



FOOD ADVERTISING UNIT

The Advertising Association
Abford House, 15 Wilton Road, London SW1V 1NJ
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7828 2771; Fax: +44 (0) 20 7931 0376; e-mail: fau@fau.org.uk

PARENT POWER²

A Practical Guide to Children, Shopping and Advertisements

Written and conceived by Jenina Bas

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, we published ParentPower, a booklet about raising children in a commercial world. We have since received many requests for it from parents, teachers and others involved in the day-to-day care of children. More and more, they recognise that the commercial nature of modern life is relevant to how children grow up, and that it is useful to acknowledge it when bringing up a family today.

ParentPower² is a guide to routine commercial pressures in family life. It is written primarily for parents because they provide the basic standards by which a child learns about the world, but will interest anyone who works with children and young people. The booklet looks at some of the aspects of commercialism experienced by families - such as advertising and promotion - and gives some practical advice on how they might best be approached.

How to use this guide:

- *Read it and consider the issues it addresses*
- *Refer to it when facing an issue connected to children and advertising or commercialism*
- *Use it as a basis for discussion with other parents, teachers or child carers*

The day-to-day experience of being a parent doesn't always make it easy to think about such issues. When you're having a hard day, and the kids want to stop at the newsagent's on the way home from school to try out a new snack - which could spoil their appetite for later - you wouldn't be human if you didn't feel some pressure.

Later on, though, when the kids are in bed and things have quietened down, most parents know that children's desire to buy things - or, more precisely, their need to ask you to buy things for them - is part of the complex process of growing up. One of the problems for us as parents is that the world our children are growing up in is so different from the world we remember, or think we remember, as children.

Many of us who are parents of young children today might have had a mother who stayed at home to look after us full time, at least while we were younger. Now, mothers are encouraged to go back into paid work and many do, either because they want to or simply to help make ends meet. Similarly, we didn't have the many modern conveniences we have today, such as videos, superstores, dishwashers and microwave ovens. Many of these things have made our lives easier and more enjoyable, but they

do add to the feeling that modern life is faster, more rushed, frantic and competitive than it ever was when we were growing up. Therefore, the things we remember our parents doing when they brought us up may not be enough to prepare us fully for all the issues and situations we now face ourselves as parents in a world that has moved on.

In producing **ParentPower²**, we interviewed parents, children, young people and teachers. This was to get a better idea of the tasks involved in raising young, dependent children into responsible grown-ups able to make decisions for themselves, including those that involve some sort of commercial judgement. The responses we got from children and young people - aged from eight to 17 - suggested a readiness on their part to 'grow up' in the best possible sense. The responses we got from the parents showed that - whatever they believed to be an 'ideal world' - they generally saw commercial pressures as a practical reality of modern life, and placed it in the context of the family's particular values, habits and beliefs.

ParentPower² does not claim to be representative of all the views of parents, teachers and children, or a definitive guide to the trials and tribulations of raising young people in today's commercial world. Nevertheless, the quoted comments contained in the coming pages were spoken by the parents, teachers and children we talked to and who have provided many useful pointers, tips and anecdotes. We actually found some potentially interesting differences between those who lived in inner city areas and those in more rural environments. It is beyond the scope of ParentPower² to be able to investigate these differences in any detail, but it could be a useful subject for a larger, more structured investigation in the future.

This booklet has been written because there is more advertising and marketing today than thirty years ago. Accompanying this change is an increasing awareness amongst advertisers and advertising agencies - as well as the media that carry advertising and get much of their revenue from advertising - of the responsibilities they hold. After all, our world is very much shaped by the many different things that we collectively see, hear, read and talk about.

ParentPower² is divided into three main sections. The first tells something about the way parents, children and teachers see and deal with the issue of children and commercial pressures. The second is a more detailed guide on some common situations that families face, with suggestions on how they might be dealt with. The final section, in addition to giving the advertisers' view of advertising and commercial pressure, describes how advertising on television, radio, in the press and on posters is regulated, and how to make a complaint about a particular advertisement. It also provides a summary of the lengthy and detailed codes governing advertising to children. There is also a list of relevant and related articles and books for those interested in exploring children and commercialism further.

In preparing this booklet, we have been conscious that families can be very different and, for this reason, we emphasise that whatever parents do rests fundamentally on what they believe to be best. Also, young people are the adult citizens of tomorrow who will not be under the control and protection of parents and teachers for ever. As such, their rights and their views need to be respected.

