

## Not Okay With Violent Play

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Christina Barkman (pictured) wants her sons Cody and Makai (pictured) to grow up without violent toys and video games. While that can be a challenge in many cultures, it is particularly tough in the Philippines where violent conflict has been ongoing for decades. Christina and her husband Darnell are Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers living in Manila.

Every day, Cody and Makai are exposed to violent play as young children, even toddlers, fight, shoot and kill with tablet and smart phone games. Christina wrote in a blog post. Real guns are just as common.

That reality prompted Christina to list the reasons why she is not okay with violent play.

1. I want my kids to love like Jesus did. Instead of responding to hate and violence with aggression or passivity, Jesus loved people and found creative ways to end cycles of violence. When kids play with guns, they pretend to shoot and kill. That doesn't teach loving behaviour.
2. I want my kids to practice forgiveness—not only to apologize for the hurt they have caused others, but to forgive those who have hurt them, as Jesus taught us. Violent play exerts power over others and increases the divide between people. It leaves no room for forgiveness.
3. War is not a game. In the Philippines we have been mere kilometers from armed conflict and have witnessed its devastating effects. Families without homes. Brothers and fathers killed in battle. Children whose deaths are “justified” as collateral damage. We have driven past tanks and under helicopters. We've seen bomb smoke lingering in the distance..
4. My grandfather is a WWII veteran who became a pacifist. He described his experience as nothing short of hell. Although he found

forgiveness for his actions at the foot of the cross, he struggled for years with the role he played in it as a Captain in the German Army. How can I let my kids pretend to shoot when my biggest role model suffered the realities of war?

5. Violence doesn't solve problems. We all have tendencies toward violence and my young sons are no different. But responding to violence with violence perpetuates the cycle. If I don't want my kids to strike out when they are angry, then I don't want them to “pretend” to strike out either.

6. While our actions might be good or bad, there are no “good guys” and “bad guys.” Concluding that people are either one or the other is contrary to Jesus' view. It is dehumanizing and fuels war.

“Playing with guns won't necessarily cause my children to choose violence as they grow up, but it certainly won't teach them anything about love and forgiveness,” Christina wrote in a recent article. “For us, teaching our kids this radical Jesus-way means we are not okay with violent play.”

*Christina and Darnell Barkman lead the new Peace Church congregation in Manila and develop relationships in their neighbourhood. You can support the Barkman's work via [donate.mennonitechurch.ca/barkman](http://donate.mennonitechurch.ca/barkman)*

*Mennonite Church Canada invites you to share with your congregation this Celebration Story. It should take no more than 2 minutes to read aloud. You might also consider sharing it through your church newsletter, bulletin board, website or other communication venue.*

*“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:11*