

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT TOBACCO IN MEDIA

It's easy to think that Canada's strict regulations against promoting tobacco and cannabis to youth would prevent kids from seeing ads for them, but thanks to the internet, teens and even younger kids can be exposed to ads from other countries. The tobacco and cannabis industries also use social media and video sites to get around Canadian advertising regulations.

Even though you're competing against peer pressure and million-dollar marketing campaigns, research has shown that kids are less likely to get involved in smoking or vaping if they've discussed them with their parents. Talking to our kids about tobacco and cannabis advertising will help them recognize when they're being advertised to and identify the tricks companies use to normalize teen smoking and vaping, making their products seem safer and less addictive than they really are.

Here are some tips on talking to kids about vaping, tobacco and cannabis advertising.

- **Start young.** Many youth who vape start in grades seven or eight, so it's important that they know the facts by then. It's important to keep talking about it, too, because different messages will resonate at different ages: younger kids may be more concerned about health risks, while teens will need help resisting peer pressure.
- **Let them know the risks - but don't rely on scare tactics.** Many young people don't know the risks of vaping. In many cases, they don't understand that vape pods can have as much nicotine as a whole pack of cigarettes, that "after-market" pods (especially those used for vaping cannabis) often contain other harmful chemicals or that youth who vape are three times as likely to start smoking cigarettes as those that don't. Mention that nicotine addiction from smoking, vaping or nicotine pouches can lead to mood swings and

can have long-term cognitive costs for developing brains.

- Make sure they know that there is no evidence that nicotine has any health **benefits**, no matter what online "wellness" influencers may say.
- While it's important to make sure they know those risks, for most kids - especially teens - that isn't enough to keep them from vaping.
- **Show them it's less common than they think.** Social media can make it seem like everybody is smoking, vaping or drinking. If you like or follow one account or video that features one of those, the site's algorithm will show you more. That's important because teens are heavily influenced by what they think their peers are doing. In fact, though, **just one in six Canadian teens vape regularly.**
- **Explain how tobacco and cannabis marketers target young people.** Teens don't like knowing that they're being lied to or manipulated, but because vaping promotions often don't look like ads, they may not view them as critically. Make sure they understand that:
 - Tobacco and cannabis companies target teens by advertising on social networks like Instagram and Snapchat and on popular sites like YouTube. Because paid ads for tobacco or cannabis are against the rules on most of those sites, they pay "influencers" to post pictures or videos of themselves using the

product and then rely on other users to share the posts.

- Ask your kids if they have seen influencers, actors or musicians using or endorsing tobacco products. Point out that even if these were not paid posts, the person is using tobacco to sell an image of themselves as cool or rebellious.
- Vaping and nicotine pouch brands are mostly owned by tobacco companies. While they claim to sell them only as a way to quit smoking, most advertising focuses on their other appeals.
- Vaping and tobacco companies fight restrictions on advertising in sneaky ways. Show your kids a website like Unsmoke.ca. It may look like an anti-smoking initiative, but the website's real goal is to get people to support looser advertising rules. If teens aren't affected by ads, why do tobacco companies fight so hard to be able to advertise?
- Warn your kids about 'smart vapes'—devices equipped with touchscreens and built-in arcade games like Pac-Man or Tetris. Some even feature virtual pets that require the user to vape to 'feed' the pet or progress in the game.
- Discuss how nicotine pouches are often promoted as "wellness" or "productivity" aids or as "brain boosters." Explain that marketing them this way is strategy to hook youth, especially boys and young men, who might not otherwise be interested in nicotine.
- Vaping companies use the same old tricks as cigarette makers to sell their products. Just like cigarettes, vaping is sold with the promise that it will make you cool, that people who vape are free and independent and that vaping is sexy.

- Many kids have never seen cigarette ads. Show them a vape or nicotine pouch ad next to an old cigarette ad to show that both use the same bag of tricks.



- **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. Talk to kids about how tobacco ads target boys and girls differently: girls in vape ads are always portrayed as skinny and sexy and vape products aimed at girls are often pink or pastel, while ads aimed at boys are more likely to show people partying, suggest that vaping will make you popular or emphasize the product's technology.
- **Talk about your own experience.** Kids are particularly likely to listen if you're open about your own struggles with tobacco. If you've never used it, ask a relative or family friend who did to talk to them about it.
- **Encourage your kids to speak out** when they see offensive, deceitful or inappropriate advertising.
 - Kids can report social network posts or videos that are promoting smoking, vaping or cannabis to the platforms where they were posted.
 - Encourage them to look for missing health warnings: almost 9 in 10 branded vape posts on Instagram violate guidelines by hiding or shrinking required health warning.
 - Our website section [Taking Action](#) tells you whom to contact for complaints about ads in different media.
 - Check out our guide [Talk Back! How to Take Action on Media Issues](#) for more tips on how to respond to inappropriate ads and content.