Key points:

- *Consider the commercial nature of the modern world, because it forms part of the environment in which children grow up*
- *Think about how the world has changed from when we were young, and how this affects raising children*
- *Use ParentPower² as an introduction and guide to some of these issues*

SECTION 1

Commercial Pressure: The Parents' View

Parents generally have mixed feelings about advertising that appeals to children. A lot just see it as a normal part of modern life. A few feel strongly that advertising and children do not go together. However, the general sentiment is simply an understanding that it is an inevitable result of the modern, competitive world.

Overall, parents recognise a number of distinct issues. The first is that, up to a certain age - generally around five to seven - children can be very much attracted by the superficial aspects of promoted products - "they're more attracted to the packaging than to the content", as one parent said. The second is that, if something captures their fancy, "the children can keep going on about it". The third involves a specific point that a parent has strong views about, like certain types of sales promotions or specific types of food. The fourth is, as one mother put it, "Working parents can feel guilty and buy things to appease their children. But will they remember the toys you bought, or rather that you hugged them and were there for them?" Finally, there is cost.

Parents generally feel confident that their children become progressively able to make commercial decisions about goods and services that interest them, such as food, clothes and entertainment. This is, of course, not surprising since parents recognise that they, and the home environment that they create, are the main influences on learning about buying, shopping and using goods. Parents typically start guiding their children about commercial decision-making in relation to food, because food is the earliest product children use for themselves and about which they can have preferences and opinions. So, parents start introducing their children to what is good to buy and eat from a very early age - "almost as soon as you start weaning them", in the words of one mother. What is more, parents have many different ways of doing it.

Discussion

Discussion is the most spontaneous part of family life. Food is a generally common point of discussion, with parents often saying: "I tell them which foods are good or bad for them"; "I push healthy eating and try to find a balance"; and, "I ask them to look at the label, and tell me what's in the food". As children get older, a parent often feels they can have a say about a wider range of purchases, typically starting with toys. "If it is a toy [my child wants] I will occasionally buy it, but mostly I explain why I won't," is how one parent put it in relation to his child under 10. Other parents point out how they also involve their children in broader family decisions, like where to go on holiday.

Controlling Choice

In the area of food, most parents feel in control of what their children eat because they do the shopping and cooking. Giving a limited choice or, as some parents say, "sometimes no choice", is a common way of dealing with mealtimes at home. Generally, parents have an idea of what kinds of foods the family enjoys. The same approach tends to be taken when families eat out, although price is also a factor. "We discuss where we are going to eat and give general guidelines and suggestions with an eye to the price as much as anything," is how one parent described his family's approach.

Compromise and Negotiation

Of all the ways that parents use to deal with their children's demands, discussing a compromise on a one-to-one basis not only acknowledges their right to have a view, but also plays a part in developing a sense of responsibility and regard for the views of others. The outcome, however, can depend on any number of factors, ranging from how tired you're feeling to whether you feel their recent behaviour deserves a treat or not. Also, because this approach can be so open ended, there are times when "anything for a quiet life" would be many a parent's response. "A lot depends on whether they're being reasonable or annoying, and being annoying doesn't necessarily mean they get what they want - it's often the opposite because I just stop talking to them when I'm furious!" explained one mother of three. Certainly, it's one way children learn that it doesn't pay to go over the line.

Delaying

Putting off a request is something many parents do. For some things, such as a toy, the delay can be

until a special occasion like Christmas or a birthday. However, it also works for other smaller treats - "...until the weekend, if they behave well", said a parent - and to good effect. Children learn that treats often have to be earned. In addition, putting things off increases the likelihood of unimportant requests simply being forgotten by both parent and child!

Watching television - together

Most families watch TV together as a matter of course. Certainly, even very young children know they can go with their mother to the kitchen for a snack during a commercial break without missing out on the story. These days, children are tending to watch more adult programmes, which some people worry about. However, there is also evidence that this type of viewing is often done in an open family setting, where some kind of discussion between parents and children can take place. Of course, a lot of the talk is about the programme, not the ads. Nevertheless, ads that are memorable are also often discussed, regardless of whether the product featured is of interest to a member of the family.

In a very young child, who has just cottoned on to the fact that ads are about things parents bring home from shops, persistent "I wants" can emerge after every eye-catching ad! It can make any parent irritated, especially if it becomes repeated ritual used by the child just to get attention. Parents who have had this experience emphasise the importance of discouraging the behaviour by simply responding with a standardised "maybe", "we'll see" or "if it's being sold where we shop". Such behaviour tends to be a phase of early childhood and, before too long, it often peters out to make way for more selective and reasonable requests.

