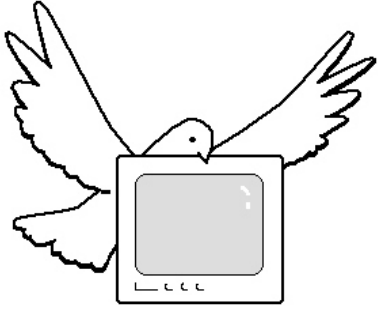


**EDUPAX**



## **“A pitch for presents of peace”**

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With only 30 shopping days till Christmas, there's no time to lose. So here are some nifty gift ideas

for the youngsters on your list:

- JFK Reloaded. This new video game allows players to stalk the Kennedy motorcade as it passes through downtown Dallas, firing shots at the late U.S. president from the same angle as Lee Harvey Oswald. Players lose points if they hit former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy.

- Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. This popular video game allows players to steal cars, beat thugs and hire prostitutes.

- Detroit Pistons tickets. Up-close interactive action as big-league basketball stars swat, punch and pummel spectators, who in turn score points by pelting players with beer, water bottles and folding chairs. (Actually, I'm kidding about that last item. It's almost impossible to get

good Pistons tickets.) Seriously, though, as we gear up for Christmas, maybe it's time to rethink our entertainment options.

Peter Jaffe thinks about it a lot. The Londoner is a world-renowned expert on violence prevention. He knows there will be a ton of video games under Christmas trees this year. And he has a simple idea: Levy a five-per-cent surtax on all violent entertainment. That would mean every video game, film or sporting event that permits or contains violence. There would be exceptions for such items as the film “Saving Private Ryan”, where the violence is educational and set in a proper context.

The revenue would be spent on anti-violence prevention programs. Sound crazy? Jaffe knows it does. He knows it's an idea that so far "has landed with a dull thud." He knows not everyone accepts that media violence is harming our kids. He compares the state of affairs to the tobacco controversy about 20 years ago, when some experts were still arguing there was no direct link between cigarettes and cancer.

Jaffe knows that despite the piles of research he has gathered, and despite the conclusions of such respected groups as the American Psychological Association and the American Association of Pediatricians, there are many people who deny the negative effects of media violence. He also knows that just as every person who smokes won't get lung cancer,

not every kid who plays violent video games will turn into a killer.

"But some children are very vulnerable," says Jaffe, special adviser on violence prevention with the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System. "They have difficult temperaments; they're impulsive; they have trouble with their own emotional regulation. So the last thing they need is a steady diet of video games and violence."

He also believes violent media affects everyone. "We're surrounded by stories of shooting and killing and war," he says. "And I think it creates a certain level of collective anger," Jaffe says. Like many, Jaffe has seen the clips of the ugly incident near the end of

Friday's NBA game in Auburn Hills, near Detroit, where players and fans clashed violently in the stands and on the court.

And like many, he sees it as a sign of something bigger. He dubs it "drive-through solutions."

"People don't really want to wait for the justice system," he says. "People are looking for the instant solutions -- the drive-through solutions. So if you've got a problem with somebody, you punch them or pull a knife. It's instant. "I think it's both an anger and an impatience."

As a trustee with the Thames Valley District school board for 24 years, Jaffe says violent media have desensitized students to the extent that they only report extreme incidents of violence. "More and more, educators are picking up the pieces every day in the classrooms and school yards." Jaffe points out that we're now exposing children to the same type of highly realistic, first-person shooter games traditionally used by the military to desensitize soldiers. The good news? Parents and gift givers can make a difference by not buying violent video games.

"It's an exhausting struggle," says the father of four boys.

"But we can neither give up nor be asleep at the switch here. Our kids are too important.

"I would hope that parents think about buying presents of peace and not war."