



CONVERSATION STARTERS: FOR FAMILIES

THE REPRESENTATION PROJECT AND COMMON SENSE MEDIA ARE PROUD TO PRESENT THIS GUIDE TO EMPOWER PARENTS AND FAMILIES TO HAVE HONEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE SUBTLE, AND NOT-SO-SUBTLE, IMPACT OF MEDIA ON OUR LIVES.

- Real-life scenarios to help you imagine how media messages impact our daily lives
- Questions about media and popular culture for you to discuss with your loved ones
- Tips to help your family take action to change their media habits and become more conscious consumers

EVERY FAMILY IS DIFFERENT. WE HOPE THAT YOU USE THIS TOOL AS A STARTING POINT FOR A DIALOGUE ABOUT YOUR FAMILY'S VALUES AND MEDIA HABITS.



STEP INTO ADVERTISERS' SHOES

IMAGINE



You and your family are browsing through magazines at a newsstand in the airport terminal. You notice that nearly every fashion and health magazine cover features “flawless” pictures of celebrities and models. A magazine with a man on the cover has a headline that says “*Six Weeks to Six-Pack Abs.*” A magazine with a woman on the front says “*Beauty Secrets Every Woman Must Know.*”

DISCUSS

- What kind of message would a headline like “*Six Weeks to Six-Pack Abs*” send to boys? How might a magazine with this headline make boys feel about the way they look, and how they should spend their time and money?
- What kind of message would a headline like “*Beauty Secrets Every Woman Must Know*” send to girls? How might a magazine with this headline make girls feel about the way they look, and how they should spend their time and money?
- Have you ever wanted something just because of an ad you saw in a magazine or on TV? What was the ad like? How did it grab your attention? How did you feel afterward?

TAKE ACTION TIPS FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

- Remember that your kids are sensitive to your reactions. When you are standing in line at the grocery store with young kids, diverting their attention from the bikini-clad babes on the covers of magazines might be all it takes. But if you notice your older kids looking at sexy images, a discussion about your family values may be beneficial. Talk about why it's unfair for magazines to make women feel like they are always supposed to be looked at or sexy in order to be desirable.

FOR FAMILIES WITH PRETEENS AND TEENS

- Uncover the messages in advertising. Find an advertisement to examine with your kids, in a magazine, newspaper, online, or on TV. Ask questions like “*What do you think the advertisers are trying to communicate?*” “*How do these messages make us feel?*” “*Why do you think they chose those models?*” “*Do you think the models look like that when they first roll out of bed in the morning?*”

CELEBRATE YOUR ROLE MODELS

IMAGINE



You hear a story on the news about a video that went viral online. In the video, a teen girl stops running in the middle of her race in order to help another runner who has fallen down. She helps her opponent get up, and together they walk across the finish line.

DISCUSS

- How can media, particularly the Internet, help us discover inspiring stories about ordinary people?
- What are some small steps that your family and friends can make in their daily lives to empower girls, and to celebrate kindness and generosity?
- Who are some role models in your life? How do they inspire you?

TAKE ACTION TIPS FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG KIDS

- Seek out positive role models. Help expand your children's horizons by finding role models in real life — as well as in books, TV, and movies — that show children that they can be recognized for their talents and brains rather than their looks. (You may have to search harder in film and TV for examples than in real life and or in books, but that's a valuable part of the exercise!).

FOR FAMILIES WITH PRETEENS AND TEENS

- Show headlines, and make them teachable moments. View current events as a springboard for talking about role models in the media. Point out that the media often pay attention to celebrities who act in inappropriate or shocking ways. Discuss the kinds of role models that are not usually represented in the media, and why.

MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE



IMAGINE

One day, your daughter and her friend are browsing through pictures of friends on a social network site. “She looks like a model,” your daughter says, looking at the profile picture of someone in her class. “I just don’t get how she looks so perfect all the time.” Her friend replies, “But she looks awful in this next picture. See ...”

DISCUSS

- When we look at pictures of others, do we judge them? If so, what are our judgments based on? Why?
- Do girls and boys both feel pressure to look good, offline and online? In what ways are the pressures that girls and boys feel similar or different?
- How can we encourage each other to focus more on our attitudes, goals, education, and dreams rather than the way we look?

TAKE ACTION TIPS

FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG KIDS

- Challenge the status quo. Placing less emphasis on how kids look helps them value themselves in broader ways later in life. Compliment your kids on their attitudes and inner qualities, such as their creativity, perseverance, and kindness. Help kids discover everyday role models who can inspire their talents, intelligence, and dreams.

FOR FAMILIES WITH PRETEENS AND TEENS

- Take time to understand their digital world. Many teens know that images in magazines are edited to perfection. But they may have a harder time resisting the urge to compare themselves to photos of their friends online. Get to know the ins and outs of social media in order to have more meaningful conversations about experiences teens may have online.



IMAGINE

You notice that your child, or perhaps your younger sibling, is having a hard time choosing an outfit to wear to school one day. She tells you that she and her friends have decided to dress up for the boys in her class.

TOO SEXY, TOO SOON?

DISCUSS

- What would you tell your daughter, or younger sibling, in this situation?
- What motivates girls and boys to look “cool” or “hot”? Why? For families with older kids and teens
- Do boys expect girls to look sexy? Do girls think that’s their role? What does “sexy” mean to different members of the family? Where did these impressions come from?

TAKE ACTION TIPS

FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG KIDS

- Help your kids stay kids. Don’t buy sexually revealing outfits, makeup, and other “grown-up” products for children (for example, high heels, short skirts, suggestive attire). Let kids be kids for as long as possible.

FOR FAMILIES WITH PRETEENS AND TEENS

- Share your values. Sexual humor can be appealing to teens because of how embarrassed by and curious they are about the whole topic. But this kind of humor often degrades women and makes sex seem like a laughing matter. Be sure to balance the sexual examples kids see everywhere with discussions about your family’s values.



IMAGINE

You and your family are watching a movie together. The main character, a girl, is smart and creative, but not well liked by her schoolmates. The captain of the football team starts to develop a secret crush on her. The movie’s “fairy tale” ending happens when she’s named prom queen, but only after she receives a makeover, defeats the school’s lead cheerleader in a battle of wits, and starts dating the football star.

DISCUSS

- What kind of message would this movie send to girls about what it means to be successful? What about boys?
- If you were a filmmaker, what type of story would you tell? How would you go beyond stereotypes in your creation of female and male characters?
- What makes up a good male or female role model in a movie? Are there characters you look up to or admire?

TAKE ACTION TIPS

FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

- Organize your own “family hour” with media. As you set guidelines for your kids about screen time, consider starting a weekly tradition where you watch or play with media as a family. Ask questions like: “What if that character had been a girl instead?” “Why is he treating her that way?” “Why is she wearing that while she’s trying to rescue somebody?” You could even watch the end credits and note how many men to women are in prominent roles in creating that TV show, movie, or game.

FOR FAMILIES WITH PRETEENS AND TEENS

- Vote with your remote. You have the power to be selective. As a family, decide which films, magazines, TV shows, toys, and games you want to support based on the messages they encourage. Make a family commitment to avoid tabloids, gossip magazines, reality TV, and other types of media that degrade women. Let a media company know if you find something offensive. Just as important, if there is a piece of media your family finds inspiring, write a letter or email thanking the creator.

BECOME A THOUGHTFUL CONSUMER