

HANDY
REFERENCE
GUIDE

YOUR KIDS

and

ADS

WHERE
DO THESE
ADS
APPEAR?

KIDS:
AN EASY
TARGET

WHAT YOU
CAN DO

to protect
your kids

EFFECTS
on health
and
behaviour

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YOUR KIDS and ADS

Advertising is everywhere these days. You can't avoid it.

You've probably even become used to it. Kids, too, are constantly exposed to advertising, but they are much more susceptible than adults when it comes to sales and promotional messages.

For the past thirty years, legislation in Quebec has banned commercial advertising that targets children under the age of thirteen.

The Office de la protection du consommateur oversees compliance with this legislation. But even when advertising is within legal limits, it can have serious repercussions on children.

The growing number of ways to convey advertising messages is having dramatic consequences. Television is no longer the sole advertising medium. Companies now even use video games to display their products – and that's just one example.

As parents or adults who are frequently around children, what can we do to better protect them? First of all, we need to understand the phenomenon. The next step involves talking about it, educating young people and developing their critical judgement.

This document was compiled by the
Office de la protection du consommateur in collaboration
with Les Éditions Protégez-Vous to heighten your awareness
about advertising and its effects on children.

Office
de la protection
du consommateur

Québec



KIDS ARE VULNERABLE

Children form their social identity very early – not just by interacting with their family and friends, but also through their exposure to the media. They're like sponges, absorbing everything around them. They sing the jingles of their favourite commercials as if they were nursery rhymes. Even before they know how to read they're able to recognize hundreds of brand names. That's not surprising when you consider that a child can be exposed to over 40,000 television commercials every year!

WHY ARE KIDS VULNERABLE?

PROMOTION = INFORMATION

Generally speaking, children can't distinguish between advertising and non-promotional information. It's more difficult for a child to tell the difference between the two because of the proliferation of advertisements cropping up on an increasingly wide range of media: games, packaging, films, websites, cars, etc.

SOURCE: M. SOLOMON, J. ZAICHKOWSKY and R. POLEGATO (1999). *Consumer Behaviour – Buying, Having and Being*. Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada. 645 p.

MAGIC AND REALITY

Children perceive ads as dazzling images and fun-filled sounds that are part of a magic world. It's all so captivating and alluring! A child's sense of judgement is not adequately developed at an early age. That's why children tend to view and accept these messages as representations of reality.

"Daddy, I want a Princess!"

WHY ARE KIDS TARGETED?

EASY TARGETS

The values and patterns of behaviour children adopt will follow them into their adult lives. Children are highly sought-after targets because once they're sold on a brand they'll be loyal to it for years to come.

SOURCE: C. COSSETTE (www.com.ulaval.ca/cossette/conferencier/ConferencesRecentes/confsv).

AN ENORMOUS POWER OF INFLUENCE

Children start to take part in family spending very early on. They make demands and even purchases. Their power of influence was estimated at

\$500 billion in the U.S. in 2003.

SOURCE: U.S. Market for Kid's Foods and Beverages (2003). 5th edition. Report synopsis (www.marketresearch.com).



Age 8

Still has difficulty distinguishing between promotional and non-promotional information

Age 5

Makes purchases with the help of parents

Age 4

Recognizes hundreds of brand logos before knowing how to read

Age 2

Starts asking parents to buy consumer items

A number of studies in recent years have focused on the link between advertising and children's health. Most of the results prove that TV advertising influences young people, often in negative ways. This is especially true in the case of eating habits.



have weight problems

More than one in five children in Quebec are overweight. Of these, **7%** suffer from obesity and **15%** from excess weight. SOURCE: Government of Quebec (2006). "Investing for the Future": the 2006-2012 government action plan to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent weight-related problems. [www.msss.gouv.qc.ca].

Once obese, always obese?

According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, 40% of obese seven-year-olds will become obese adults, with all the health risks that go along with it: cardiovascular diseases; diabetes; orthopaedic, psychological and social disorders.

THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN



Encouraging a healthy lifestyle and preventing weight-related problems are government priorities.

Backed by a \$400 million budget spread over a ten-year period, "Investing for the Future": the 2006-2012 government action plan to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent weight-related problems is intended to improve the quality of life of Quebecers. The Office de la protection du consommateur is participating in this project.

