

# Selling to Kids

This discussion guide will help you facilitate a conversation with parents about kids and advertising. Use the following questions and stories to get parents thinking and talking about this issue. You may also want to show the Selling to Kids parent tip video and hand out the Selling to Kids parent tip sheet to help spark the discussion.

## What's going on with your kids?

Questions to encourage parents to share experiences, concerns, and solutions

1. Advertisers try to reach kids in different ways. In what ways do media target your child? Your preteen? Your teen?
2. Do you have ways to filter or reduce advertising in your household?
3. Marketers spend billions of dollars targeting teens, while most teens say “It doesn’t affect me.” How can you help teens understand that advertising affects everyone — including them?
4. What are some ways you can help your children understand the value of non-material things?
5. What challenges have you faced with your children around media and the buying bug? How have you handled the situation? What has worked? What hasn’t?

## Elementary school child

Seven-year-old Cindy loves to watch Dora the Explorer every afternoon. Her mother thinks the show is educational and great, but is having a hard time dealing with the nonstop requests for Dora dolls, Dora cups, Dora pajamas, and Dora backpacks. It seems everywhere she turns there’s another piece of Dora merchandise that Cindy begs her to buy.

She shares her frustration with a group of parents at the park and they chime in: “It’s like they see a commercial and say, ‘I want that! I want that!’ — without even thinking about it.” Another parent says, “And now they get bombarded with ads on the kid Web sites too.” Another parent says, “My biggest problem is the products tied to movies. Every time a movie comes out my child begs for all the stuff — the toys, the video game, T-shirts — it never ends! I feel like I can’t win.”

- » What techniques do commercials for toys, food, and other products use to grab kids’ attention? How can you help your children think critically while encountering commercials or online ads?
- » How can parents use trips to the store as a learning experience to teach children about how stores market to kids?

### Elementary / middle school child

Timothy loves to play on Millsberry, a virtual world Web site hosted by General Mills. When his mom began to notice that he was spending a lot of time on the site, she explored it to get an idea of what it was. She was concerned by all of the ads — especially for sugary cereals. Tim's doctor says he's at risk for childhood obesity, and his mom is trying to get her son to eat healthier. She found some similar sites that are ad-free and have nothing to do with junk food, and checked them out. Then she told Timothy she didn't want him visiting Millsberry anymore, and directed him to the sites she approved of.

- » What do you think of Tim's mom's strategy? How can she include him in the search for sites they both can live with?
- » How can Tim's mom use Millsberry as a way to discuss food advertising through advergames (ads for products that are disguised as games)?

### High school teen

Fifteen-year-old Alicia is crazy about designer fashion. She likes to watch Project Runway and other reality shows about celebrities. She also keeps up with the latest trends in fashion magazines and always searches for the products they feature in their spreads. Alicia tells her parents she wants to be famous and launch her own clothing line when she is older. Her mother is becoming concerned about her daughter's expensive tastes in clothing and accessories. Alicia refuses to wear certain brands and gets up an extra hour early each day to do her hair and makeup before school.

- » How can Alicia's parents provide enriching experiences to nourish her interest in fashion — and minimize her exposure to celebrity-saturated media?
- » As a developmental stage, teens want to express their identity, individuality, and peer group membership by the clothes they wear. What possible impacts could name-brand items have on teens' identity and relationships with peers?
- » In what ways does the beauty and fashion industry target young women differently from young men — or even older women?