

Separating Fact from Fiction in the New Media World

Would you allow a complete stranger to come into your home and spend time with your children? Of course not. Yet, many parents allow their children to spend large amounts of unsupervised time watching television, surfing the Web, or listening to popular music.

While there are many good and educational television programs, Web sites, and popular songs, there are also many that contain messages harmful to youth - messages about drugs, alcohol, body image, sex, and violence - and kids often take these messages to heart, especially when they come from some of their favorite celebrities.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, parents can help their children by watching and listening to the messages their children receive. This critical viewing skill is called media literacy. There are many ways parents can help their kids become media literate. Some suggestions:

- Watch television, surf the Web, and listen to music with your child. Find out what kinds of media they are being exposed to. Ask probing questions about why your child finds these shows, Web sites, and songs appealing. Have them look or listen for pro-drug or other unhealthy messages and discuss how to resist those behaviors.
- Remind your child that there are people - actors, producers, directors, screenwriters, songwriters, corporate sponsors, advertising executives, and others - whose job it is to create these messages to inform or entertain. Discuss any messages about drugs that are untrue or that show drug use in a positive way. Point out the disadvantages of using drugs, like failure in school or losing the trust of the family.
- Help your child look for media messages that might not be so obvious. Ask questions like, "Does this song suggest that violence is a good way to solve problems?" "According to this movie, what are women like? What are men like?" "What does this commercial say will happen if you wear those jeans? Is that true?" "Is drug use portrayed as positive or glamorous?"
- Use movies, advertising, or TV shows that show drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes as a catalyst to discuss why people drink or smoke and why the behavior was perhaps not necessary to the scene.

This article is brought to you by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. For more information, visit the [Parent's Entertainment Guide](#), presented by The AntiDrug.com and E! Online, for additional tips on kid-friendly entertainment.

[Denise Witmer and About.com discuss online safety](#) and what parents need to know about teens and Internet usage.

Additional Resources

Dads and Daughters: Fathers Matter www.dadsanddaughters.org

Partnership for a Drug-Free America: www.drugfreeamerica.org

Prevention Through Service Alliance: www.ptsanet.org