

## Commercialization of Childhood

### Script to Accompany the PowerPoint Presentation

#### INTRODUCTION

**(SHOW TITLE SLIDE)**

**(SHOW SLIDES 2-10)**

It is so good to meet with you today. This talk grew out of our interests in both mental health and the environment. It's important to remember the context in which we are living. We are facing staggering social and environmental challenges. Decisions are being made, either by commission or omission, which are affecting the sustainability of life on our earth. We all want the best for our children. Can we have healthy children if we don't have a healthy planet? Conversely, can we have a healthy planet, if we don't have healthy children? Both are critical.

Child Psychologist Allen Kanner is a leader in the movement to educate the public about the impact of commercialization of childhood. He explains how he came to recognize the connection between the environment and marketing to children:

**[SHOW SLIDE 11]** *I wondered why people were constantly consuming, and thus supporting the corporate dismantling of the planet's ecosystems, when the accumulation of wealth doesn't make them any happier [...]. The more people believe they need an endless array of material goods to be happy, the harder it is to live sustainably. The more time that is devoted to consuming [...] the less time is devoted to activities that satisfy non-material needs – family and friends, creative and artistic endeavors, spiritual practices, etc.*

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. [I come to you as a concerned mother of three grown children, a grandmother of seven, a former elementary school teacher, and a counselor who has worked with individuals and families for over 17 years.] My colleague \_\_\_\_\_ will tell you more about him/her self. We are part of the Commercialization of Childhood committee, an initiative of the Center for Earth Leadership. This committee is part of a growing movement to question the role of advertising in children's lives. For example, The American Psychology Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the World Health Organization have all called for restrictions on marketing to children.

**[SHOW SLIDE 12]** So today we want to talk with you about marketing to children, and how it's become much worse than most of us realize. We'll address specific ways it's harming children and families; ways that also are having a negative effect on the earth. We know that

increasing awareness offers the opportunity for new choices. Acting on these choices WILL make a difference. Individuals working together to affect change have been at the core of every great social change and movement. At the end, we'll offer you concrete steps that you can take.

## **MARKETING TO KIDS IS BIG BUSINESS**

### **Money Spent on Marketing to Children Has Skyrocketed**

**[SHOW SLIDE 13]** In these changing times, parents often express a feeling of helplessness about how to raise their kids in a consumer culture. Before they know it, the slippery slope of “I want this!” or “all my friends have a Play Station 2!” is upon them, and it feels difficult to assert one’s family values. To protect our children from the marketing deluge they face, parents must be **prepared, educated, and highly intentional**.

**[SHOW SLIDE 14]** It is no accident that most American children are under the spell of consumer culture. Since the 1980s, the amount spent on marketing to children has shot from \$100 million to \$16 billion a year. And that much money is spent because children under 12 are influencing the spending of \$500 billion annually, and the figures rise with each passing year.<sup>1</sup> Even adult products, such as hotels and cars, are pitched in Saturday morning cartoons because children are influencing their parents' choices...

**[SHOW SLIDE 15]** A leading marketing executive, says, “They aren’t children as much as what we like to call ‘evolving consumers.’”

**[SHOW SLIDE 16]** TV is by far the largest medium in advertizing to children, taking 70% of the marketing budget.

How many hours of TV do kids watch? Does anyone know the statistics? (Take guesses). Children in the United States watch an average of **three to four hours of television a day**<sup>2</sup>

Counting weekends, this means that by the time of high school graduation, they will have spent **more time watching television than they have in the classroom**.

### **Marketing to Kids is Ubiquitous and Sophisticated**

**[SHOW SLIDE 17]** Since the 1980s, commercial messages have saturated children's lives in three major ways. First, marketing has spread to every part of children’s lives. Not only do children see more than 40,000 advertisements on TV alone per year,<sup>3</sup> but now marketing has spread to the internet and throughout all forms of media—to schools, including textbooks, to hospitals, buses, and subways, and to virtually any public event children attend or place they are likely to show up.

Second, marketing has become far more sophisticated and refined. These days, advertisers speak of Kids Getting Older Younger, KGOY, meaning, they claim, that children have become media savvy and therefore require more subtle modes of marketing to be reached. Some strategies marketers use are...

