

Skill-Building Opportunities

Influence of Commercials

Question: It seems like every time my child watches videos and television she starts asking for the things she sees advertised. How can I curb this behavior without getting rid of media altogether?

Advertising is effective or companies wouldn't pay all those \$\$\$ to produce, print and air it. And kids are a desirable and profitable market demographic, one to hook early. Try to view advertising as an opportunity for you to help your daughter be aware of media influences while promoting the life skill of Critical Thinking.

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.

1

Watch together and have “just in time” conversations about the commercials.

As an adult, you know the purpose of commercials is to sell you something, but children need help in recognizing that purpose. To kids, commercials can seem like entertainment, just like the shows. As you watch commercials together, talk about the products and the strategies the advertiser is using. Ask her things like:

- “What is this ad trying to sell?”
- “How is this ad trying to sell things to children?”

These conversations, as we describe in greater detail below, will help develop your child's awareness of the impact of commercials, and help her improve her ability to take in information, think about it, reflect on it and analyze it.

2

Encourage your child to question and think scientifically about the ads and products.

Model and promote scientific thinking by asking your daughter to question the claims, uses and purposes of products. This will also encourage her to pursue the truth and learn more, an essential building block for later learning. Ask her:

- “How can you find out if this information is true? What are the advertisers trying to make us feel or do with this commercial?”

3

Turn your child's requests into games and activities to promote critical viewing skills.

David Considine, writing for the Center for Media Literacy, suggests that when parents view television with their children, they can guide their children to think about the

content, the presentation, the external forces shaping the ads and their connection with reality.

Children progress in their ability to evaluate the accuracy of information, moving from an understanding that others might not know something, to an understanding that others might be intentionally or unintentionally deceitful. You can help her hone these abilities by promoting critical viewing skills in fun and engaging ways.

- **Pros and Cons.** While watching television, ask her to create a list that includes the pros and cons of the products she wants. This strategy promotes Critical Thinking as it asks her to reflect on the difference between her wants and her needs. She must also think about the effect of outside sources on what she wants.
- **Commercial Critic.** Your child can be a commercial critic and ask questions that promote the skills of analyzing and evaluating like:
 - “Why did the advertising company choose that way of selling the product?”
 - “How were they doing it? Were they trying to say all the cool kids wear this brand of clothes? Were they trying to use peer pressure or sex or adventure or humor to sell this product?”
 - “Does this ad work? Does it make you remember the name of the product?”
 - “Do you want to buy it? Why or why not?”
- **Facts versus Opinion.** Encourage your child to be a detective to explore what’s true and what’s only opinion within the commercial by asking questions like: “Is this ad accurate? Are the claims they are making true?”