A TV set in the bedroom?

Research suggests that a lot of children - possibly more than half of those aged nine and over - have a television set in their bedroom. It also indicates that a similar proportion may have an electronic games console, too, and a few even a computer. It is important to remember that these sorts of activities and entertainments should not be a substitute for more physically active sports, hobbies and games which help children burn off energy and keep fit and healthy.

In addition, despite the many positive aspects of new media - for example, the use of CD Roms for learning - some parents are worried when it seems that children are able to gain access to a number of things they shouldn't, whether on video, cinema, computer game or the Internet. A few parents have even gone to the extent of not having a television in the house. However, as one mother of a family without a TV said, "The children know what's going on anyway because they watch television at their friends' houses and television programmes are what they talk about in the playground. And they have asked me to buy things for them just as much as children who have a television. What they ask for tends to be the kind of things their friends are buying, so advertising itself doesn't seem to me to be a particular issue. I've tended to try to put a greater emphasis on independence of mind. What's more, I think people should put ads in perspective when you consider some of the programmes children are watching."

Key points:

- *Parents guide their children about making commercial decisions from a young age, often starting with food*
- *Discussion is a good way to involve the whole family in making commercial decisions, although parents can control the choices on offer or delay things*
- *Family TV watching encourages discussion about programmes and ads*
- *Keeping an eye on children's leisure activities, including TV watching, is a good idea*

Commercial Pressure: The Children's View

Without thinking about it - and without children realising it - most parents offer their children a sound education in becoming consumers from a very young age. One parent said that exposing children to advertising, and discussing it with them, gave young people "an inoculation" against it. Indeed, many of the day to day activities that parents do with their children, from watching TV to going shopping, are important ways in which young people are introduced to the commercial aspects of the modern world and learn to operate in it. This is reflected by the memories of older children who recall shopping

tantrums and other similar behaviour, which often resulted in being "told off" or taken out of the shop unceremoniously. Equally, they refer to parental examples as the way that they learned about the ins and outs of shopping, cooking and watching TV.

- Older children also recall a wide range of routine experiences which act as early practical lessons. This can include anything - from playing with a toy cooking set or a cash till, carefully choosing what to buy with pocket money, or making a cake instead of buying one, to saving up and choosing a present for a member of the family or a friend, or even just going along with their parents on a shopping trip. Virtually all children old enough to talk can remember a time when their parents refused to buy them something because it was too expensive, too 'grown-up' or 'not good for you'.
- Tantrums and nagging at such refusals gradually disappear as children get older and develop both an understanding that they cannot have everything they want as well as an ability to reach a compromise. "I can offer to pay for some of it with my pocket money" or "I can offer to do something around the house that I don't normally do", are negotiating tactics that two children said worked from time to time!
- The experience of trying out a promoted new product only to be disappointed is also a widely shared experience amongst older children. This results in a healthy scepticism about all advertising. "Ads always make things look really yummy, but sometimes you try it and it's awful or not as nice as the one you're already buying," was the view of one 12-year-old, whose friends all nodded in agreement.
- Children recall their own experiences when considering how parents can best deal with commercial pressure. Common responses and recommendations were: "Don't take children shopping all the time", "Don't spoil them" and "Be firm".
- However, it would be wrong to conclude from older children's understanding of the commercial process that today's generation are unrealistically virtuous. When negotiating with their parents, older children are well aware of the value of having a product that they want endorsed by their friend and, better still, other adults - not least the other parent! As one 13-year-old put it, "If Mum won't get it, I'll talk Dad into it."
- The tendency to rebel and be different becomes more evident in the middle-teens when, for example, fast foods become the usual food consumed with friends, and movies and videos with an adult age rating become appealing. Also, from around the age of 11, specific ideas about which brands of, for example, shoes and clothes are fashionable become more important, often as part of the change from childhood to adulthood. Not surprisingly, therefore, some parents feel that "I have no influence on the teenagers . . ."
- There's been a good deal of research into the way children make decisions about things they want to buy and judgments about things that are marketed and advertised. A psychological study at Exeter University into food preferences points to children naturally categorising different foods according to whether they are seen to be 'healthy' or 'unhealthy', whether they are best eaten as meals or as snacks, and whether they are raw or cooked and processed in some way. It concluded that by around the age of seven to eight, children have a good basic understanding of different foods and what makes up a healthy diet.
- This is also around the age that they begin to know what being a 'good' consumer in the family context is all about and when they consciously start to realise that, "I used to make a fuss in shops when I wanted something, but I don't do it now". "Take no nonsense, and occasionally let them [the children] win," was the advice of a 17-year-old to any parent, which is surprisingly in tune with the view of a mother who said, "Don't make a drama out of it. Ads are part of life and the more you attract attention to them, the more attractive they become."
- The preferences of children and young people for certain types of food and other products change as they grow older, reflecting the different stages of children's social development. In the same way that dolls and toy diggers might give way to clothes and computer games as children grow older, sweets might give way to fast foods as the kind of things that are enjoyed amongst friends.

