

## Co-Viewing With Your Kids — Tip Sheet

### THINKING CRITICALLY

- Media are made by people
- Media are made for commercial reasons
- Media are socially and politically important
- People react differently
- The medium affects its meaning

### ASKING QUESTIONS

- Sample questions

### TOP TIPS

- Respect their media choices
- Look for teachable moments
- Give them a chance to create media, not just analyze it

### TO LEARN MORE...

One of the most important things you can do to raise media-savvy kids is to co-view media with your children. That includes listening to their music, watching TV, movies and videos together and playing the games they enjoy. While just being with them is an important step, this is also a great opportunity to help your kids think critically about the media they consume, by asking them questions about it and, sometimes, answering back.

### THINKING CRITICALLY

There are five key ideas that help kids think critically about media. You can start to make your kids aware of these concepts almost as soon as they start asking you questions!

#### **Media are made by people.**

It's not obvious to kids that somebody made the media products they enjoy, and even older kids and teens may forget that every element of any media product is the result of *somebody's* decision. Recognizing that media are made by people, who make conscious decisions about what they're doing, also helps kids to understand that even when media products look realistic, they're not real and don't necessarily reflect what the real world is like. (Even things that aren't the result of a *conscious* decision are often the result of the creators' *unconscious* assumptions.)

It can be an eye-opener for children to realize that TV shows, like books, are written and created by people with their own biases and experiences. When you watch a program with children, ask them to think

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about who created the show and whether they think the writers and producers really understood the types of people they are portraying or whether they're basing characters on preconceived notions about groups of people.

*For example:* you can show them how families on TV or in books do – and don't – resemble your family or their friends' families.

**Media are made for commercial reasons.** Almost all media are made so that the creators can make money from them. Because of that, most of the decisions they make are influenced by wanting to create a product that will make them money.

*For example:* you can show children how different boxes for cereals aimed at kids and cereals aimed at adults look.

**Media are socially and politically important.**

We get a lot of our ideas about what the world is like, about what's right and wrong, and even about who we are from media. Many of these messages can be very subtle: for example, we get them from who the main characters are, who and what are shown as being important, and what things characters do that are rewarded or punished. That's why even the most "meaningless" media like cartoons or video games can still have a big effect on us.

*For example:* you can talk about the male and female characters in your kids' favourite shows or games and talk about the differences between them.

**Different people will react differently to media.**

Though all media have meaning, part of that meaning is determined by each viewer, player or listener. That's because we all bring our own experiences to media: we may get a different meaning from something depending on how alike or unlike we are to the main character, or if what we're watching reflects values that are different from those of our family or our culture. Understanding this is a key step in helping kids to see things from other people's points of view.

*For example:* you can show your kids an ad for a product that's aimed at a very different audience and ask whether it makes the product look appealing to them, and then have them imagine how it might appeal to the audience it's aimed at.

**The medium a story is told in affects its meaning.**

Each medium has its own way of telling a story or giving you information, and each one has different strengths and limitations. Most TV shows, for instance, are written in chunks that are about seven to ten minutes long, and each of these segments has to end with something that'll make you come back after the commercials. A lot of media products also fall into genres (sitcoms, action movies, and so on) that have their own rules and expectations.

*For example:* read a book to or with your kids and then watch a cartoon or movie that was adapted from it. How was it changed? Why did those changes have to be made to adapt it to a different medium? How did that change how you felt about the story?

### ASKING QUESTIONS

The most important media literacy habit we can encourage in our kids is to ask questions about the media they consume. You can start early by asking them questions about their media and, as they get older, encourage them to ask questions of their own.

#### Sample questions:

- How does this [ad/show/website/movie/song/brand and so on] get and keep your attention?
- How will this media product help someone make money? What effect might this have on the story, characters or themes?
- How might this media product have been affected by things that the people who created it believed or assumed?
- Who is expected to watch, play or listen to this? (What sex, what age, what race, what interests, and so on) What effect might the audience it's aimed at have on its story, characters and themes?
- How might this be different if it were aimed at a different audience? How might other people see this media product differently?
- How does this make you feel, based on how similar or different you are from the people portrayed?
- Does what you see in media reflect your experience? Does it reflect the diversity of the society you live in?
- Who is shown as being in a position of power? Who is not? Who is not shown at all?
- What kinds of people, things and activities are rewarded or shown positively? What are punished or shown negatively? Why might these people and things be shown this way?
- What *medium* is this media product (TV show, movie, video game, magazine and so on). How would it be different if it were in another medium?
- What *genre* is this media product (kids' cartoon, action movie, role-playing game, and so on). What are some things that products in this genre have in common – characters, ideas, or story elements that appear often? In what ways are images changed by techniques like computer effects, lighting, makeup, camera angles, and so on?
- If the media product includes violence, ask kids how they think the people involved would feel if this happened in real life. What would be the actual results of the violence? What would happen to the people involved?
- Ask kids to think about how realistically males and females are portrayed in the media. Have them compare the images of men and women they see on TV with people they know in real life. Are women generally shown as more concerned about personal relationships, while men are more concerned about their careers?
- What do the voices of the bad characters in cartoons sound like? Do they have an accent? What about the good, kind, sweet characters?
- Why do food ads use language like “a *part* of this nutritious breakfast”? What else has to be added to make the breakfast nutritious?

## TOP TIPS

Here are a few key things to remember when it comes to encouraging media literacy in your kids:

**Respect their media choices.** While you have a right to decide what media products you'll allow in your home, your kids may develop very different tastes in media than yours. Resist the urge to try to show them what's "wrong" about their media choices, even if some of the content makes you uncomfortable. Instead, give them the tools to ask their own questions and reach their own conclusions. Don't forget to look at positive examples when talking about things like stereotyping.

**Look for teachable moments.** Media isn't just scripted and packaged products: breaking news stories, scandals, and celebrity meltdowns are all great opportunities for media analysis.

**Give them a chance to create media, not just analyze it.** Today it's easier than ever for kids to create short movies, music videos and even to add their critical commentary to the latest ad or viral video. There's no substitute for hands-on experience to help kids understand how things like editing and music can influence the way a movie or TV show affects us emotionally.

## TO LEARN MORE...

To delve more deeply into media literacy, check out the *Media Literacy Fundamentals* section on our website: <http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy-fundamentals/media-literacy-fundamentals>

For more specific information on how to talk to your kids about some of the media literacy topics raised here, check out these parent tipsheets:

- *Talking to Kids About Media Violence* [http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet\\_Talking\\_Kids\\_Media\\_Violence.pdf](http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet_Talking_Kids_Media_Violence.pdf)
- *Talking to Kids About Advertising* <http://mediasmarts.ca/tipsheet/talking-kids-about-advertising-tip-sheet>
- *Talking to Kids About Racial Stereotypes* <http://mediasmarts.ca/tipsheet/talking-kids-about-racial-stereotypes-tip-sheet>
- *Talking to Kids About Gender Stereotypes* [http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet\\_Talking\\_Kids\\_Gender\\_Stereotypes.pdf](http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet_Talking_Kids_Gender_Stereotypes.pdf)
- *Talking to Kids About The News* <http://mediasmarts.ca/tipsheet/talking-kids-about-news-tip-sheet>