
Common Sense on Smoking and Media

Seeing through the smokescreen

4,000 teens taking up smoking every day may sound like a lot. But not to Big Tobacco. Smoking sales are down, so tobacco companies are driving advertisers to create new ways to influence our kids to smoke. Luckily, science (and the law) is on our side. The health dangers are well advertised and real, but so is our opportunity to teach kids about who is trying to influence them and why.

Some facts

Nearly 4,000 teens start smoking every day (American Cancer Institute, 2008).

Exposure to pro-tobacco marketing and media more than doubles the odds that a child will start smoking (Pediatric Adolescent Medicine, 2006).

Nearly a third of teen boys try to control their weight through unhealthy methods — including smoking (National Eating Disorders Association, 2010).

What is smoking in the media?

As the overall rates of new smokers are declining, cigarette manufacturers have resorted to product placement and print ads to get a new generation hooked on tobacco. Advertising cigarettes on TV is against the law, but you'll see smoking in a majority of movies aimed at kids. Celebrities are routinely photographed with a cigarette in their hands, and a cigarette is still seen as a cool accessory for rebels and rock stars.

Why it matters

According to the American Cancer Society, kids who see a lot of smoking in the movies are almost three times more likely than those who don't see it to start smoking. And more than 50 percent of kids who started smoking did so because they'd seen smoking in the movies.

Kids who watch more TV start smoking at an earlier age. The relationship between TV viewing and age of starting smoking is stronger than that of peer smoking, parental smoking, or gender.

Parent tips for younger kids

- » **Try to keep your children away from ads and entertainment with smoking.** Tell them that smoking makes people really sick — and makes them smell bad!
- » **Deglamorize cigarette smoking in entertainment.** Talk with your kids about smoking scenes. Ask your kids if they realize that cigarette companies have used product placement to lure them into being future smokers.
- » **Share smoking facts.** Kids think they're immune and immortal. The death statistics could be eye-opening, even for the "won't happen to me" age group.

Parent tips for middle and high school kids

- » **Don't buy in.** Debunk myths about cigarettes and weight management and about "light" cigarettes. Don't let your kids buy posters of "cool" movie characters or celebrities who are smoking.
- » **Don't kid yourself.** Young teens are influenced profoundly by celebrity behavior, and they will do whatever it takes to be cool. If you suspect your teen is smoking, it's time for a tough talk on the health consequences of the choice they're making.