

Policy for a Commercial Free Environment for Children:

In an effort to continue the support of our home/school partnership and address the concerns of a community that shares like values and responsibilities, the Westport Weston Cooperative Nursery School is enacting a policy that strictly prohibits clothing or accessories that depict media related characters. The policy encompasses any and all media characters targeted to children, especially those that promote violence. Our primary goal in enacting this policy is to filter out the commercial culture and its negative influences and offer a “safe have” for the children while attending our preschool. While we feel that such a policy is not a panacea for all the undesirable effects of mass media exposure on our children, we believe it will have a powerful and positive impact on the children’s experience at the Co-op.

When children come to our school, they need to feel that “I am safe here, my body is safe, my feelings are safe, my thoughts, ideas and words are safe and the materials and the things I make here are safe.” With safety comes trust, the most basic need of children and on which social, emotional and intellectual development builds.

The foundation for how people treat each other is laid in the early years. Violence in any form leaves young children feeling scared, hopeless and unsafe. Many children might seem unaffected by exposure to entertainment violence, however under the surface there is the burden of discomfort and uncertainty which weighs on their minds.

Even minor exposure to violence can cause anxiety in the young child. The messages that children are hearing all around them in the mass culture (movies, T.V. etc.) include violent or sexually stereotyped approaches to problem solving. Children need many chances to try out and develop a range of positive ways to interact with others and to be constructive members of a social (or classroom) community. Teachers encourage children to create appropriate roles in which to feel empowered.

Our experience has shown that over exposure to media related characters by owning many of the articles, violent or not, reinforces children’s idea that the portrayed power of such characters is real. Our teachers have observed how they distract from the creative process in the classroom and can be used by the children to exclude friends that do not have them.

In order to teach children in non-violent, non-sexually stereotypical classrooms, we must create concrete and meaningful rules, ritual and routines. This will encourage an environment that helps children develop a sense of autonomy, and empowerment and encourages mutual respect and interdependence.