Parents tend to fall into two camps in this respect.

Some worry at all stages about their children eating too many sweets or having too many toy guns. Others recognise that they need to meet their children part of the way and agree to things like a television in their child's bedroom. Generally, however, there is a recognition that a great deal of a

child's day to day activities, including eating, are still very much within the family environment and therefore within the influence of parents.

- **Victor, 8, ...**
has a younger brother of three. He says: "I don't really ask for anything much except football stuff. Anyway, my mum doesn't have much time for shopping and tells me things are expensive." But later on, he remembers there are occasions that he gets the kind of things he does like -- "Oh yeah, at Christmas and stuff". He says he no longer has tantrums, in shops or anywhere else, but eagerly offers his younger brother as an example of somebody who does. "He cries and moans and my mum just has to stop him." Victor says his mother generally does the shopping and cooking. "We just eat what she buys . . . we eat lots of rice and she tells us to eat our vegetables up and that sweets aren't good for our teeth.... I can usually wait for tea to be cooked, but when my brother gets hungry and starts to moan she'll give him a piece of bread or fruit or carrot or something."
- **Grace, 13, ...**
says that she still has 'tantrums' of a sort -- "I don't scream and cry and stuff, but I know I stomp and sulk when I don't get what I want." She recalls a recent incident when both her mother and father would not buy her a pair of shoes with four-inch heels. But she also says there are times "when I can see their point. Like that time last year when I wanted a pet. My mum said no because she didn't think I could look after it myself, and when I thought about it, she was probably right. Anyway, if I really want to buy something they won't buy for me, I can save up for it." Her mother does most of the cooking, but she and her father also sometimes get involved at weekends or on special occasions. She let's her mum know what she would like to eat so that she can buy it, but "I sometimes go shopping with her and just put things in the trolley . . . she doesn't really mind as long as we eat it."
- **Ben, 17, ...**
can't recall a recent incident when he disagreed with his parents about what to buy. "Situations like that happened when I was younger, but they don't happen now because they get me the things I need -- like for school and stuff -- plus other reasonable things, and if there's anything I really want that they won't get me, I can get it for myself because I work part-time." He still eats most of his meals at home and occasionally helps in the cooking. "My mum knows more or less what I like and I sometimes tell her what I feel like eating, if she asks, but I don't do the shopping with her or anything. Sometimes I help her carry the shopping in or something."

From Home to School

With children spending well under half of their waking time at school, the importance of learning in the family environment is becoming more and more recognised. As the head of a secondary school explained, "There is little enough time in the school day to cover the core subjects of the National Curriculum, but even if there was, teachers can only effectively teach the basic aspects that fall under personal and social development - like nutrition and cooking, or learning about the way advertising exists to persuade and present only one side of the story. But whatever we do needs to work with the values and habits that come from the home."

Indeed, older children's responses consistently place family (especially mothers), friends and teachers as influential sources of information on commercial life. Some parents are even aware of the way that older children are able to help introduce their younger brothers or sisters to, for example, different types of foods. "She [a six-year-old] learns a lot from her older sister. She tells her to eat her vegetables, not to eat too many chocolates and things like that," said one mother. Clearly, the overall role of learning at school in these areas is limited to formal knowledge and technical abilities, although there have been some good initiatives such as a 'Get Cooking' campaign to introduce children to the skills involved in preparing and cooking food. Knowledge acquired at school can be, and often is, reinforced by daily routines in the home.

Key points:

- *Many family activities, from watching TV to going shopping, enable children to learn about the commercial aspects of the modern world*

- *As they grow up, children realise they cannot have everything, they learn to negotiate and compromise, and their tastes and preferences change and develop*
- *The home and family environment is an important source of values, as well as information and knowledge on topics not fully covered at school*

SECTION 2

When Push Comes to Shove

There are several common situations that bring a child's wants and needs into conflict with the wishes of his or her parents. Here are a few of those trying times, together with some pointers from parents and children about how best to deal with them.

