



Marketing and Advertising to Children

This information supports the following Healthy Beginnings 2-5 guidelines:

- All attempts should be made to avoid exposing children to marketing and advertising.

Marketing and advertising directed at children (and parents) has a strong impact on the kinds of foods and beverages that children want to eat. The Internet, television, games, toys and characters on food products, clothing, utensils and placemats are all marketing tools that companies use to sell their products. Among children two to six years old, even a brief exposure (10 to 30 seconds) to advertisements can influence their food, drink and toy preferences (Henry, H. K. M., & Borzekowski, D. L. G., 2011). Marketing companies direct advertising at children to build lifelong brand loyalty, meaning a person will buy products repeatedly from the same company. (Childhood Obesity Foundation, 2013).

Most foods and beverages promoted to children are high in sugar, fat and/or salt (sodium) (Food Marketing to Youth, 2013) and therefore do not meet Canada's Food Guide recommendations. Marketing and advertising encourages children to develop the unhealthy attitudes, behaviours and preferences for unhealthy food and beverages that we all want children to avoid (Media Smarts, 2013).

Studies show that children under the age of five years cannot tell the difference between commercials and television programming (Childhood Obesity Foundation, 2013). Even older children do not have the cognitive abilities to distinguish sales pitches from facts and stories (Childhood Obesity Foundation, 2013). Children usually believe what they are told in advertising of unhealthy food and beverages and this negatively affects their food preferences (Childhood Obesity Foundation, 2013). Television commercials cause children to influence parental purchasing, as children are more likely to ask their parents for items they have seen advertised on TV (Henry, H. K. M., & Borzekowski, D. L. G., 2011). It has been estimated that in 2005, 99 % of food and drink advertised to children during Saturday morning children's television programming was high in sugar, fat and/or salt (sodium) (Faculty of Public Health of the Royal College of Physicians of the United Kingdom, 2005).



Early learning practitioners have a responsibility to support healthy childhood growth and development by creating supportive healthy environments that are free of marketing and advertising, and that foster healthy choices (Government of Nova Scotia, 2011). Together, we need to create supportive environments where children and families live, work and play.



Here are some tips to help do this.

1. Allow only commercial-free TV programs or tape TV programs and movies in advance. Be sure to fast-forward through commercials in both TV programs and movies. Watch children's programming on commercial-free channels.
2. If children are using computers, avoid company-sponsored websites, advertisements on Internet sites and all digital advertising through email, text messaging, online quizzes, puzzles and advergimes (videogame promoting a brand-name product by featuring it as part of the game).
3. Educate families so they also limit their children's screen time and become advocates for stricter rules on food and beverage advertising to children.
4. Do **not** accept any of the following:
 - a) Promotional products such as collectible toys, books and sports equipment that intend to advertise specific brands or characters that promote unhealthy food.
 - b) Sponsorship of items such as playground equipment or facility furniture by companies that promote unhealthy food and beverages.
 - c) Promotional placemats, dishes, utensils, trays and napkins that advertise specific brands or characters (Government of Nova Scotia, 2011).
 - d) All donations of food/beverages from companies that promote unhealthy food and beverages.
 - e) Free samples of food/beverages or discount coupons for food/beverages that have been provided by companies who do not promote healthy food choices.
5. Do not sing songs (such as the "fast food song"), read books or play games that promote unhealthy food and beverages.
6. Encourage families to talk about inappropriate marketing and advertising with their children. Suggest that families discuss what a particular advertisement is trying to do (the advertiser's motives) and how that fits into a healthy lifestyle.

