The ESRB also has its Principles and Guidelines for Responsible Advertising Practices. Their website says "ESRB's Advertising Review Council (ARC) diligently monitors and enforces compliance with industry marketing guidelines across TV, print and online media vehicles." The video-game industry regularly argues that this self-regulation provides sufficient oversight, negating any need for legislation to protect kids. But if ESRB is providing oversight, why is this campaign clearly marketing an M-rated game ("Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language") to kids?

If the ESRB has any real enforcement power — or integrity — and wants parents as well as members of Congress to trust their self-regulation, they should act quickly and sanction Electronic Arts for the *Dead Space 2* ad campaign. Lack of action on the part of ESRB will demonstrate that the industry is unwilling or unable to help families protect kids from the marketing of disturbingly violent images and storylines. And rather than being a proponent for industry self-regulation, I and many parents will be calling for legislation to end these exploitive and manipulative advertising practices. Game developers are free to develop whatever ultra-violent games they may be inspired to create. Certainly, adults are free to purchase them. However, impressionable, bright, young minds are the future of our country, and they deserve the best technology can offer, not the worst.

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Laureate for her work regarding child online advocacy. The Free State Foundation is a nonpartisan Section 501(c)(3) free market-oriented think tank in Rockville, Maryland.

ESRB ratings website: www.esrb.org

YouTube link to watch the ads: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jri8LFci4xQ

More ratings and help for parents: www.commonsense.org