Shopping Tantrums

It may come as a surprise, but some parents and children say that they have never had the shopping tantrum experience! "I got everything I wanted unless it was absurd, in which case I just stopped asking for it," is the comment of a 13-year-old girl. An eight-year-old boy said he never really asked his Mum for anything because he only liked football things and she would just buy them for him! More commonly, shopping tantrums are associated by both parents and older children with being 'little' - generally under five.

Older children who remember them describe parents' responses which typically involved being "told off", "carried out of the shop while I was crying", "taken home", "explained why I couldn't have it" or "ignored". Most parents confirm these approaches - "I ignore him and walk away", "I ride it out and try not to worry about looks from other shoppers!", "I just let them get on with the tantrum", "I drag him off the floor and tell him to behave", and "they lose a treat and I explain why they can't have what they want."

There are also a couple of other methods suggested by both parents and children to deal with tantrums. "I take something with me to give them, or I divert their attention by getting them to help me look for things I really do need" is one parent's way. An eight-year-old girl said, "My Mummy always says I might get it at the weekend, if I'm good".

Can't eat, won't eat

Children tend to like the food that they eat at home. Most let their parents know generally what they like and don't like, and are happy to let them anticipate what they want to eat. Less frequently, they add to the shopping list themselves, or take part in shopping and "load the trolley with the kind of food I like to eat." Those who are encouraged to cook enjoy doing it with their parents, and children quickly get to know how their friends' parents deal with things like food and can compare it with their own experience. As one 14-year-old boy put it, "I get asked to help in the kitchen once in while, but I know some of my friends only just help themselves to snacks." A girl of the same age noted that, while some of her classmates were saying how they would sometimes take the initiative in deciding on and cooking a family meal, "I'm not allowed to do anything in the kitchen on my own."

Inevitably there will be fussy eaters for whom there are no easy solutions. For younger children, combining favourite foods with less familiar ones can be a good idea. "I make foods more attractive by mixing them with a favourite like baked beans and something else", said one mother. Another commented that, "I buy other things [from what they are used to] and they like to go with what I want them to eat". For older children, regular exposure to different types of foods often leaves an impression. "When I was younger and we went out to eat [about once a month], my parents encouraged me to try new foods," is the recollection of 14-year-old of one way in which he developed his food preferences. Whatever a parent does, though, it is important that children develop a relaxed approach to eating and enjoying food.

I want, I want

Parents are aware that the nature of the different influences on their children depends on their age. "Advertising has more influence on our seven-year-old than it does our 12 year old", said one mother. Overall, older children attribute the greater long-term influence on their food preferences to their parents, over and above the peer pressure of friends, and advertising. Not surprisingly, parents can expect to be asked to buy things by their children, but by no means do all parents see this process as an unnatural form of badgering. Most parents prevail when there are differences of opinion, and children generally agree that their parents usually 'win' or that at least there is a chance of an open discussion.

Some good ways proposed to deal with nagging about an item include: "getting them to put it on a Christmas list or something", "use it as a reward for some achievement", and, from children, "I saved for it and bought it for myself" and "I offered to pay out of my own pocket money".

But I've got to have one ...

Young children can hanker after something because they've seen it at a friend's house, but for more image-conscious pre-teens and teens, getting a particular item can seem like a matter of life and death. One recent quarrel described by a 15-year-old girl involved an expensive party dress she had saved up for herself, only to be over-ruled by her father who told her that it was a bad use of money. Clearly, some situations at any age may be appropriately dealt with by a firm approach.

If ever this becomes necessary, parents can be heartened by the fact that an image-conscious teenager is nevertheless able to make judgments that balance style, usefulness and price. The trick is to build on their basic common sense while respecting what is important to them.

Playground obsessions

Whether it's for electronic pets or football stickers, parents can get fed up with the amount of money - their own and their children's pocket money - spent on bits of plastic or paper just because they happen to be the rage! However, the phenomenon of children latching on to a particular craze is not new and is closely related with the kind of group games that children have been playing among themselves for centuries. For this reason, some schools even allow, for example, swapping of football stickers on specifically designated days, even though they may not be allowed on the school premises at other times. A similar approach to such fads at home may be useful. It is interesting that older children can look back fondly at a craze only two years on and comment, as one 12-year-old girl did about electronic pets, "It was so silly really, because they were such a pain to look after. But everybody had one and even my Dad got into it."