- **Product Placement.** This occurs when products are incorporated into the fabric of a TV program, movie, computer game, or book. Now M&Ms, Fruit Loops, and Cheerios have all produced counting books for very young children.
- **[SHOW SLIDE 18] Product licensing:** Ad agencies sell the use of popular images and logos to promote products other than the ones they were created for. This catches kids' attention and influences them to buy something they may not otherwise consider buying. For example, the Cat in the Hat is used to market Pepsi, Frito Lay, and Kellogg's as well as MasterCard and the USPS. And Cat in the Hat is not alone...almost every major media program for children has a line of licensed merchandise.
- **[SHOW SLIDE 19] Stealth Marketing** is a newer, quite sophisticated strategy used to reach kids. With this type of marketing, the receivers of the message are unaware that they have just been exposed to a commercial. Consider, for example, the **GIA, or Girl's Intelligence Agency**, whose website is shown here. GIA is a relatively new company that seeks corporations as clients. It offers these corporate clients the assistance of 40,000 girls, ages 8-29, to introduce new products. Keep in mind that the average market researcher makes around \$50,000 a year. But instead of using paid adults to do their market research, the GIA uses the free service of girls, recruiting girls to help them do product testing and marketing research. In return, girls get to be "GIA secret agents" and post their profiles on the GIA website.
- **[SHOW SLIDE 20]** Let's look at how they describe their services to the corporations who may be interested in hiring GIA for marketing services: *Your private youth council. All access. All the time...40,000 GIA secret agents are on call nationwide, ready to invite you into their bedrooms, to hang out with their closest friends and give you candid feedback on your concept, product and brand....Your team will walk away with crucial insights and next actions to succeed in the female youth market.*
- **[SHOW SLIDE 21]** In return, GIA attracts girls through "girlspeak". The GIA tells the girls "agents" that they "gotta be sneaky," and in fact the girls who attend the slumber party are never told that the party was sponsored by the GIA.<sup>4</sup> Let's look at how they market to the girls to get more "secret agents."
  - *GIA: Ruthless spies saving the world from making more lame stuff for girls. You talk, IM, email (ahem, totally CONFIDENTIAL), we listen and decode and translate....to help companies go from LAME to SWEET!*

- **[SHOW SLIDE 22]** GIA is best known for its **Slumber Party in a Box**. The girl agents throw a slumber party for up to 11 of their friends, where they introduce toys, films, TV shows, health and beauty aids. The girl “agents” pass out free products supplied by the GIA’s corporate client. The girls then report back to GIA on their friends’ reactions to the products and provide other kinds of information—what the girls are listening to, what’s fashionable, what they buy for their bedrooms.
- **[SHOW SLIDE 23]** Why do these agencies hire GIA to have access to these girl agents? Because it pays off! Here is a chart of the estimated “buzz” that can be created by word of mouth in just the first week after a GIA Slumber Party is held. As it says, 500 slumber parties reach over 600,000 girls nationwide---this is how they “Create a Bond—Build a Buzz.”

## Marketers Are Targeting Younger and Younger Children

**[SHOW SLIDE 24]** The third major trend in advertising is to market to children at ever younger ages. Here's what the former President of Kids R Us, has to say:

*If you own this child at an early age, you can own this child for years to come...  
Companies are saying 'Hey, I want to own the kid younger and younger.*

**[SHOW SLIDE 25]** Children’s marketing “guru” James McNeal, points out that, “At six months of age, the same age they are imitating simple sounds like ‘ma-ma,’ babies are forming mental images of corporate logos and mascots.”<sup>5</sup>

To find out just how brand-savvy young children are, a news reporter with WCCO-TV in Minnesota visited 3, 4 and 5-year-olds at St. Paul's Children's Center. They showed 12 flash cards to the kids, with different corporate logos on each one. The 3-year-olds saw the Target bulls-eye, and started screaming, "Target! Target!" The kids said they recognized the trademark red circle. An even wilder celebration ensued when we showed the kids the picture of the McDonald's golden arches. The 3-year-olds kicked, laughed, and screamed about McDonald's. They recognized the "M."<sup>6</sup> Advertisers know that early exposure creates **brand loyalty** – get people hooked young and you’ll have them for life.

## How Marketing Affects Children

**[SHOW SLIDE 26]** As a child, what was your favorite way to pass time? [Take answers from the crowd.]

**[SHOW SLIDE 27]** Childhood has changed a lot. One of the more obvious ways is the amount of time children today watch TV. Let’s take some time now to look at this question: What **are** the effects of mass marketing on our children?

**[SHOW SLIDE 28]** TV as a medium has a significant impact on children's health. First, watching TV is a **sedentary** activity. A big concern about hooking children on screens early in life is the current trend for young children to be spending more of their lives parked in front of the TV or computer, rather than being involved in physical activity.

It's always good to remember what kids do when they **aren't** watching TV...

**[SHOW SLIDE 29]**

**[SHOW SLIDE 30]** And, secondly, **watching TV is non-relational**. Some people will argue that it is an activity that families can do together, but increasingly, children have TVs in their own rooms, and already children are spending more time with the media than with their parents. TV is reaching children at younger ages. A recent Henry Kaiser Foundation Study<sup>7</sup> reported the following:

- 59% of children under 2 watch TV or videos more than 2 hours/day.
- 19% of children under 1 and 29% ages 2 - 3 have TVs in their rooms

**[SHOW SLIDE 31]** And when they aren't in front of the television....

**[SHOW SLIDE 32]** Extensive **exposure to media and marketing affects a child's play**. Throughout time, play has been where children learn about their world and themselves in relation to their world.

**[SHOW SLIDE 33]** Play is the basis for cognitive development, imagination, humor, and the acquisition of social skills.

**[SHOW SLIDE 34]** Whereas play helps children develop cognitive skills, the few studies that exist suggest that **viewing TV impairs some forms of future cognitive development**.<sup>8</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 35]** When kids aren't watching TV...

**[SHOW SLIDE 36]** Play is the medium through which children learn about life. Children's play was once spontaneous and active. Children explored the natural world and played make-believe games. Whereas toys once stimulated a child's imagination, now they often consist of pre-packaged characters. In fact, modern toys are frequently based on licensed products derived from videos and television programs. Children re-enact the shows they've seen rather than creating their own plots. Children are losing the precious chance to be creative and imaginative.

