

## ***Children and Media: Nurturing Savvy Communication Consumers***

Children spend more time sitting in front of electronic screens than doing any other activity besides sleeping. [According to the National Institute on Media and the Family, "Media Use and Obesity among Children" Fact Sheet, [www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts\\_tvandobchild.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts_tvandobchild.shtml) (accessed October 23, 2006).]

Kids' excessive screen time comes with all kinds of hazards: lack of physical activity, exposure to adult themes and content, and lack of interaction with family and peers. And then there are the ads—for almost every product imaginable, including alcohol and medications intended for adult use only. Ads also send strong messages about personal appearance and other topics to which children and teens are especially attuned. Fortunately, you can do many things as a parent to help your children and teens navigate the world of marketing.

### ***Try it...***

#### ***For parents with children ages birth to 5***

- Limit young children's computer, television, and video exposure. Make sure they have ample opportunity for imaginative play.
- Pay attention to what your kids watch. Know the general content and themes of the shows and videos you let them see. Research shows that some children begin to build "brand loyalty" at age two, so choose shows that include little or no advertising.

#### ***For parents with children ages 6 - 9***

- Talk about differences between commercial advertising and program content on the television. While very young children cannot make a distinction, by this age they can begin to understand the difference.
- Set aside media-free family time on evenings or weekends. Play games, read aloud together, toast marshmallows, listen to music, play outside, go on an outing, or plan some other enjoyable activity together.

#### ***For parents with children ages 10 - 15***

- Discuss with your children the ways advertisements persuade us that certain products will make life better. Talk about whether, and how, "stuff" can make us happy, healthy, and more secure.
- Know the sites your children visit on the Internet. Ask them to show you a few favorites. Talk with other parents about what they know. Ask your child's teachers to tell you about popular sites.
- Let your children know you may occasionally check your computer's log of Internet activity. Talk to them about any Web sites that are unfamiliar to you.

#### ***For parents with children ages 16 - 18***

- With your teenagers, check out the Web site [www.mediafamily.org](http://www.mediafamily.org), which offers information about becoming savvy media consumers.

- Instruct your teens never to give out personal information or sign up for promotions and programs without first checking in with you.

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