Merchandising

When asked what kind of things they routinely choose for themselves, with their parents' approval, older children tend to answer "snacks", "clothes" and various forms of entertainment, especially videos and the cinema. Parents generally take account of their children's opinions and preferences on these items, just as they would do with food. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that many more things are being produced for the children's market today than, say, thirty years ago, and for this reason, some parents are concerned about the sheer volume of advertising of products that are intended for children.

Some parents therefore find the BBC and videos a useful alternative to commercial television channels. There is also an awareness that, "ads are a part of life that should be explained to children, so that they understand what advertising is about and will hopefully be able to make the right commercial choices as adults."

Key points:

- *Younger children - usually under five - are associated with shopping tantrums, and how parents deal with them can be valuable lessons in growing up as a consumer*
- *Parents generally serve foods that their children like and enjoy, and also introduce them to new foods to provide variety and develop their preferences*

- *There are many different factors that influence what children of different ages want and ask for, and parents usually have the upper hand in discussions*

Parenting education and support

Being a parent today is often demanding, and advertising is just one of many different issues that parents face. For information on parenting and support groups in your area, contact your local library or:

The Parenting Education and Support Forum

8 Wakley Street
London EC1V 7QE
Tel: (0171) 843 6099

NSPCC

National Centre
42 Curtain Road
London EC2A 3NH

Some more hints

DO ...

- Take a lead in introducing your children to different foods, exposing them to variety and choice.
- Try to ensure that your children see food being prepared and cooked from scratch at home as often as the family schedule allows.
- Make a regular habit of eating together as a family.
- Help your children learn to read labels.
- Remember that children change their minds, tastes and preferences as part of growing up.
- Set some ground rules about watching television, and try and watch some television with your children and discuss what's on - ads as well as programmes.
- If you see an advertisement or commercial you find objectionable, consider making a formal complaint. (See [Section 3](#))
- Explain to your children what ads are and what they're for.
- For things they want, encourage them to make a Christmas and/or birthday list.
- Set some ground rules about treats and luxuries.
- Stand firm in what you believe to be the right thing and don't allow yourself to be overcome by persistence, especially from very young children.
- If your only objection to a request relates to cost, explain this and, if appropriate, help your children choose a lower-priced alternative.
- Talk to other parents and teachers to compare your experiences.

DON'T ...

- Belittle anything your child might want - instead, explain why it is inappropriate.
- Make a drama out of a tantrum or a child's whining about a requested product.
- Feel guilty about not buying something because it's too expensive or outside your budget.
- Think that by giving in once in a while and saying "yes", that you're being soft or inconsistent - but do make the point, using words children can identify with, that you don't like being bullied.
- Believe that new and expensive things are overly important, or can somehow result in a better relationship with a child. Children today enjoy more luxuries and have more possessions than any previous generation simply because they've been born in the late twentieth-century - there is no need to feel guilty. There is, however, a need to pass on timeless values that are far more important than material possessions.
- Think that buying things can make up for time you don't spend with a child, because as long as you have a good relationship with your children, they know there is a loving person they

can rely on. There is no need to spend any extra money on anything they wouldn't otherwise need or ask for. You are their best gift!

- Automatically impose your generation's values on things that will pass, like hairstyle and fashion, because they might well be very important to a young person. However, there can be ground rules about such things - only at weekends, for example. Overall, focus on passing on your sense of what is right and wrong, what is worthwhile and what is not.
- Hesitate to impart your values and bring home the practical realities of budgeting.
- Allow a difference of opinion over a particular purchase between you and your partner to be interpreted as the absence of a common parental front. Open family discussions on such issues are helpful.
- Feel resentful if your point of view is not accepted in an open discussion.
- Believe everything you read in the media, whether it's an advertisement or not.

SECTION 3

The Advertisers' Perspective

There are more brands and varieties of goods in the shops today than there have ever been, which means more choice for the consumer. However, it also means more competition amongst the providers of those goods. These companies survive - and we continue to enjoy a wide range of choices of products and services - because they are able to use advertising as one of the ways with which to inform and familiarise people about what they have to offer.

Other ways of doing this include public relations (for example, gaining coverage in programmes and articles in the media), sales promotions and special offers, as well as eye-catching pack designs and in-store displays, direct marketing (often involving communicating with consumers via post) and sponsorship. However, we are all prompted to buy things as a result of many different influences - word of mouth and personal recommendations; seeing what our family, friends and neighbours have bought; as well as impulse and spur-of-the-moment decisions. Advertising, therefore, is only one of a range of factors relevant to people's buying behaviour.

