**Consumerism**

Helping kids understand how advertising works can help protect them from being exploited.

**Tips for parents of preschool kids**

* **Keep your children away from advertising as much as possible.** Let them watch commercial-free TV or use a DVR to skip through ads. And those sugar cereal Web sites with the free fun games? They are a ploy to get kids to buy more cereal.
* **Teach kids the difference between a TV program and a commercial.** Point out commercials and use a timer to show your children when a commercial begins and ends. Ask questions to help your kids recognize that the purpose of the commercial is to sell them a product. For example, ask, “What is the commercial selling?”

**Tips for parents of elementary school kids**

* **Help kids identify other types of advertising messages.** Watch TV or play a video game with your children and find the products and logos used as props or part of the storyline. Have a conversation about how the messages try to get kids to buy products.
* **Tell your kids never to click on an ad or fill out a form without your permission.** Contests and promotions are often devious ways for companies to get emails and phone numbers.
* **Start a conversation.** Ask your children if they know who created a particular ad and what words, images, or sounds were used to attract their attention. How did they feel after seeing the ad?
* **Explain “tricks” that advertisers use in commercials.** For example, advertisers often use Vaseline to make hamburgers look juicy. Talk with your children about the true purpose behind promotions, downloads, and links from games, websites, and cell phones. Kids need to know that no matter how clever the gimmicks or games, they’re all ads.
* **Teach your children about the popular techniques ad-makers use**, such as testimonials from celebrities – or everyday people. This will help your kids recognize how they’re being influenced.

**Tips for parents of middle and high school kids**

* **Demystify brands.** Brands sell images to kids as much as they sell products. Companies are smart about making brands seem so cool that every kid will want the products. Help your kids to know that they are much more than what they own.
* **Talk to kids about alcohol advertising.** Help keep your children away from alcohol-branded merchandise. Studies show that alcohol messages to kids are very effective. In fact, the more kids see ads, the more likely they are to drink.
* **Mobile phones are for communicating, not for contests.** Some advertisers get kids to trade personal information for freebies – soda, candy, etc. Not a good trade; the drink lasts a moment and the cell number is with advertisers forever.
* **Resisting peer pressure.** Many ads will count on the fact that kids are especially sensitive to peer pressure. Remind your children that advertisers are counting on this vulnerability to sell things.
* **What is left out?** Ask your children, “What might the advertiser be leaving out of the commercial and why?” For example, most food ads are not designed to tell us nutritional values. Encourage your kids to look elsewhere for missing information.

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