EFFECTS ON



40%
of children in Quebec eat dinner while watching TV
SOURCE: Institut de la statistique du Québec (2004).



ADVERTISING AND OBESITY

Obesity can be due to several factors. Being sedentary is one of them but there are many more: eating high-calorie, nutrient-poor foods, adverse economic and social conditions, not to mention enticing and intensive advertising for foods

that are laden with salt, sugar, or fat, and ads for fast food restaurants.

The World Health Organization recognizes that advertising is a contributing factor to childhood obesity.

SOURCE: [www.who.int].

"LOOK, MOM! That's the restaurant where we Eat fresh!"



TV AND JUNK FOOD
As children spend **MORE** time in front of the tube, their attitude toward junk food becomes **MORE** positive, they buy **MORE** into junk food ads and eat **MORE** junk food.

SOURCE: Social Science Medicine (October 2007).

GOAL Lower the prevalence of obesity and excess weight among young people and adults by 2012.

EFFECTS ON

BEHAVIOUR

Children quickly adopt values conveyed by advertising, ranging from rampant consumerism to sexual stereotypes. These influences are determining factors that shape children's concept of the world and social standards, as well as their body image and self esteem. Effects on their behaviour may be less obvious than weight problems but they are just as serious.

hypersexualization

Children who are regularly exposed to sexuality in an idealized setting try to emulate male and female stereotypes.

This form of behaviour can lead to sexual relations at an increasingly early age.

SOURCE: J. B. BERROS (2007). *Génération télévision - La relation controversée de l'enfant avec la télévision* (television generation: children's controversial relationship with television), 424 p.

TRIVIALIZATION

Repeated exposure to products intended for adults, such as alcohol, can result in the perception that their consumption is commonplace and widely accepted despite the fact that the effects of alcohol abuse on health are well known.

SOURCE: JEFFREY JENSEN ARNETT, Editor. *Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents, and the Media*. California: Sage Publications, Inc. (2007). 537 p.

mental health

Advertising can also affect a child's mental health. When children are targeted by ads, they feel compelled to respond to the urge to consume. When they are unable to do so, their frustration mounts and may potentially lead to violent behaviour. Additionally, the excessive materialism that advertizing encourages can affect a child's self esteem and values, and might ultimately result in narcissism and feelings of dissatisfaction.

FRUSTRATION
ANXIETY
Low self esteem

SOURCES: J. B. BERROS (2007). *Génération télévision - La relation controversée de l'enfant avec la télévision* (television generation: children's controversial relationship with television).
MEDIA AWARENESS NETWORK: Special Issues for Young Children. [www.education-medias.ca].

"I want it NOW!"

Advertising creates needs that children want fulfilled immediately. Kids often pester adults to get their way. Think about the last tantrum you were subjected to in the toy aisle.

"BRAND" MARKETING

For pre-teens, brand names (especially when it comes to clothing) play an important role in identity and the sense of belonging. Being accepted is crucial at this age. Advertising capitalizes on concerns young people have about their image by offering them products to boost their popularity.

SOURCE: MEDIA AWARENESS NETWORK: Special Issues for Tweens and Teens [www.education-medias.ca].

girls as objects

The more young girls are exposed to stereotyped images, the more they suffer from eating disorders and low self esteem. These attitudes can have adverse effects on their ability to succeed.

SOURCE: S. BISSONNETTE, *Sexy inc. Our Children under the Influence*, NFB (2007).



Television has long been the primary vehicle for advertising. But advertising strategists today use a host of other methods to reach both children and adult consumers. The change goes hand in hand with the emergence of new forms of communication and entertainment (online games, cell phones, networking sites, etc.) that are especially prevalent in children's social environments.

ADVERTISING

S₁ T₂ R₁ A₁ T₂ E₁ G₂ I₁ E₁ S₁

Where does advertising pop up in kids' daily lives?

