

## Violence and Drugs

### *The Ultimate Conflict*

### Depiction Suggestions

The following points for consideration on the portrayal of violence and drugs were developed as a resource for entertainment development and production. They are not meant to limit the creative process.

#### Association Between Violence and Drugs:

- ◆ Unless a character's violent behavior or drug use is essential, avoid relying on these behaviors as automatic creative solutions. Look toward alternative behaviors where possible.
- ◆ Be aware that there are numerous factors correlating violence with alcohol and other drug use, therefore violent behavior frequently leads to or is caused by some form of drug use.
  1. Alcohol is the drug of choice in the United States and is the drug most associated with violence, far more than all other drugs combined.
  2. Sometimes drugs can reduce inhibitions that would otherwise keep aggressive behaviors in check.
  3. It is not always the drug user who becomes violent. Cocaine, for example, can cause people to provoke violence toward themselves through irritability, paranoid thinking, verbal or physical aggression, or invasion of others' personal space.

4. Pharmacological effects, as well as cultural, environmental, and individual factors, can contribute to the link between drugs and violence.
5. Crack, PCP, methamphetamine, steroids, and other drugs can serve as a catalyst by inducing violence or making an individual more prone to violent behavior.
6. Drug use is associated with numerous cases of child abuse, homicide, spousal abuse, rape, assault, and suicide.
7. Often, victims of violence turn to drugs as an emotional escape from the violent behavior of others. Also, victims of violent behavior often use drugs to alleviate pain from violence-related injuries.
8. Perpetrators of violence, particularly those who hurt or killed someone when forced to defend themselves or others, will also sometimes turn to drugs to escape their feelings of guilt.
  - ◆ When making creative decisions about the behavior of a character, bear in mind that young people view violence in entertainment as a kind of role modeling. Will others, especially young people, want to emulate the behavior of your character?

- ◆ Consider alternative solutions to resolve conflict between characters, using non-violence when situational factors place them at odds with one another. Is there a more unique but equally compelling way to show the conflict?
- ◆ Anti-violence and anti-drug billboards can be used as a location set piece.
- ◆ The use of educational posters in scenes can send a subtle message in such places as police stations, hospitals, youth centers, and schools. (For more information on education posters or additional information, please call the Entertainment Industries Council, Inc., 800-783-3421.)
- ◆ Attempt to minimize violent scenes that do not contribute to the plot or character development. Consider having the violent act occur off-screen to minimize graphic portrayal of violent acts.
- ◆ Where possible, try to show violence as the last resort for characters that have thus far attempted to use solely their intelligence to deal with obstacles or jeopardy. When appropriate, depict thoughtless or gratuitous violence as nonglamorous tools of those who seek easy solutions.
- ◆ When appropriate, demonstrate the emotional, social, and financial impact of violence on victims, perpetrators, family, friends, witnesses, and community.
- ◆ Consider that guns in the home are more likely to harm than to protect family and friends. Where a gun is shown in the home, try to show it unloaded and locked away, unless you plan to portray the tragic outcome of unsafe storage.
- ◆ When possible, avoid having characters who are victims of violence reach for drugs. Consider portraying them as seeking other outlets to relieve stress and reduce the violence.

## Violence and Drugs on the Streets:

- ◆ Try to balance portrayals of gangs whose existence is based on the drug economy with gangs that exist for other reasons.
- ◆ Before dealing with youth violence in a production, try to understand its nature and circumstances, examining it and addressing it on a case-by-case basis.
- ◆ Try to avoid stereotypes such as that all youth are into gangs and gang violence.
- ◆ Remember that frequent use of toy guns by on-screen children reinforces the child's desire to focus role-play activities on violent play.
- ◆ When appropriate, demonstrate individuals in a community taking an active role in prevention of drug use, violence, and gang activity. Are there characters in the lives of on-screen youths who are adequate role models?
- ◆ Attempt to balance the devastation of neighborhood drug use, drug dealing, and gang activity with images of hope outside these street cultures that are realistically available without bias. Empower young viewers to take positive action and older viewers to mentor young people and inventory their own behavior as role models. Include, where possible, activities that youth might engage in to build positive character and to enjoy life outside of involvement in drugs, violence, and crime.

### Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

Proprietary To:

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### Fact Sheet

#### Violence, Crime, and Drugs:

◆ Crime is inextricably linked to alcohol and other drugs. There are a total of 3.2 million arrests each year for alcohol and other drug statutory crimes, accounting for more than one-third of all arrests in this country:<sup>1</sup>

1. Almost 800,000 annual arrests for illicit drug violations.
2. 1.3 million arrests for driving while under the influence.
3. 427,000 arrests for liquor violations.
4. 700,000 arrests for drunkenness.

◆ The impaired judgment and violence induced by alcohol contribute to alcohol-related crime. Rapes, fights, and assaults leading to injury, manslaughter, and homicide are often linked with alcohol because the perpetrator, the victim, or both, were drinking.<sup>2</sup>

◆ Many perpetrators of violent crime were also using illicit drugs. Some of these drugs, such as PCP and steroids, may induce violence. These drugs can also be a catalyst for aggressive-prone individuals who exhibit violent behavior as a result of taking them.<sup>3</sup>

◆ Sixty-three percent of all reported child abuse and neglect cases in New York City are associated with parental drug abuse.<sup>4</sup>

◆ More than 70 percent of adult female drug abusers were victims of physical abuse before their drug use.<sup>5</sup>

◆ Alcohol is a key factor in 68 percent of manslaughters, 45 percent of murders/attempted murders, 48 percent of robberies and 44 percent of burglaries.<sup>6</sup>

◆ Seventy-two percent of victims and/or assailants in rape cases were drinking at the time of the assault. Alcohol is one of the strongest predictors of a college woman's rape.<sup>7</sup>

◆ Alcohol and other drug use is associated with 50 percent of spouse abuse cases and 38 percent of child abuse cases.<sup>8</sup>

◆ Violence associated with drugs has turned many inner-city neighborhoods into war zones. Crack users commit crimes for money to buy the highly addictive drug and crack can induce violent behavior in users. Drug-related violence can also involve disagreement over individual drug transactions or competition for territory among dealers.<sup>9</sup>

◆ Ninety-five percent of U.S. household residents recently surveyed stated that spending tax dollars reducing drug use was extremely important. Among these persons, the two most important concerns about drug use were the

crime and violence associated with drug use (29 percent) and the impact of drug use on children (28 percent).<sup>10</sup>

### **Violence—Impact of Handguns:**

- ◆ Every year, more than 24,000 people are killed with handguns in homicides, suicides, and accidents; that is 65 killed every day.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ Of the estimated 320 million guns in the possession of private citizens, 82 million are handguns.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ Firearms are the second leading cause of fatal injuries, taking more than 38,000 lives.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ In 1997, 11 children and teens ages 19 and under were fatally injured with guns everyday in the United States, and many more were wounded.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Guns kept in the home for self-protection are 22 times more likely to fatally injure a family member or friend than be used in self-defense.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ 10,369 people were murdered with firearms in the United States in 1997.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ Of young people aged 10 to 19, 39 percent personally know someone who had either been killed or injured by a gun in the past year.<sup>17</sup>

#### Sources:

1-7. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), *Making the Link*, "Violence and Crime and Alcohol and Other Drugs," 1991.

8-9. CSAP, *Prevention Works*, "Violence," 1993.

10. Office of National Drug Control Policy, *Consult with America: A Look at How Americans View the Country's Drug Problem*, March 1996.

11-18. Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, *Fact Sheets*, 1996.

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