

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

This letter is to let you know about a new and exciting learning activity we are beginning. **MediaSharp: Analyzing Tobacco and Alcohol Messages** teaches young people about the many messages they see and hear in the media which encourage use of tobacco and alcohol. This set of activities has been specifically designed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Education Association Health Information Network to teach youth how to decode these media messages by seeing through the glitz and glamour used to sell tobacco and alcohol.

By helping youth recognize how saturated the media are with tobacco and alcohol images that make these products seem glamorous and normal, they will be able to make better choices in the face of these powerful images.

You can help support this important exploration of the media by participating with your child on the various homework assignments that are part of the learning unit. These include counting and evaluating tobacco and alcohol images in television shows, commercials, and sports programs, and advertising in newspapers and magazines. Your child will also be asked to develop a map of the neighborhood around your home or the school to identify the many and often unexpected ways tobacco and alcohol are promoted, such as on billboards, signs in grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, and through sports event sponsorships.

I encourage you to participate with your child in these exercises and to use the opportunity to discuss your own views about tobacco and alcohol use. In addition, your participation will allow you to reinforce these important “media reading” skills both during and after we have completed our *MediaSharp* activities.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Media Tips for the Home

Media play a large role in most of our lives today, providing us with both information and entertainment—some good and some bad. To get the most from media, however, it is important to make careful choices. By following the simple steps listed below, your family can practice thinking about and questioning the media messages you receive.

1 Know what forms of media exist in your community.

Media take many forms. While the major ones are TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, books, and recorded music, computers have quickly become an important new medium. Billboards, in-store advertising and promotions, flyers, posters, and direct mail are other common media used to send messages to consumers.

2 Recognize that media are important to young people for both communication and expression.

While it is important for you to express concerns you may have about the media messages your children receive, do so in a way that shows you value their media interests and choices.

3 Know what media your children see and hear.

You can't know everything your children are exposed to. But you can talk with them about their use of the media and what they like and why. Make discussions of the media a natural topic of conversation in your home.

4 Make media use (such as watching TV) a family affair.

TV is the main medium used by most people, particularly children. Because TV viewing takes place largely at home, you have some control over what, when, and how much your children watch. Most importantly, make TV viewing a family activity. Talk back to your TV. Explore with your children how realistic the programs are. Examine messages that encourage healthy attitudes and behaviors compared with those that may encourage your children to take risks with their health. Discuss what is being shown and how it fits with your beliefs, opinions, and values.

5 Discuss other media with your children.

Children are exposed to a lot of media outside the home. Advertising takes place everywhere—on billboards, in store windows, inside stores, at bus stops, and more. Comment on these media as you encounter them with your children.

6 Make media use a planned activity.

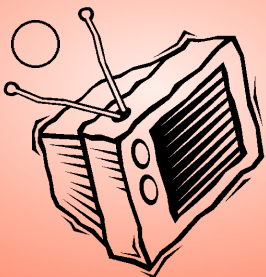
Be sure your children are exposed to quality programs and materials by helping them choose what to watch, read, and listen to. Discourage habits of just watching whatever is on TV or reading whatever is lying around the house. Be a role model for smart use of the media to show your children how they can learn and be entertained without becoming passive media users.

7 Help your children understand the commercial nature of media.

You don't need to be an expert to help your children understand how media are used to sell products, services, and images. Use your own experience and knowledge to discuss ways in which advertising can be misleading. Talk about how entertainment programs attract viewers for the purpose of showing them advertisements. Selling advertisements is the main way media companies make money.

8 Plan activities that don't involve media.

It's easy to simply let the media dominate family time. However, it is important for children and young people to have a wide range of activities. By planning family outings to the park, the museum, the library, and other places in your community, you can make sure your children don't spend all their time with media. Getting them involved in local youth groups is another constructive and healthy alternative.



Glamorization Appeals

Media messages use many appeals to get our attention and make us interested in a product. These appeals are also used to make products appear “glamorous” and “normal.” The following appeals are used a lot, particularly for tobacco and alcohol products. Add other appeals you may have seen, and use this page for coding media messages. Remember, many messages use more than one appeal, so look closely.

YOU WILL USE THE GLAM CODES IN LATER ACTIVITIES, SO KEEP THIS HANDOUT.

APPEAL		GLAM CODE
SUCCESSFUL	= First-class, elegant, sophisticated, exclusive, adult, mature Promotes tobacco and alcohol use as important for successful, sophisticated people.	SUC
POPULAR	= Well-liked, center of attention, socially successful Promotes tobacco and alcohol use as ways to be part of the “in-crowd,” useful in being liked, accepted, and valued by others.	POP
ROMANTIC	= Sexually appealing, sensual pleasure, physically attractive Portrays tobacco and alcohol use as ways to be “successful” in intimate relationships, part of what makes people “desirable.”	ROM
INDEPENDENT	= Rebellious, adventurous, mature, self-assured, distant, aloof Portrays tobacco and alcohol use as ways to express one’s individuality, with a specific focus on being independent, courageous, and tough.	IND
HEALTHY	= Clean, active, refreshing Portrays tobacco and alcohol use as “refreshing” and restful, something done by people who appear healthy and active.	HLTH
HAPPY	= Joyful, exhilarated, ecstatic, playful Associates tobacco and alcohol use with pleasurable emotions.	HAP
FUNNY	= Humorous, clever, witty Associates tobacco and alcohol use with fun, “good times,” and amusement.	FUN
_____	= _____	_____
_____	= _____	_____
_____	= _____	_____



The Seven Critical Media Questions

Knowing the answers to these questions is key to understanding media messages.

1 Who is communicating and why?

Every message is communicated for a reason—to entertain, inform, and/or persuade. However, the basic motive behind most media is to profit through the sale of advertising space and sponsorships.

2 Who owns, profits from, and pays for media messages?

Media messages are owned. They are designed to yield results, provide profits, and pay for themselves. Both news and entertainment programming try to increase listenership or viewership to attract advertising dollars. Movies also seek to increase box-office receipts. Understanding the profit motive is key to analyzing media messages.

3 How are media messages communicated?

Every message is communicated through sound, video, text, and/or photography. Messages are enhanced through camera angles, special effects, editing, and/or music. Analyzing how these features are used in any given message is critical to understanding how it attempts to persuade, entertain, or inform.



5 What are the intended or underlying purposes and whose point of view is behind the message?

Behind every message is a purpose and point of view. The advertiser's purpose is more direct than the program producer's, though both may seek to entertain us. Understanding their purposes and knowing WHOSE point of view is being expressed and WHY is crucial to being media sharp.

6 What is NOT being said and why?

Because messages are limited in both time and purpose, rarely are all the details provided. Identifying the issues, topics, and perspectives that are NOT included can often reveal a great deal about the purposes of media messages. In fact, this may be the most significant question that can uncover answers to the other questions.

7 Is there consistency both within and across media?

Do the political slant, tone, local/national/international perspective, and depth of coverage change across media or messages? Because media messages tell only part of the story and different media have unique production features, it helps to evaluate multiple messages on the same issue. This allows you to identify multiple points of view, some of which may be missing in any single message or medium. This is typically referred to as the **“multi-source rule.”**

4 Who receives media messages and what sense is made of them?

Messages are filtered through the “interpretive screens” of our beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors. Identifying the target audience for a given message and knowing its “filters” and the way in which it interprets media messages help make you media sharp!

