



What do media have to do with children's use of Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs?

Children at this age are often less curious about alcohol, tobacco and drug use. Exposure to substance use and references in the media should be limited. This tip sheet can help you monitor and guide your children's media choices in order to optimize their health and development.

How can media affect substance use?



- * Some children's movies show alcohol and tobacco use portrayed both positively and negatively, in both good and bad roles, without any dialogue regarding the negative health consequences.

- ❖ Many popular commercials, billboards and branded products for alcohol contain elements that appeal to children, such as slapstick humor, popular music, engaging storylines, special effects and, people or animal characters. Children at this age are especially vulnerable to suggestion and can be easily swayed by these attractive ads, believing that alcohol consumption is commonplace and attractive.

- ❖ In today's world alcohol and tobacco ads as well as drug references in media are nearly unavoidable (everything from posters and video games to music and sports games) and can influence even young children's beliefs and attitudes towards substance use.

What can I do?

- * Limit your child's access to developmentally inappropriate content by reading reviews and ratings, watching trailers, and checking out the content first before allowing your child to watch/interact with it. When your child is exposed, point out the incident and talk to your child about the consequences.

- ❖ Children under age 8 haven't yet developed the cognitive capability to understand persuasive intent, thus it is important to break down the ads and references they see with them so that they can recognize how the messages make them feel and can start to identify manipulative content. This will help them develop critical thinking skills in the future as well.

- ❖ Be aware of what you are watching and/or playing when your child is present. Know that even if the content seems to be above their level of understanding, they can still be affected by the substance use messages and thus should not be engaging with the content.

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