



## Effect of advertising on children's body image

TV watching is a major activity for Australian children and adolescents. If a child watches the average of two and a half hours per day (the average for an Australian child) and if this is mainly commercial TV he or she will see around 75 advertisements in a day, or around 22,000 per year. This topic covers:

- what does advertising do
- what are the particular problems for children and young people
- what can parents do.

### What does advertising do

Advertising often works by making us feel unhappy with our lives, anxious and dissatisfied. The messages are that you are not OK unless you buy this, wear that brand, wash your hair with, and look like that very slim model. It attacks our self esteem.

### What are the particular problems for children and young people

- girls in early adolescence are particularly vulnerable to messages about being OK as they are sensitive about their body image and whether they measure up to the peer group
- recent research indicates that there is a marked link between TV watching, and negative body and eating disorders. (Becker, A, 2002)
- two studies at South Australia's Flinders University have shown that television advertising featuring idealised thinness negatively affected both the mood and the body image of adolescent girls, with those in the 13-15 year age group being more affected. (Hargreaves, D, 2002).

### What can parents do

- from an early age give your children a solid sense of their worth and encourage them to have high self esteem, by valuing them for what they are, and as they are
- minimise children's exposure to commercial TV in the early years. Anxieties created by advertising start early.
- act as media educators from an early age, pointing out the techniques used in advertising, and discussing how people in the TV world look compared to how most of us do
- encourage media education at your children's schools, so that children are well equipped to read the media. A study at Flinders University has shown that media education can promote critical viewing skills and less concern about body image and weight. (Wade, T, 2002)
- challenge corporate Australia to have a conscience about damaging the mental and physical health of young Australians

### References

Becker, A (2002) "Marked link found between eating disorders and TV"

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Wade, T (2002) "Media literacy staves off eating disorders"

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