However, advertisers value their freedom to advertise - it is a competitive tool encouraging the development of new products, competitive pricing and wide consumer choice. Advertisers also realise that it is certainly not in their interests to offend or mislead people, because advertising would soon lose consumers' confidence and trust, and cease to be of benefit to anyone.

Advertisers need to be particularly responsible in a number of areas, and this especially includes advertising during children's programmes or at times when large numbers of children are likely to be watching. A strong but flexible system of regulation, that can respond quickly to change, is one way to ensure that such responsibilities are met by all those involved in advertising - the advertisers who use ads, the agencies which make ads and the media which show ads. The UK has one of the longest-running and most developed systems and it is described below. The rules that specifically govern advertising to children are summarised in the [appendix](#).

How advertising is regulated

There are three parallel systems of advertising regulation. The first, under the Independent Television Commission (ITC), covers television advertisements. The second, under the Radio Authority, covers radio commercials. The third, administered by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), covers all non-broadcast advertisements including print, posters, and cinema.

The detailed codes under which the ITC, ASA and Radio Authority operate (see the appendix) exist to protect the public and consumer interest, including children. All three bodies can direct that advertisements be withdrawn or re-scheduled, and have a number of sanctions at their disposal to counteract advertisements that breach the codes.

They receive complaints from the public and consumer interest organisations, as well as from other companies and manufacturers. All complaints are logged and those that reflect a consistent and widely-held public view are acted on. The responses to complaints and actions taken are published regularly by the regulating bodies. There are valid grounds to complain about an advertisement if you feel that it:

- is misleading
- in some way oversteps the mark in terms of decency, especially in relation to children who might see it
- promotes anti-social or harmful behaviour in children

Not only will your complaint be dealt with on its own account, but it will also be considered in the light of any other similar complaints about the specific ad and more generally, over time, in the light of complaints made on similar grounds. Advertising guidelines are periodically reviewed to account for changing climates of opinion, advances in technology, and the current state of scientific and medical knowledge. If you would like to know in more detail about how they are formulated and administered, you can contact the relevant regulatory body at the addresses provided below.

TV and radio advertising

Before a television advertisement can be broadcast in the UK, it needs to have been cleared by the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre. Before a radio advertisement can be broadcast, it must either be cleared by the relevant radio station or, if it falls into one of several special categories (including advertising directed specifically at those below the age of 16 or containing child voice-overs), it must be cleared by the Radio Advertising Clearance Centre. Each year, thousands of television and radio commercials are checked in this way before the public see or hear them.

In spite of this, sometimes people can still find specific advertisements objectionable. In that case, a complaint should include the date, day, time, broadcaster and, of course, the product advertised. The day of the week and time of day of an ad broadcast may well be relevant as to how a complaint is assessed because the ITC uses daily and weekly scheduling, and 'watersheds' as important regulatory tools.

Complaints about television advertisements should be made to:

Advertising and Sponsorship Division
The Independent Television Commission
33 Foley Street
London W1P 7LB
Tel: (0171) 255 3000

Complaints about radio advertisements should be made to:

The Advertising and Programming Department
The Radio Authority
Holbrook House
14 Great Queen Street
London WC2B 5DG
Tel: (0171) 430 2724

Non-broadcast advertisements

With tens of millions of non-broadcast advertisements produced each year it would be impossible to clear them all. The industry has devised codes regulating advertising and sales promotion through its Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) on which the advertisers, agencies and all the media are represented. The codes are very similar to those of the ITC and RA; the differences being those necessary to take account of the individual nature of the media. The ASA is set up to operate independently in administering these codes and adjudicating on all complaints. However, the ASA also runs a free copy clearance service to help advertising agencies produce advertisements that will not run foul of the codes.

The only material difference between the criteria for valid complaints about a print ad and a broadcast ad is readership and distribution. A specialist publication with a limited readership will have more scope to run advertisements that may be unsuitable for children to see than a mass circulation publication. Bearing this in mind, if you do have a complaint, make a copy of the ad in question as well as recording the name and date of the publication in which it appeared.