**[SHOW SLIDE 37]** Today, most of the popular – and expensive – toys are electronic. Children play with these toys passively, pushing buttons and watching what happens.

**[SHOW SLIDE 38]** At school, when given time for play, as one teacher observed, “[Children] don’t know what to do. They have no ideas of their own.”

## **MATERIALISM AND FAMILY STRESS**

**[SHOW SLIDE 39]** One of the central premises of marketing is that buying things will make us happy.

**[SHOW SLIDE 40]** There is a growing body of evidence, however, that the opposite is true: that the pressure to spend and consume actually makes people less happy.<sup>9</sup> Materialism has become a common value in our society today. Does this have any affect on kids?

**[SHOW SLIDE 41]**

- Materialism is correlated to exposure to marketing for children as young as preschoolers.
- 63% of parents surveyed believed that their children define their self worth in terms of what they own.<sup>10</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 42]** A recent study done of values found the following:

- Children who were more materialistic were less happy, had lower self-esteem, poorer social skills, and reported more symptoms of anxiety.
- Children who were more materialistic reported less generosity
- ...and they reported engaging in fewer environmentally-friendly behaviors.<sup>11</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 43]** In the book *Born To Buy*, sociologist Juliet Schor found that psychologically healthy children will be made worse if they become more enmeshed in the culture of getting and spending. Children with emotional problems will be helped if they disengage from the world that corporations are constructing for them.

**[SHOW SLIDE 44]** Several studies have demonstrated that the more advertising children are exposed to, the more conflicts they have with parents.<sup>12</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 45]** Marketers are partially to blame for this trend. Ten years ago, market researchers found that nagging was responsible for 40% of trips to “entertainment establishments like the Discovery Zone and Chuck E. Cheese,” one of every three trips to a fast-food restaurant, and three out of every ten home video sales.<sup>13</sup> Juliet Schor found that marketers use what is called the “nag factor” to deliberately try to get children to nag their parents for products. Hard to believe?

**[SHOW SLIDE 46]** This is what Kelly Still of Heinz said:

*All of our advertising is targeted to kids. **You want that nag factor** so that 7-year-old Sarah is nagging Mom in the grocery store to buy Funky Purple. We're not sure Mom would reach out for it on her own. (By the way, Funky Purple is purple ketchup!)*

**[SHOW SLIDE 47]**

A poll of teenagers demonstrates the power of this “nag factor.”

- They said they have to ask nine times before their parents give in and let them have what they want. Eleven percent of 12-13 year olds admitted to asking their parents more than fifty times for products they've seen advertised.
- This “keep asking strategy” is paying huge dividends for kids and marketers alike: 55% of TEENAGERS surveyed said they are usually successful in getting their parents to give in.<sup>14</sup>

## **FOOD MARKETING AND CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

**[SHOW SLIDE 48]** We will now take some time to discuss the relationship between food marketing and childhood obesity.

**[SHOW SLIDE 49]** For example, have you ever thought about how TV ads affect what children know about food and what they choose to consume?

**[SHOW SLIDE 50]** Research shows that marketing is a factor in childhood obesity. The Kaiser Family Foundation concluded that exposure to food advertising and product licensing (where a child's favorite media characters, such as SpongeBob Square Pants, are used to sell junk food) contributes to childhood obesity.<sup>15</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 51]** More specifically, TV is bombarding children with images of and ads about junk food:

- 50% of TV commercials are for food.<sup>16</sup>
- 1/3 of all food ads targeted to children are for candy/snacks;
- **[SHOW SLIDE 52]** 1/3 of all food ads are for cereal.
- **[SHOW SLIDE 53]** On Saturday mornings, kids see about 1 food commercial every 5 min;<sup>17</sup> most of these ads are for foods high in fat, sugar, salt & calories.<sup>18</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 54]** This chart shows the break-down of ads on TV promoting food products.

**[SHOW SLIDE 55]** At the same time that the amount of money spent on advertising to children has increased, there has been a dramatic increase in obesity among American children.

- Since 1980, the number of overweight children ages 6-11 has doubled to 15%, for overweight adolescents, the rate has tripled to 16%
- Among children of color, rates are even higher: 40% of African & Mexican American children age 6-19 are overweight or at risk for being overweight.<sup>19</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 56]** Ads are not found solely on TV commercials--they are everywhere:

- One of our colleagues tells the story of her 9 year old goddaughter: *On a road trip to a lake cabin, she asked if we could stop and eat lunch. Her parents explained to her that we had one more hour to go until we got to the cabin, where lunch would be waiting. And, besides, how could she be hungry? She had been eating for the past several hours. She responded, "I know, I guess I'm not really hungry when I think about it. It's just that every time I look up I see a sign for a fast food restaurant, and I can't stop thinking about food."*

**[SHOW SLIDE 57]** Marketing of junk food has also entered into schools. Marketers take advantage of budget shortfalls to offer cash or products in return for advertising access. McDonald's sponsors McTeacher Night where the teachers work at the restaurant for an evening, and the school gets a portion of the profits.

