

How to take on the junk food marketers in the classroom

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Junk food advertisements pervade children's lives on many levels and are almost impossible to avoid. Whenever the TV is on, especially during children's viewing times, food advertisements bombard us. Open a children's magazine, turn on the radio, look at the billboards, stroll through a supermarket, and it becomes evident that the marketing of junk food is at an all time high.

Australia has more food ads (12 per hour) on children's television than any other country in the world, including the US and the UK. Australian children watch approximately 23 hours of television each per week, so at 12 food ads per hour they see roughly 276 ads over the seven days.

Of these, over 75 percent are for poor quality, nutritionally questionable foods, such as chocolate, soft drink, confectionary, breakfast cereals and fast food. Compared to hamburgers, confectionary and breakfast cereals, how often do children see ads for bananas or carrots?

Relentless messages from the advertising industry use sophisticated marketing techniques. Vulnerable children (and often vulnerable parents) can easily fall prey to these techniques. Consider this fact: brand loyalties can be established as early as age two and, by the time children reach school age, most can recognise hundreds of brand logos.

What can teachers do to help stem the tide of influence from food manufacturers so that children get a balanced account? How can teachers help students scrutinise food advertisements and their inherent food messages with confidence and perception? Try some of these ideas....

- ◆ Show your students some food commercials and watch for the techniques and practices mentioned above.
- ◆ Discuss these methods with the students. Teach them what to look out for and have them report back to you. Kids love being detectives and feeling superior to the advertisers by being able to 'catch them out'.
- ◆ Make a point of looking for and discussing advertisements that deliberately mislead with so called 'healthy' foods. Bring some of the culprit products to class and get the kids to read the ingredient labels. This soon shows up the claims.
- ◆ Discuss the power of advertising with your students and talk about the ways in which



Food marketers start 'em young

advertisers try to increase their desire to purchase.

- ◆ As a class or school, join or start a campaign and become advocates for junk food free children's television. You will be surprised how many kids, particularly teenaged girls, would support a move to reduce any temptations to eat junk food.
- ◆ Discuss billboards and their messages with the students so they gain an understanding

of the forces that try to control our spending and eating habits.

- ◆ Point out that the reason food manufacturers advertise poor quality foods is because they are made with cheap ingredients and so there is a huge mark up on these items.
- ◆ When advertisers use sports celebrities to endorse their product, find out all about the personality involved. Talk about whether that celebrity would need to look after their health to be fit and strong and their probable reasons for undertaking the advertisement (money, increasing celebrity status etc.).
- ◆ Discuss supermarket tactics. Where are products placed and why? Checkout aisles are notorious for pester power.
- ◆ Have your students spend a day/week listing all the prominent places they see junk food placed for tempting purchase (such as service stations, video stores, and cinemas).
- ◆ Point out product placement such as confectionary, fast food and soft drink in movies and television programs. This is a particularly insidious method and often goes unnoticed.
- ◆ Encourage your students to aim for less than one hour per day of television viewing, or better still, to turn it off altogether! Research has shown that the simple act of turning off the TV helps kids eat less, become more active, and lose weight.



Jacqui Deighan runs food education programs in schools throughout Victoria and offers food education resources nationally. Visit www.naturalkitchenstrategies.com.au

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