



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of fourth-grade students

Children and Digital Media

The Influence of Commercials

Does social media really influence children? Absolutely! You probably can recall popular songs, jingles and advertising slogans from your youth. Marketing to children has gotten only more sophisticated. Children are very aware of influencers, brands and trends. They use this information to ask parents to buy the products they are seeing online.

One way to reduce the influence of commercials is to discuss with your children your reasons for purchasing a particular product. Teach your children what you look for. You also can talk back to the many ads (TV, billboards, print, online) you see when you are with your children. Point out flaws in reasoning or photoshop techniques that make a product appear better than it really is.

Children may learn misleading information about nutrition from commercials. More than half the food ads on children's TV are for heavily sugared foods such as presweetened cereals and snack foods. Less than 4% of the food ads directed to children are for meat, bread, fruits, vegetables or dairy products.

This nutritional "education" is important because food habits are established in childhood. Children are in what some commercials refer to as "the cavity-prone years." A diet high in sugary foods can increase the incidence of cavities. A diet high in sugary or fatty foods also can increase the chances for weight problems. Advertising through product placement in movies, video games and online are clever ways to get younger customers to want a particular product.

Help Your Child Become a Good Consumer of Television

To combat obesity and help children adopt a healthier lifestyle, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends kids get at least an hour a day of physical activity. Limit total screen time to no more than 1-2 hours per day. Remove screens from children's bedrooms. Encourage physical and social activities away from screens.

The impact of TV on children and families continues to be hotly debated. Even a quick glance at the prevalence of screens in daily life explains why. According to the CDC:

- The average TV set is in operation more than seven hours a day.
- Children ages 8-10 spend about six hours a day in front of a screen watching TV, using social media and playing video games.
- Nearly four of the six hours are spent watching TV.
- By the time young people graduate from high school, they will have spent more time watching screens than on any other activity except sleeping.



Alternatives to Screen Time

- Walks and talks
- Creative play and board games
- Podcasts
- Storytelling
- Family meetings
- Gardening
- Exercise of your choice: play ball, ride bike, skate, ski, sled
- Crafts, hobbies, experiments
- Singing and musical activities
- Letter writing – pen pals, relatives
- View photo albums – family histories
- Visiting – social interaction, conversation
- Exploring – nature, your community, the attic

Tips to Make Media Work for You:

- **Make TV time family time.** Identify programs that the family can watch together. Spend time talking about what happened on a show. What feelings do family members have about a character or the way a show ended? How would your child change the show? These types of questions can lead to an evening of sharing that can strengthen your relationship with your child and pass on your values.
- **Turn the device off when the show is over.** Model this selective viewing for your children.
- **Discuss family values.** Ask your child to identify the ways in which a family on a show is different from your own family. Discuss why your family has its own values, beliefs and home rules.
- **Is your child able to tell the difference between the stunts used on screens and reality?** Explain that the stunts in movies, TV programs, videos and computer games may be dangerous and untrained people should not attempt them.
- **Plan follow-up activities after watching.** Trips to the library, zoo, museum, lake or even the backyard can expand the meaning of the many programs that deal with animal and plant life, math, music and most any subject area.
- **Challenge your child to be a good consumer.** Spend time listing products shown in ads and decide with your child which of these products to sample. Compare the products with the ad. This activity works best and is least expensive for food commercials.
- **As a family, try doing your own research.** Watch your regular TV programs together and write down the products advertised. Note what kind and how many ads are shown when stations know that children are home from school.
- **Use all of the above activities with videos and computer games your children play, too.**

Consider These Points for All Digital Media:

- Level of violence
- Potential impact of stereotypes
- Potential impact on school performance
- Potential impact on physical health
- Potential impact on language development
- Potential impact on behavior and imagination
- Balance in your child's life

Children who watch television in moderation (less than two hours each day) do better in school, are less likely to be obese and have better social skills.

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Media Violence

Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of media violence. They are less able than adults to distinguish between fantasy and reality, less able to understand real-world consequences of violence and more prone to imitate what they see on television and online. Parents should limit their children's exposure to media violence. Instead, they should work together to select good-quality media and make participation a constructive activity.

Reading Books Together

Reading together can be a highlight for children and parents. Often adults read regularly to younger children but quit once the children can read on their own. School-age kids enjoy snuggling up to a good story with you. Read a high-quality chapter book together and then see the movie based on that book. Rich conversations can emerge from these comparisons.



Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Choose one of the activities from the alternatives to screen time list and do it together.

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