MediaSmarts – Canada’s Centre for Digital and Media Literacy

Tips for co-viewing with your kids

**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.