

Top Ten Tips for Parents

strategies for healthy TV viewing

- 1 Lead by example**
Children's viewing patterns often reflect their parents'
- 2 Choose which programmes to watch on TV**
Turn it on only when you have specially chosen to watch a programme
- 3 Tape programmes the family wants to see**
Use a VCR for control and flexibility
- 4 Choose some times when the TV is off**
Plan TV free times during the day
- 5 Choose a family area which is a TV free space**
Make it user friendly and fun
- 6 Talk about programmes seen on TV**
Discuss characters, stories, themes
- 7 Encourage children to describe how TV affects them**
Ask them how they feel when watching TV: happy, sad, worried, angry
- 8 Play 'Spot the Gimmicks and Trickery' in TV commercials**
Do we know the 'real' size, speed, performance
- 9 Make a list of other things for the family to do**
Time out for exercise, see friends, discover...
- 10 Find the OFF button**
And practise using it

Key references

- 1 Australian Broadcasting Authority (1996) *Children's Television Standards* Sydney ABA 1996
- 2 Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (1999) *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice* Sydney FACTS 1999
- 3 Frith, Stephen, Biggins, Barbara & Newlands, Tracy (1995) *Marketing Toys: It's Child's Play* proceedings of a conference Sydney, March 1995 UNSW New College Institute for Values Research 1995
- 4 Young Media Australia *Sugar Shows and Fast Food Frenzies* (1997) First stage report of research into food advertising to children on television Adelaide YMA 1997

Further information about YMA services and resources is available from

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Young Media Australia (YMA) exists to promote a quality media environment for Australian children and to raise community awareness of the needs of children and young people in relation to print, electronic and screen based media.

Young Media Australia is the trading name of the Australian Council on Children and the Media.
ABN: 16 005 214 531

small screen

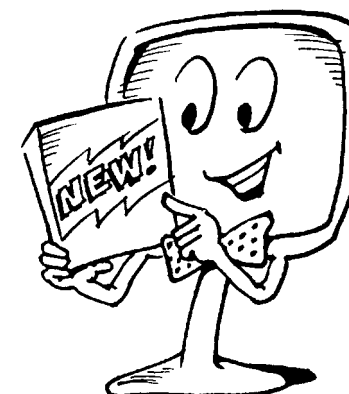
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Advertising & children

is advertising a 'fair game' for kids?



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updated brochure January 2003

Advertising and Children

overview

A child watching commercial TV sees up to 15 minutes advertising each hour. A child watching 2 hours and 30 minutes per day (the present average) will see 75 ads a day, or 525 ads a week, or 27,300 ads a year.

The majority of these ads will be for fast, fatty, salty, sugary food and drink of low nutritional value, for expensive toys (in season), and for household goods and toiletries.

The average child under five will not distinguish between programmes and commercials. The average child under eight will not discern, or have defences against, the selling intent of advertisements.

nutrition

The majority of food ads to which children are exposed are for products of low nutritional value. The selling message for these processed foods is based on the appeal of 'fun to eat' and peer esteem.

Children (with limited understanding of language) interpret phrases such as 'good to eat' or 'fruit flavoured' as 'good for you', as 'containing fruit' or 'has fruit in it'.

The claims of food ads cannot be assessed by children in contrast to the salutary effect of hands-on experience of a toy that doesn't perform as expected.

The only regulatory protection of direct relevance to food ads and nutrition is the Australian Broadcasting Authority's Children's Television Standard 19(6), viz: "An advertisement for a food product may not contain any misleading or incorrect information about the nutritional value of that product".

toy-based programmes

There is a growing trend for cartoon series to be used to 'bring to life' a range of toys. The toys become the heroes of these cartoons. There also may be paid 30-second advertisements for related products.

Toy-based programmes compound the difficulty that children under five have in distinguishing between programmes and advertisements.

Most of the toys are designed to be played with violently. The associated programmes show them how. Some remedies have been devised for caregivers in dealing with play based on violent TV. (See YMA's *Does Media Violence Hurt Your Children?*)

Toy tie-in programmes are subsidised by toy manufacturers, and are available (along with associated advertising) more cheaply than (and pose a significant threat to the ongoing viability of) programmes designed simply to entertain children, rather than sell them things. These are presently no regulatory remedies available for this problem.

promotion of unhealthy lifestyles

Cigarette advertisements are banned from TV. Alcohol ads may only be screened in M or MA classification periods (12 noon–3:00pm or after 8:30pm), or during live sports broadcasts on weekends and public holidays.

Alcohol and cigarette use is effectively promoted through use by characters in dramas and 'soapies'. Their use is common in stress related scenarios.

Healthier portrayals of alcohol and cigarette use could be achieved through co-operation between health professionals and TV scriptwriters, and still preserve dramatic impact. Parental comment on these practices during or after screening of programmes can be effective in moderating the impact of unhealthy practices displayed by healthy-looking heroes.

are advertisements directed towards children fair?

Advertisements directed to children under eight are inherently unfair, as children are unable to evaluate product claims and they trust the source of the claims.

Children between eight and 10 can be made anxious by ads, as they know ads don't always tell the truth. Children also are aware that they don't always know when ads are truthful or not.

Children are vulnerable to 'host selling' techniques (i.e. sales messages by hosts or characters from programmes). These messages have authority for children.

Children can be misled or deceived by technique (size, shape, speed, performance) used to display products to best advantage.

what to do?

If possible, parents should choose a commercial-free environment.

TV advertisements directed at children come under the directions of the Australian Broadcasting Authority's standards.

Regulatory remedies exist (e.g. "No ad may mislead or deceive a child" – CTS 17) and also for display techniques used in ads (see Australian Broadcasting Authority Children's Television Standard 19), but are not well and consistently applied.

how to complain about ads

- Contact the TV station, network, ABA;
- Consult YMA's *Talking Back* information kit for media consumers.