**[SHOW SLIDE 58]** In 2000, a national survey showed that 94% of high schools, 84% of middle schools, and 58% of elementary schools allow sales of sugar-laden drinks on their premises.<sup>20</sup> Many schools have exclusive contracts with Coke or Pepsi where the larger the drink the more money the school makes.

**[SHOW SLIDE 59]** **Channel One** regularly shows ads for soda, candy, fast food & chips. For those of you who are not familiar with Channel One, it is an advertising-based, 12-minute television news program that public and private schools show their students in exchange for the loan of TV equipment, VCRs and access to a video library. According to Channel One's website, as of April 2008, more than 8,000 schools are participating showing broadcasts to more than 6 million students.<sup>21</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 60]** Obesity leads to health problems:

- 1 of 3 overweight kids is susceptible to diabetes.<sup>22</sup>
- 80 % of overweight adolescents continue to be overweight in adulthood.<sup>23</sup>
- 300,000 deaths in the U.S. each year are related to obesity.<sup>24</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 61]** For every hour of TV viewed per day, the risk of obesity increases by 6% (a figure that jumps to 31% if the TV is in the child's bedroom).<sup>25</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 62]** The growing epidemic of physical inactivity and its related diseases are such a significant problem that US doctors have coined a new term: "**Sedentary Death**

**Syndrome.**” An article about SDS in *The Oregonian* on Jan. 6, 2008 was titled “Food isn’t the be-all – you can be killed by your couch.”

**[SHOW SLIDE 63]** It is important to remember that young children are not able to distinguish between commercials and TV programs. They do not recognize commercials are trying to sell something.<sup>26</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under 2 years old and two hours or less per day of quality programming for children over 2 years.

**[SHOW SLIDE 64]** And in a closely related issue, marketing is a factor in eating disorders. At the same time that kids are being flooded with advertisements for junk food, they are being sold on the notion that they are supposed to be thin.<sup>27</sup>

- The number one wish of girls age 11- 17 is to be thinner.
- 40% of girls 9 & 10 are on diets.<sup>28</sup> And girls as young as 5 express fears of getting fat.<sup>29</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 65]** As many as 10 million females are struggling with an eating disorder; anorexia or bulimia.<sup>30</sup>

- More than 50% of the boys 11-17 chose a **physical ideal only possible through the use of steroids.**
- In real life, Barbie would be 8 feet tall and have a 16 inch waist.

**[SHOW SLIDE 66]** Discontent about body image is directly correlated to how often teenage girls read fashion magazines and watch TV commercials.<sup>31</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 67]**

**[SHOW SLIDE 68]** In the country of Fiji, the ideal body form has always been “robust and well-muscled.”<sup>32</sup> When Fiji (a previously non-media country) was introduced to TV, this was quickly followed by a significant increase in eating disorders.<sup>33</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 69]** Is there any good news? Yes - In Portland, there is the *Campaign for Commercial Free Schools*, an organization seeking passage of a comprehensive policy to reduce commercial influence in Portland Public Schools. In addition, in 2006, Portland Public Schools, adopted a district-wide wellness policy to address nutrition and fitness standards.<sup>34</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 70]** Also, people are starting to protest the use of super-thin models in the fashion industry. In September, 2006, the world's first ban on overly thin models at a top-level fashion show in Madrid caused outrage among modeling agencies.<sup>35</sup> The next year, Spain banned ultra-thin models from catwalks, and in April 2008, the French parliament's lower house adopted a groundbreaking bill that would make it illegal for anyone—including fashion magazines, advertisers and Web sites—to publicly incite extreme thinness.<sup>36</sup>

## MARKETING SEX TO CHILDREN

**[SHOW SLIDE 71]** Children are also bombarded with sexual content and messages. Research shows a link between watching sexual content and adolescent's sexual activity and beliefs about sex.

- More than 50% of teens report getting some or most of their information about sex from the media.<sup>37</sup>

A Kaiser Foundation study showed that 83% of the top 20 teen shows had some sexual content...

**[SHOW SLIDE 72]** ...with 20% having simulated sexual intercourse.<sup>38</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 73]** Teens who watch more sexual content on TV are more likely to initiate intercourse and progress to more advanced non-coital sexual activities during the subsequent year.<sup>39</sup>

- 42% of songs on top 10 CD's in 1999 contained sexual content.<sup>40</sup>
- On average, music videos contain 93 sexual situations per hour.<sup>41</sup>
- **[SHOW SLIDE 74]** Girls who watch more than 14 hours of rap music videos/week were more likely to have multiple sex partners and be diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>42</sup>
- **[SHOW SLIDE 75]** And at the same time, there is an alarming rate of STD's among girls this age. In March, 2008, a federal study reported that one in four American girls between the ages of 14 and 19, and nearly half of all African-American girls in that age range, are infected with at least one of four sexually transmitted diseases—HPV, Chlamydia, genital herpes and trichomoniasis (*The Oregonian*, 6/26/08)
- **[SHOW SLIDE 76]** Furthermore, marketing of sexualized products has reached young children. Has anyone here heard of Bratz dolls? Believe it or not, they have outsold Barbie dolls in Britain since 2004 and are connected to declining Barbie sales.<sup>43</sup> They are described as childlike dolls with big eyes and big heads, pouting lips, bare midriffs, plunging tops, tiny skirts and skimpy black and pink lingerie. Bratz doll books and other products have even been sold to US schools through educational books publisher, Scholastic Inc., with titles such as *Lil' Bratz Dancin Divas* and *Lil' Bratz Catwalk Cuties*. Only through an intensive letter-writing/email campaign by the lobby group Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood, did Scholastic finally agree to stop selling Bratz books and products to schools.<sup>44</sup>

