

Dangerous Images to Avoid! Joseph Smedley, Ph.D., LMHC

Parents protect your children!

We are in an unprecedented time of sudden social distancing, suspension of normal school attendance, restriction of play and sports, and fear of succumbing to a deadly disease that is affecting African Americans and Latino Americans more than other groups.

These conditions alone are facilitating a rise in domestic conflict and child abuse. We are also witnessing a rise in depression and anxiety for those with “stable” or “normal” mental health and well-being. Recently, there has been an increase of murders and assassinations of black and brown men and women caught on cell phones or via police body cameras. With limited activity outside the home, many are spending an extended amount of time on technology, especially cell phones, iPads and laptops. I want to issue a warning to all parents and mentors.

When news stations begin to play these repeated images of killings **TURN IT OFF!** This is especially important for children and youth. Repeated viewing of these images by persons of color can contribute to a condition called “learned helplessness”. Research on what is known as learned helplessness has shown that when people feel like they have no control over what happens, they tend to simply give up and accept their fate. They may begin to behave in a helpless manner. This inaction can lead people to overlook opportunities for relief or change. Learned helplessness has also been associated with several different psychological disorders. Depression, anxiety, phobias, shyness, and loneliness can all be exacerbated by learned helplessness. Repeated viewing by children and youth can bolster these feelings of helplessness and hopelessness and result in growing into adulthood ultimately feeling that there is nothing one can do to change his or her problems.

Some common symptoms of learned helplessness in children include:

- Low self-esteem
- Passivity
- Poor motivation
- Giving up
- Lack of effort
- Frustration
- Procrastination
- Failure to ask for help

Therefore, I encourage all parents and mentors to (1) avoid viewing these images and (2) have age appropriate conversations with your children to educate them on avoiding these dangerous images. Everyone’s mental health is at stake.