- ☒ Free collectable toy prizes
- ☒ Contests printed on packaging or products that include a prize
- ☒ Toy reproductions of consumer products
- ☒ Products featured on programs, films and video games
- ☒ Interactive games and contests on the Internet
- ☒ Product displays in public places
- ☒ Educational materials designed around a specific product and distributed in schools



PROMOTIONAL WEBSITES FOR CHILDREN

Some products have their own websites specifically designed to target children. This is especially true of the food industry. Promotional games that feature products or brands are a frequent tactic.

These sites also use viral or "buzz" marketing by encouraging kids to tell their friends about the product or brand.

SOURCE: E. MOORE (2006). *It's Child Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children*, A Kaiser Family Foundation Report, 57 p.

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

There has always been a strong consensus in Quebec that commercial advertising targeting children should be prohibited. What's more, Quebec's legislation on the issue has become an internationally recognized reference tool.

"No person may make use of commercial advertising directed at persons under thirteen years of age."

Consumer Protection Act, Section 248.

The Quebec government adopted a new Consumer Protection Act in 1978 in order to include, among other provisions, sections for the protection of children with respect to advertising. The Supreme Court of Canada confirmed the Act's validity in 1989.

HOW TO DETERMINE WHETHER AN AD IS TARGETING CHILDREN

The ad's context must be taken into account by asking the following questions:

- How is the message being conveyed?
- What types of goods are being advertised?
- When and where does the ad appear?

Consumer Protection Act, Section 249.

ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

Governments and organizations the world over have concerns about advertisements targeting children. More than 60 countries monitor television commercials directed at children through statutes and self-regulation. Norway and Sweden, like Quebec, have banned this type of advertising. In addition, the World Health Organization, the United Nations and Consumers International are carrying out major research projects, heightening public awareness and participating in other activities related to this issue. SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (2004) *Marketing Food to Children: the Global Regulatory Environment*, 88 p.



Ads permitted under certain conditions:

- educational advertising (for example: a safety awareness campaign);
- advertisements for shows or performances intended for children;
- advertisements appearing in store windows or displays, or on containers, wrapping or labels;
- advertisements in magazines that are intended for children and that are sold and published at intervals of not more than three months.

Regulation Respecting the Application of the Consumer Protection Act, Sections 87 and following.



WHAT YOU

COULD

DO TO PROTECT YOUR KIDS

Advertising is everywhere. Its pervasiveness has far-reaching effects on children's health and behaviour. How can we make our kids less vulnerable to it? As a parent or someone who is frequently around children, you can help them develop their judgement and critical thinking skills so that they can become responsible consumers. Here are some activities for you and your children to do together.



Game 1

Help your kids spot the advertising that's all around them. It's not just on TV. It's on packaging, toys, videogames, and more.

SPOT TEN ADS!

Grab a pencil and a pad of paper and take a short walk with your child – down the street, in a store, or even just around the house. Write down all the places where you notice advertising. The game's over once you've spotted ten advertising venues.

Talk about what advertising is with your kids.

The goal of advertising is to sell a product or service. To do that, marketers often play on our emotions. They associate what they are selling with happiness and are quick to exaggerate a product's quality or value.

CREATE AN AD!

Ask your child to pretend to be an advertising strategist. You play the role of the consumer. Your child needs to sell you a specific item. Once he or she manages to convince you (because that's the object of the game), discuss the tactics your child used and compare those strategies with the ones used in advertising.

Game 2

Teach your kids to be sceptical of the enticing look junk foods might have.

These types of ads often feature meticulously designed visual presentations that portray foods as being better than they really are...both nutritionally and from the standpoint of appeal. Help your children understand the difference between food products and the image created for them.

TASTE THIS!

Give your child the same foods in different packaging: some in neutral packaging; others in packaging associated with junk foods. Notice which ones your child prefers. Ask your child why he or she likes them better. Discuss the kind of foods that are usually found in these types of packaging.

Game 3

FILE A COMPLAINT

If you notice an ad targeting children that does not seem to comply with the Consumer Protection Act, you can file a complaint with the Office de la protection du consommateur. The Office looks into complaints and conducts investigations when appropriate. Charges may be filed that could lead to convictions.

To file a complaint, visit the **Office de la protection du consommateur website: www.opc.gouv.qc.ca**

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For more information about the Office de la protection du consommateur, visit www.opc.gouv.qc.ca.

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