- But they also market to children younger than school age. The Bratz baby dolls for 2-year-olds has ad copy that reads "Babyz already know how to flaunt it," and "They're keeping it real in the crib!"
- **[SHOW SLIDE 77]** There are make-up kits for 4-year-olds and thong underwear sized for 7-year-olds.
- Abercrombie and Fitch t-shirts for preteens include a slinky number that reads, "The Rumors are True." These can also be found on bibs produced by other companies.
- Boys can sport Abercrombie t-shirts that read "Something about you attracts me, I wish I could put my finger on it."

**[SHOW SLIDE 78]** What do you think? Are 7-year-old girls who wear thong underwear any more emotionally mature than 7 year olds were 20 or 200 years ago? There is no evidence that kids are any more ready for sex at an earlier age than they used to be.

**[SHOW SLIDE 79]** There is hope. This is a picture of the underwear Walmart tried to market to young girls. Also called "prostitution panties," these underwear for girls were emblazoned with "Who Needs Credit Cards?"

**[SHOW SLIDE 80]** But, concerned parent activists were able to stop Walmart's marketing of underwear for girls emblazoned with "Who Needs Credit Cards?" We can make a difference!

## **MARKETING VIOLENCE**

**[SHOW SLIDE 81]** Now we would like to talk briefly about marketing violence. By age 18, an American child will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence.<sup>45</sup> Research shows a connection between media and youth violence as strong as that between tobacco and cancer.<sup>46</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 82]** There have been more than a thousand studies over the past 40 years with the conclusion that TV and film violence leads to real-world violence in childhood and later in adult life.<sup>47</sup> For example, six 10-year-olds from 5 countries were followed up in their early twenties; those with more exposure to TV violence were more aggressive as young adults.<sup>48</sup> It's rare to find such uniformity in psychological research.

**[SHOW SLIDE 83]** Early research on violent video games suggests they may be more harmful than violent TV because they reward the child for simulated violence that results in graphic gore or even makes fun of the victims.

**[SHOW SLIDE 84]** Immediate effects include physiological arousal; aggressive thoughts, emotions and actions; hostile attributions and decreases in pro-social actions.<sup>49</sup>

**[SHOW SLIDE 85]** The majority of video games include violence (half of which would cause serious injury or death in the real world).

**[SHOW SLIDE 86]** For example, in Grand Theft Auto 3, one of the most popular video games, players earn points for violence with a wide array of weapons. Game players can use these weapons on their choice of victims—gangsters, police officers or innocent pedestrians. Injuries produce sprays of blood or leave the victim in a pool of blood. A squishing sound is made when someone is run over. In a mature version of the game, a player can have sex with a prostitute and gets extra points for beating her up and taking her money. Computer-savvy teens can even download a way to unblock the censoring program so that in the game they can have sex with the prostitute, beat her up **and then kill her.**

**[SHOW SLIDE 87]** This slide shows that violent video game playing effects the real-world behavior of kids regardless of whether they are low or high on a measure of hostility. The higher the violence level of the video games a kid plays the more likely he is to get into fights. In general, young teens who play more violent games (red columns) engage in more fighting. The good news is fighting is rare (4%) among kids who are already low in hostility and who play games with a low level of violence. However even these low hostility kids are ten times more likely to get into fights if they play the more violent games. And even among those with high hostility levels, violent games more than double the fighting.

**[SHOW SLIDE 88]** Although many teens insist that there is no connection between video game violence and aggressive behavior, perhaps this Parentstv.org. cartoon more accurately illustrates this point.

*In the first square, the boys are looking at a headline that reads: “Violent TV and games linked to aggression”.*

*The boy in the green shirt says, “I hate those bogus studies, they’re so full of it!” The second boy agrees: “Seriously! We see tons of violence and we’re fine!”*

*In the second square the newspaper stand has been demolished and we see the boys walking away, saying, “MAN, those guys tick me off!” “Bunch of quacks!”*

**[SHOW SLIDE 89]** But, the researchers agree with the newspaper headline. In fact, the evidence is so overwhelming that professional organizations, the Surgeon General, the Senate Judiciary committee, and others **uniformly endorse the conclusions about media and violence and have issued suggestions for parents.**

[SHOW SLIDE 90] But there is some good news. You can make a difference by knowing what your children are watching and by setting limits to their exposure to advertising.

- Teenagers in the U.S. are having a more difficult time buying mature video games than in past years. Parent and government efforts reduced the percentage of under-age purchases from 85% in 2000 to 20% in 2008.<sup>50</sup>
- 3rd and 4th grade students whose media time was restricted experienced a 50% **decrease** in verbal aggression and a 40% **decrease** in physical aggression.<sup>51</sup>

## ALTERNATIVE TO MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

[SHOW SLIDE 91] Since the beginning of history, human beings have sought to educate their children to survive and find meaning in their environment.

