

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT ADVERTISING

Today's kids have become the most marketed-to generation in history, due to their spending power and their future influence as adult consumers. By talking to kids about advertising - how it works and how they're targeted - we can help them to become more savvy as consumers and more resistant to the pressures to be "cool."

Here are some tips on talking to kids about advertising.

Start young. Most children start to be able to tell the difference between advertising and other content around age **five**. By around age **eight**, most kids can understand that the purpose of advertising is to sell or promote products. In the following years, between **nine and twelve**, kids can learn that advertising does not just send a simple message ("this product exists") but that it has a persuasive message that may be misleading, and may not be based on rational arguments.

However, research also shows that it's never too early to start talking to kids about advertising. The trick is to follow your children's lead: if they ask why a cartoon character is on a cereal box, for instance, you can tell them it's because the people who make the cereal know kids like cartoon characters and so will ask for that kind of cereal.

Talking to children about advertising from an early age encourages them to become active - not passive - consumers of commercial messages.

EDUCATE YOUR KIDS ABOUT ADVERTISING AND HOW MARKETERS TARGET YOUNG PEOPLE

- Help kids understand that the main goal of advertising is to make them buy things—often things they don't need, and didn't even know they wanted until they've seen the ad.

- Explain that advertising is big business, one of the largest businesses in the world.
- Tell kids that the purpose of advertising is to persuade you to buy or to like something. Make sure they understand that not all ads make a "buy this" appeal: a lot of it is just aimed at making us feel good about a brand, by doing things like using cartoon mascots or hiring social media influencers to endorse it.

HELP YOUR KIDS SPOT ADS AROUND THEM.

- Public spaces, stadiums, schools, even our clothes often have branding on them. Sensitive your kids to the ads they see that promote brand awareness, so they can spot them in more subtle contexts like product placements in TV shows and movies. Using the [Can You Spot the Ad?](#) handout in the [Can You Spot the Ad?](#) lesson, help your children understand that branded characters are a kind of advertising even if they're not delivering a particular advertising message.
- Play the game [Co-Co's Adversmarts](#) with your children to help them recognize commercialized online environments and understand the tricks that they use to build brand loyalty and make you come back.
- If your kids watch unboxing videos or video game streamers, ask them if they think the people who made them got paid or got things for free. Does that change what you think about their opinion?

CHALLENGE YOUR CHILDREN'S DEFINITION OF "COOL"

Ask them the following questions:

- Do you ever feel bad about yourself for not owning something?
- Have you ever felt that people might like you more if you owned a certain item?
- Has an ad made you feel that you would like yourself more, or that others would like you more, if you owned the product the ad is selling?
- Do you ever worry about your looks? Have you ever felt that people would like you more if your face, body, skin or hair looked different?
- Has an ad ever made you feel that you would like yourself more, or others would like you more, if you changed your appearance with the product the ad was selling?

Discuss stereotyping, gender and body image issues in advertising. Ads often have more racial or gender stereotyping than other media, and frequently promote unrealistic and unhealthy body image in both girls and boys. When it comes to body image, make sure you're your children understand that what they're seeing is a fantasy, something that was made to sell a product and that camera tricks and photo manipulation are often used to make models conform to the "ideal" body shape. See our tip sheet [Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#) for more information on how to have these conversations.

LIMIT YOUR KIDS' EXPOSURE TO ADS

- Young children (over two years old) should watch mostly non-commercial television.

- If possible, have kids watch commercial programs on DVDs from the library or on streaming services, where they won't see TV commercials. But remember to point out product placement when you see it!
- Use browser plugins and apps like [Privacy Badger](#), [DuckDuckGo](#) and [Blokada](#) to block intrusive ads and stop your kids' data from being collected.
- Visit [Ad Choices](#) to opt out of interest-based ads on your (and your kids') computers and devices. You can also turn off ad personalisation on [Google](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#), [Snapchat](#) and [TikTok](#). This won't make your kids see fewer ads, but the ads they see won't be targeted based on their personal information.
- Teach kids to skip ads when they can. You can help them avoid in-app ads by teaching them to "Wait for the X" - don't tap popups right away (which will take you to the full ad) but wait until the X to close it appears.

EXPLAIN THE EFFECTS OF MASS CONSUMERISM ON THE PLANET AND SOCIETY

- **Talk about the effects of consumption** on the planet, and how the world's resources are distributed very unevenly among the world's people.
- **Celebrate Buy Nothing Day in your home.** Use it as a catalyst to talk about why we often buy things we don't need, and how we can become smarter consumers and better savers. You can have your children complete the Consumerism Diary from our [Buy Nothing Day](#) lesson to help them reflect on their own consumer habits.

- **Talk about the value of money.** One of the most important lessons we can teach our children is how to be smart about money. Our consumer culture promotes spending over saving, so we have to counter that message on a regular basis by discussing purchasing decisions and money-management skills with kids.
- **Discuss how to be a wise and responsible consumer.** Show kids how to comparison shop, read reviews and investigate warranties. Talk about the effect of mass consumerism on the environment. Encourage them to think about ways they can cut down on buying non-essential consumer products.
- **Encourage your kids to speak out** when they see offensive, deceitful or inappropriate advertising. Our guide [Talk Back!](#) tells you whom to contact for complaints about ads in different media.
- Avoid buying branded clothing. Try to limit the connection between brands (especially branded characters) and your child's identity.
- (If your child does become involved in a "fandom," encourage them to explore it through creative activities – such as writing, drawing or making their own games or videos – rather than buying things.)
- Resist [pester power](#): set rules about what you are willing to buy and when, and stick to them.
- Put as much time as possible between when kids start to want something (such as when they see an ad) and when you buy it for them.
- Explore libraries, second-hand stores, and garage sales. Many communities also have online Buy Nothing or Freecycle groups where you can get things for free and give away things you don't need.
- Model non-materialist behaviour yourself: talk out loud about what you're buying and why.
- Explain that there are children, even in your own community, who don't have many toys. Donate your old toys to a local women's shelter, or send them to an aid agency so they can be shipped to refugee camps in developing countries.

ENCOURAGE NON-COMMERCIAL VALUES IN YOUR KIDS

- Try to spend more time with your kids, not more money on them. What kids really want and need is time with their parents, not more consumer goods.
- Don't buy them things as a reward, or refuse to buy them things as a punishment.
- Don't buy them things to make them feel better when they're unhappy.
- Help kids learn to talk about their feelings and provide emotional support when they have troubles.
- Help them build a strong identity by praising qualities like effort, honesty and kindness.

PUT SHOPPING INTO PERSPECTIVE

- Explain that shopping should not be viewed as a hobby or pastime. It's something we do when we need to buy something and then we come home.
- Treat shopping as an errand, not a treat or a ritual.