



## I want! I Want! I WANT!:: Building Good Consumers

### Marketing to Children

Sharing your values with your children today is much more difficult than it was in generations past. Marketers are competing with you for the hearts and minds of your children. Today's marketers are spending 50 million dollars on advertising every day, and are using many new means, including Internet Web sites, to reach your child with their messages to buy the latest junk foods, toys, and clothes.

This endless targeting of marketing to children is not good for them. Research suggests that aggressive marketing to kids can create a host of psychological and behavioral problems, including dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, childhood obesity, eating disorders, increased violence, and family stress. (Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy*, 2004)

### I want! I Want! I WANT!:: The Nag Factor

Are you a victim of the Nag Factor? Does your child beg you to buy junk food, toys, or clothes that she sees advertised? Advertisers are getting savvy to the fact that children are very good at wearing down their parents. By the time children are

in their teens they have learned well how to use "pester power." Typically kids this age will ask nine times for an advertised product in the hope their parents will give in, according to a recent survey conducted by The Center for a New American Dream. More than half the parents surveyed said they do, eventually, buy what their children ask for.

### Stopping Consumer Monsters

You don't have to accept the commercialization of childhood, but it will take some action to get your child away from the marketers. Here are some things you can do.

### No TV for Babies and Toddlers

You might have seen shows or videos that claim that they are educational for babies and toddlers. But despite the growing numbers of shows aimed at the youngest children, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television for children under the age of two. They believe that time spent with people, talking, playing, and just being together are the most important things that infants and toddlers need.

### Make Your Child a Savvy Consumer

Studies show that children under age 8 are not able to tell the difference between TV shows and commercials. Help your child understand when a commercial comes on. You might want to say, "It's time for a commercial. We'll be able to watch the rest of your show when the commercials are over."

**Ask your child questions to help him think carefully and talk about TV ads. Here are some questions to ask:**

- What did you notice first when you saw this ad?
- What is being sold in this ad?
- Do you think you need that product? Why?
- Do you think that product really looks, tastes, or works the same way as it seems to in the ad?
- What else would you need to know about that product before deciding if you should buy it?
- Do you think that product will make you happy? Why?

Teach your children that advertisers want their money and that they don't always tell you the truth. Talking about this with kids can help them become educated consumers. Help children learn from experience when they are disappointed with a toy. Often a toy that looks so good in the ads really doesn't work as well as the commercial leads you to believe. A toy might break easily or be a disappointment in another way. This is a great time to talk about how the toy didn't live up to the advertising message. When children have these experiences they learn first-hand that marketers are more interested in your money than in telling the truth.

## Limit Screen Time

No TV in children's bedrooms. Parents should know when children are watching TV.

Limit TV watching and time spent on the computer to 2 hours or less per day for children over age 3.

Use a TV guide to plan what shows your child wants to watch, then turn off the TV when they are over.

Watch TV shows with your child and talk with her about what you are seeing.

Some parents tape their child's favorite TV shows, so they can fast forward through the commercials.

Turn the TV off and do other family activities, such as playing games, going for a walk, doing puzzles, reading books together, or going to the library.

## Beware of the Internet

A number of Internet Web sites offer games for children to play. Beware: While your child is playing, he will also see lots of advertising for junk foods and toys. Some Web site games are tied to buying toys or snacks to move to different levels of play.

## Teach Your Child to Save

Start giving your child an allowance that he can save and use to buy things he wants. Even children under five can be given a small allowance. When you are in the store and your child is begging for candy or a toy, ask him if he has enough money. You will need to help your young child to figure it out. You can say: "It will take three allowances for you to buy this." If you insist that your child stays in her budget you help her learn how to manage her money. Having to save and make choices forces kids to really think. As they grow they can decide if having a brand name is so important that they want to spend the extra money on it. This approach teaches kids to

One mom said her daughter nagged and nagged her to buy an expensive doll. Instead of pulling out her credit card, mom started giving her daughter an allowance of 50 cents every week. Whenever the daughter nagged to buy the doll, the mom said, "When you save enough money, you can buy that doll." It didn't take long for the nagging to stop because mom didn't give in. One day the mom asked her daughter if she had enough money to buy her doll. The daughter told her she changed her mind and didn't really want that doll anymore.

manage their money and it's a great way to handle children who whine to buy, buy, buy.

## Buy Buy Buy does not spell L-O-V-E

Busy parents often feel they don't have enough time to spend with their children. Many parents say they give in to their child's whining and nagging and buy what they want because parents feel guilty. They reason, if they can't spend time with their child, they'll spend money to buy whatever their child wants. Buy Buy Buy does not spell L-O-V-E.

## Books to Read to Children

The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies, by Stan Berenstain and Jan Berenstain, Random House, 1988.

The Berenstain Bears, Trouble with Money, by Stan Berenstain and Jan Berenstain, Random House, 1983.

Sheep in a Shop, by Nancy E. Shaw, Sandpiper, 1991.

The Great Pet Sale, by Mick Inkpen, Orchard Books, 1999.

Benny's Pennies, by Pat Brisson, Bantam Doubleday Books, 1993.

## Books and Resources for Adults

Born to Buy, by Juliet Schor. New York: Scribner. 2004.

Can't Buy My Love, by Jean Kilbourne. New York: Touchstone. 1999.

"Media and Young Children Action Guide," by Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE). [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org)

"Sexy Halloween Costumes..... For Little Girls?" by Melissa Healy. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. [www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org)

"Tips for Parenting in a Commercial Culture," by New American Dream. [www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org)

So Sexy So Soon, by Diane Levin and Jean Kilbourne. New York: Ballantine Books. 2008.

"Toy Action Guide," by Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE). [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org)

"TV and Your Child," by Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE). [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org)

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### Think Before You Buy

*Think about toys you bought for your child in the past year.*

Do they have a lot of play value, meaning is your child still interested in playing with them?

How many toys are no longer interesting to your child?

How many toys broke soon after you bought them?

<b>Stop wasting your money on toys with little play value. Here's a list of questions to ask yourself before buying a new toy:</b>	Yes	No
Can a child use this toy in more than one way?		
Will the toy allow children to be in charge of how they play with it? Children should do the playing, not sit and watch as toys play for them.		
Is the toy appealing to children at more than one age or stage of development?		
Is the toy linked to video games, TV shows, or movies? Great toys don't need to advertise for others!		
Can the toy be used with other toys for new and more complex play?		
Will the toy be sturdy and not break easily during play?		
Will children want to play with this toy over time as they develop new interests and skills?		
Does this toy promote respectful, non-stereotyped, non-violent play among children?		
Will this toy help children develop skills that are important for further learning?		