[SHOW SLIDE 92]

[SHOW SLIDE 93] It was then, and it is now, up to the families, the elders, the villages to pass on the necessary values.

[SHOW SLIDE 94] We live in a much more complex world. Outside forces have entered our homes and are influencing our families to an extent unimagined in previous times.

We know that we can't eliminate advertising from our environment. However, we can work to provide balance;

[SHOW SLIDE 95] through our families, our neighborhoods, our schools, our churches and organizations.

[SHOW SLIDE 96] Working together we can give childhood back to children.

[SHOW SLIDE 97]

[SHOW SLIDE 98]

We have put together a list of resources that can provide ideas, support and encouragement, but it's worth taking some time now to reflect on what kinds of things kids love to do...now and always. First, we thought it would fun to hear some of your ideas of technology--and media-free activities children and families can do as alternatives. (Some sample questions):

*What would you do if you had to go without electricity and batteries for 3 days?*

*What are some of your favorite things to do that don't involve media or technology?*

(After the group has shared some ideas, share some of the following)

[SHOW SLIDE 99] **Contributing to the household:** Young children love to help with household chores, laundry, and preparing meals, and if parents start early establishing this

routine, the kids will feel proud of being able to contribute, and the parents will feel less stressed. Give children a small job to make them feel part of these kinds of everyday activities. You can even make them fun! For example, one family had Saturday morning cleaning while playing show tunes and singing loudly as they cleaned.

**[SHOW SLIDE 100] Bed-time routines:** Having “bed talk” every night with children is a way to give each day a closing ceremony. Night-time rituals give children a sense of security, and allow them to relax and connect with you before going to sleep. Some examples are baths and stories to candlelight. Reading stories ignites a children’s interest in reading, and hearing stories or helping tell them gives children a chance to develop their creativity and imagination. Continuing to read to children even after they can read for themselves is linked with improved vocabulary and reading comprehension. Some families review the day’s highlights and lowlights, and even prepare for the next day’s activities.

**[SHOW SLIDE 101] Dinners together:** Regular routines that children can come to count on are important to families. Simply eating dinner together with the TV off, and using this as a chance to talk to each other, can go a long way in improving family connections. Some families even fill a jar in the middle of the table with slips of paper on which each family member has written questions or conversation starters.

**[SHOW SLIDE 102] Rainy day play:** Children need down time to engage in imaginative play, to de-stress, and to learn to navigate their world. Provide a bin of used clothes for playing dress-up; give kids cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes, and simple things for building; provide your kids with simple art supplies, and encourage your kids to create puppet shows with socks or paper bags. These kinds of activities can engage children’s imagination for hours, and these activities are practically free. Games like charades can engage the whole family for hours.

**[SHOW SLIDE 103] Outdoor play:** Children of all ages love to build forts (indoors or out), play Hide and Seek, tend their own garden plot, or care for an animals, play in mud or water, go on walks to explore the neighborhood. As you do this as a family, you can establish an ongoing relationship with, for example, a tree or a stream, and watch it change through the seasons. One family goes on “Trillium Hunts” in the spring. With your help, your children can learn to look for wild animals, such as birds, squirrels, or spiders, watch them for awhile and try to guess what they are doing. Kids also love to draw on the sidewalk with chalk, hunt for leaves or pinecones, or set up lemonade stands!

**[SHOW SLIDE 104] Establish limits to screen time:** There are much better ways for families to be together than staring at a screen, especially with infants and toddlers. Social and cognitive skills, not to mention love, are far better served by direct contact with parents and friends and through active engagement with the world. Establish limits on how much total

time your children spend online or watching TV, and keep the TV and computer in public areas of the house so that you can supervise them. Consider creating “screen tickets” for TV, video, or computer in half-hour increments and limit how many tickets can be used per week. Sit down with your children at the beginning of the week and highlight which shows they will pick throughout the week to “spend” their screen time wisely.

**[SHOW SLIDE 105] Media Literacy:** When your children do watch TV, sit down and watch it with them, and engage them in conversation about what was realistic or unrealistic about the show, and ways that the show lines up with your family’s values. Teach them to analyze advertisements; help them to guess what they are trying to sell.

**[SHOW SLIDE 106] Assert your role and rights as a parent!** The Parent’s Bill of Rights is an informative way to continue to educate yourself (Commercial Alert: [www.commercialalert.org](http://www.commercialalert.org)). Get involved! Become conscious, active, and public critics of corporate capitalism and proponents of compassionate economic systems

**[SHOW SLIDE 107] Join others:**

- Psychology for a Sustainable Future, [www.earthleaders.org](http://www.earthleaders.org)
  - The site has a Citizen Action Kit to help you and other parents address advertising in your child's school.
- Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood, [www.commercialexploitation.org](http://www.commercialexploitation.org)
- NWEI discussion course: *Healthy Children, Healthy Planet*, [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)
- Earth Scouts, [www.earthscouts.org](http://www.earthscouts.org)
- Jane Goodall’s *Roots and Shoots*, [www.rootsandshoots.org](http://www.rootsandshoots.org)
- TV Turnoff Week, [www.screentime.org](http://www.screentime.org)

**[SHOW SLIDE 108]**

---

<sup>1</sup> Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 21.