Complaints should be made to:

The Complaints Department

The Advertising Standards Authority

2 Torrington Place
London WC1E 7HW
Tel: (0171) 580 5555

Appendix

A Summary of Codes Governing advertising to Children*

Based on the founding principle that all advertising should be 'legal, decent, honest and truthful', the codes are enforced by the Independent Television Commission (ITC), the Radio Authority (RA) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and are periodically revised. Each has a specific section governing advertising to and featuring children. While each body deals with different forms of media, and their codes reflect this (for example, some types of television advertisements are subject to the 9pm watershed, which is naturally inapplicable to print advertisements), they obviously share a substantial number of common guidelines to ensure consistently responsible advertising:

- Advertisements should not contain anything that might cause physical, mental or moral harm to children. They should not be shown in hazardous places or situations, or conversing with strangers (ITC and ASA).
- Advertisements should not exploit the credulity, immaturity or inexperience of children. Children should not be misled about the size, quality or capabilities of a product or service and neither should they be made to feel disloyal or inferior if they do not purchase a product or service (ITC, RA and ASA).
- Advertisements should not exhort children to purchase or ask parents or others to purchase for them. Neither should they invite children to make a direct purchase by mail or telephone (ITC and RA). Advertisements should not encourage children to be a nuisance to parents or others, and there should be no direct appeal to purchase unless the product is likely to be of interest to children and one that they could reasonably afford. Parental permission should be sought before they are committed to purchasing costly goods (ASA).
- Advertisements should not encourage children to eat frequently throughout the day or to eat or drink near bedtime (ITC, RA and ASA), or suggest that confectionery and snacks should replace balanced meals (ASA and RA), or condone excessive consumption of any food (which includes, for example, showing someone eating two or more chocolate bars in succession), or discourage good dietary practice (ITC).
- Advertisements for alcoholic drinks (ITC, RA and ASA), and for cigarettes, medicines and slimming regimes should not be directed to those under eighteen or contain anything likely to be of particular appeal to those under eighteen.
- Prices should not be minimised by using words such as 'only' or 'just' (ITC and RA). Advertisements for expensive toys, games or other services must include an indication of their retail price - a product is not 'expensive' if it is widely available at a retail price below £22 (correct as of December 1998, ITC).
- Children may not give a personal testimonial about a product or service, but they can make spontaneous comments on matters in which they would have an obvious natural interest. Nor may they be used to present advertisements for products or services that they normally would not buy or have an interest in, or display knowledge of such products (ITC and RA).
- Advertisements with references to competitions should not exaggerate the value of prizes and the chances of winning (ITC, RA and ASA). The published rules must be sent in advance to

the licensee (ITC and RA codes). Promotions addressed to children should not encourage excessive purchases in order to participate, make clear that parental permission is required if prizes might cause conflict between children and parents (for example, holidays or bicycles), contain a prominent closing date, and clearly explain the number and type of any additional proofs of purchase needed to participate (ASA).

As regulators of broadcast media, both the ITC and RA are able to utilise restrictions on the times of transmission of certain advertisements.

The ITC code incorporates the following restrictions:

- Advertisements for alcoholic drinks, liqueur chocolates, matches, medicines, vitamins or other dietary supplements, 15 and 18 rated film trailers, lotteries or pools must not be transmitted during children's programmes or in the advertisement breaks immediately before or after them.
- Advertisements in which children are shown to be administered or self-administering any medicine, vitamin or other dietary supplement, or advertisements for such products which use techniques that are likely to appeal to children, are only acceptable after 9pm except in circumstances approved by the ITC.
- Advertisements in which personalities or other characters (including puppets) who appear regularly in children's programmes present or positively endorse products or services of particular interest to children must not be transmitted before 9pm.
- Advertisements for merchandise based on children's programmes must not be broadcast in any of the two hours preceding or succeeding transmission of the relevant programme.

The RA code incorporates the following restrictions:

- Licensees must exercise responsible judgements when scheduling categories of advertisements which may be unsuitable for children. Particular care should be taken in categories such as sanitary protection, contraceptives, and anti-drugs messages.
- Advertisements for cigars and pipe tobacco, alcohol, and violent or sexually explicit films should not be broadcast in or around features directed particularly at people under 18.

**The appendix is not an exhaustive, verbatim documentation of the codes. Full copies can be obtained from the respective organisations (addresses in the How to Complain Section).*

We would like to thank Titus Alexander, Alexandra Wakeling and the parents, teachers and children who contributed their time and thoughts to this publication.

Published by the Food Advertising Unit, December 1998.

*For further information, please contact:
Lionel Stanbrook, Acting Director, Food Advertising Unit
(fau@fau.org.uk)*