<sup>2</sup> American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2001. Retrieved from [http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/children\\_and\\_watching\\_tv](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/children_and_watching_tv) on April 5, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> From CCFC booklet: Kunkel, D. (2001). Children and television advertising. In: D.G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.) *The handbook of children and media* (pp. 375-393). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Kanner, Allen, PES conference (2008).

<sup>6</sup> DeRusha, Jason. (2007, May). “How Many Brands Do Young Children Recognize?” WCCO-TV. Accessed on September 22, 2008 from Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood website: <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/news/brandschildren.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> “Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers, Henry Kaiser Foundation Study (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Kanner, Allen, PES keynote (2007); “Children’s Television Viewing and Cognitive Outcomes: A Longitudinal Analysis of National Data”, *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, retrieved from <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/159/7/619>

<sup>9</sup> Kasser T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

<sup>10</sup> Center for a New American Dream. (1999, July). *New poll shows marketing to kids taking its toll on parents, families*. Takoma Park, MD.

- 
- <sup>11</sup> Kasser T. (in press). Psychometric development of brief measures of frugality, generosity, and materialism for use in children and adolescents. In K. Moore & L. Lippman (Eds.) *Conceptualizing and Measuring Indicators of Positive Development: What do children need to flourish?* New York: Kluwer/Plenum.
- <sup>12</sup> Buijzen, M & Valkenburg (2003). The effects of television on materialism, parent-child conflict, and unhappiness: A review of research. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 437-456.
- <sup>13</sup> E. Morales. (2000, March). The Nag Factor: Measuring Children's Influence. *Admap*, 35-37 and Western Media International (1998). The fine art of whining: why nagging is a kid's best friend. *Business Wire*. August 11.
- <sup>14</sup> Center for a New American Dream. (2002, May) Thanks to Ads, Kids Won't Take No, No, No, No, No, No, No, No for an Answer. Takoma Park, MD.
- <sup>15</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation (2004). *The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity*. Menlo Park, CA: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=32022>.
- <sup>16</sup> Children's Nutrition Research Center in Houston, Texas, [http://www.bcm.edu/cnrc/consumer/nyc/vol\\_2006\\_4/page4.htm](http://www.bcm.edu/cnrc/consumer/nyc/vol_2006_4/page4.htm)
- <sup>17</sup> Kotz, K. & Story, M. (1994). Food advertisements during children's Saturday morning television programming: Are they consistent with dietary recommendations? *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 94, 1296-1300.
- <sup>18</sup> Horgan, K.B., Choate, M. & Brownell, K. (2001). Television food advertising: Targeting children in a toxic environment. In: D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of Children and the Media* (pp. 447- 462).
- <sup>19</sup> Ogden, C.L., Flegal, K.M., Carroll, M.D. & Johnson, C.L. (2002). Prevalence and trends in overweight among US children and adolescents, 1999–2000. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 288:1728–32.
- <sup>20</sup> Center for Disease Control. *Fact Sheet on Food and Beverages Sold Outside School Meals Program*. [http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/shpps/factsheets/pdf/outside\\_food.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/shpps/factsheets/pdf/outside_food.pdf).
- <sup>21</sup> "Channel One News," 28 September 2008. Wikipidia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channel\\_One\\_News](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channel_One_News)
- <sup>22</sup> "Study Teaching Scientists about Prediabetes in Overweight Kids." 11 Jan. 2008. *San Antonio Business Journal*. 14 Jan. 2008, <http://www.bizjournals.com/sanantonio/stories/2008/01/14/focus2.html?b=1200286800^1575050&t=printable>.
- <sup>23</sup> Styne, D. (2001). Childhood and Adolescent Obesity: Prevalence and Significance, *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 48 4: 823–854.
- <sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Overweight and obesity: A major public health issue. *Prevention Report*, 16.
- <sup>25</sup> Robinson, T.N., et al. (2001). Effects of reducing television viewing on children's requests for toys. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 229(3).
- <sup>26</sup> Comstock, George (1991). *Television and the American child*. Academic Press Inc.
- <sup>27</sup> Kilbourne, J. (1999). The more you subtract the more you add. In: *Deadly Persuasion*, New York: Free Press, pp. 128-154.
- <sup>28</sup> Holzgang, J. (2000). Facts on body and image. <http://www.justthink.org/bipfact.html>
- <sup>29</sup> Schreiber G.B. et al. (1996). Weight modification efforts reported by black and white preadolescent girls. *Pediatrics*, 98(1): 63-70.
- <sup>30</sup> Crowther, J.H., Wolf, E.M., and Sherwood, N. (1992). Epidemiology of Bulimia nervosa. In: Crowther, D.L., Tennenbaum, S.E., Hobfall, M.A.P. Stephens (Eds.) *The etiology of bulimia nervosa: The individual and the familial contest*. Washington, D.C.: Taylor and Francis, pp.1-26.
- <sup>31</sup> Field, AE, et al.(1999). Exposure to the mass media and weight concerns among girls. *Pediatrics*. 103:E36.
- <sup>32</sup> Westhead, James. "TV brings eating disorders to Fiji." BBC News. May 20, 1999. Accessed on September 28, 2008 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/347637.stm>.
- <sup>33</sup> Becker, A.E., et al. (2002). Eating behaviors and attitudes following prolonged exposure to television among ethnic Fijian adolescent girls. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 180, 509-514.
- <sup>34</sup> "Portland Public Schools Pulls Soft Drinks, Low-Nutrient Snacks From Campuses" 08/28/2006 Portland Public Schools website <http://159.191.14.139/pg/11018>
- <sup>35</sup> "Fashion Show Bans Too Skinny Models" (September 15, 2006), Fashion News. Accessed on September 28, 2008 from [www.viciousstyle.com/fashionnews/bones.jpg](http://www.viciousstyle.com/fashionnews/bones.jpg)
- <sup>36</sup> Lauter, Devorah (April 15, 2008). "France seeks ban on skinny model ads." CBNNews.com Accessed on September 28, 2008 from <http://www.cbn.com/CBNnews/358005.aspx>.

- 
- <sup>37</sup> Becker, A.E., et al. (2002). Eating behaviors and attitudes following prolonged exposure to television among ethnic Fijian adolescent girls. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 180, 509-514.
- <sup>38</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation (2003). *Sex and the Media*. 3. Menlo Park, CA.: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=14209>
- <sup>39</sup> Collins, R.L. et al., (2004). Watching sex on television predicts adolescent initiation of sexual behavior. *Pediatrics*, 114 (3), 280-289.
- <sup>40</sup> Gentile, D. (1999) *Teen-oriented radio and CD content analysis*. Minneapolis: National Institute on Media and the Family.
- <sup>41</sup> Lichter, S. R. et al. (2000) *Sexual imagery in popular culture*. Washington, DD: Center for the Media and Popular Policy.
- <sup>42</sup> Wingwood, GM, et al. (2003) Perspective study of exposure to rap music videos and African American female adolescents health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93 (3), 437-439.
- <sup>43</sup> Barbaro, Michael. "A Makeover of a Romance" *New York Times*. February 9, 2006. Accessed on October 1, 2008 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/09/business/09barbie.html?pagewanted=1>
- <sup>44</sup> Carolyn Moynihan. "Knock-back for Bratz brand in schools" *Mercator.net* September 23, 2008. Accessed on October 1, 2008 from [http://www.mercatornet.com/family\\_edge/knock\\_back\\_for\\_bratz\\_brand\\_in\\_schools/](http://www.mercatornet.com/family_edge/knock_back_for_bratz_brand_in_schools/)
- <sup>45</sup> CHILDREN, VIOLENCE, AND THE MEDIA - A Report for Parents and Policy Makers, Senate Committee on the Judiciary September 14, 1999
- <sup>46</sup> Alan Kanner's Presentation at PSF conference Portland 2007.
- <sup>47</sup> CHILDREN, VIOLENCE, AND THE MEDIA - A Report for Parents and Policy Makers, Senate Committee on the Judiciary September 14, 1999
- <sup>48</sup> Huesmann, L.R., Moise-Titus, J., Podolski, C., and Eron, D. (2003) Longitudinal relations between children's exposure to TV violence and their aggressive behavior in young adulthood 1977-1992. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol 39, No.2, 201-222.
- <sup>49</sup> Ballard, M.E., & Weist, J.R. (1966). Mortal Kombat: the effects of violent video game play on males' hostility and cardiovascular responding. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 26, 717-730; Lynch, P. J. (1994). Type A behavior, hostility, and cardiovascular function at rest and after playing video games in teenagers. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 56, 152; Crick, N. R., & Dodge, K. A. (1994). A review and reformulation of social information-processing mechanisms in children's social adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 115, 74-101; Gentile, D. A., Lynch, P. J., Linder, J. R., & Walsh, D. A. (2004). The effects of violent video game habits on adolescent aggressive attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol. 27, pp. 5-22; Griffiths, M. D., & Hunt, N. (1998). Dependence on computer games by adolescents. *Psychological Reports*, 82, 475-480; Gentile, D. A., Lynch, P. J., Linder, J. R., & Walsh, D. A. (2004). The effects of violent video game habits on adolescent aggressive attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol. 27, pp. 5-22; van Schie, E. G. M., & Wiegman, O. (1997). Children and videogames: Leisure activities, aggression, social integration, and school performance. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 27, 1175-1194; Anderson, C.A., Gentile, D.A. and Buckley, K.E. (2007) *Violent video game effects on children and adolescents*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY; Anderson, C.A. and Bushman, B.J. Effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, physiological arousal, and prosocial behavior: a meta-analytic review of the scientific literature, *Psychological Science*, Vol 12, No.5, Sept 2001, 353-359.
- <sup>50</sup> Prepared statement of the Federal Trade Commission on "Marketing violent entertainment to children: self-regulation and industry practices in the video game industry". June 14, 2006 and [http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/145654/ftc\\_kids\\_finding\\_it\\_harder\\_to\\_buy\\_mrated\\_video\\_games.html](http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/145654/ftc_kids_finding_it_harder_to_buy_mrated_video_games.html) May 8, 2008
- <sup>51</sup> Robinson TN, et al. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2001;155:17-23).