

# Advertising: Self Defence Tips for Parents and Young People



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The food industry spends a fortune promoting pre-packaged foods that are high in salt, fat, sugar and additives. Regular consumption of these foods pose a major health risk to our children. Advertisers think nothing of targeting children, and we have outlined a few of their tricks below. Talk to your children about these tricks, and try to help your children become discerning Consumers. If you help your children understand how advertisers influence their behaviour, the advertising magic disappears. The danger is that we drift through life allowing ourselves to be swayed by marketing campaigns without even realising it.

The following are gimmicks that are used by advertisers. See if you can spot these tricks next time you're watching TV!

## **Children's Characters**

Shrek is used to sell chocolate breakfast cereal, and Darth Vader is used to sell burgers. Characters like these are used to make children identify with products, and younger children may pester parents for the product.

## **Health Claims**

The message on a pack of Dairylea lunchables crows that the product is a "good source of calcium". This may be true...but the product is also a good source of saturated fat and salt (with 12g saturated fat per pack, and 2g of salt per pack - it is high in both saturated fat and salt). Foods high in saturated fat and salt are the last things that children today need!

## **Omission**

Advertisers often don't give you the full story about their product. For example, if a manufacturer claims that their product is "virtually fat free" they usually don't mention it when the product is very high in sugar. If a product is touted as "90% fat free", it is still 10% fat...which is high enough.

## **Free Gifts**

Roald Dahl books are given away "free" with Honey Nut Shredded Wheat. Are you buying toys/books, food, or both?

## **Competitions**

“Win a signed light sabre when you buy Rice Krispies”...advertisers frequently try to tempt our children with competitions. It's hard to evaluate the product when your child is so interested in the competition.

## **Smiling Happy People**

Families and kids are always perfect in adverts, like a bunch of smiling happy robots. Advertisers use ideal imagery so that we associate their product with perfection. When did you ever see a guy with a beer belly in a Guinness advert?

## **Stars in Their Eyes...**

Celebrities are paid to tell you that product X is the best. Adverts link unhealthy foods with people who are good-looking or cool, with the hope that consumption of the product is normalised. Ronan O’Gara and Peter Stringer are being **paid** to say that Lucozade sport keeps you going “33% longer”...a dodgy enough claim. This particular product is simply a sugary drink with a little salt, colourings and other additives...but it must be good, Damien Duff drinks it! This tactic takes advantage of the innocent way that children idolize celebrities. Disgusting.

## **Health By Association**

David Beckham drinks pepsi, and he's a fit guy...pepsi must be OK, right? Wrong! Check our website for a review of the health effects of regular soft drink consumption . The reason Pepsi use Beckham is that consumption of the product is normalised...David's good health "rubs off" on the product in the mind of the consumer. Pepsi & Coke do not care if your children increase their risk of type II diabetes or obesity as a result of consuming their products. They are simply interested in the bottom line.

## **The Norm**

Advertisers like you to feel inadequate unless you consume their product. Parents sometimes say to us that they feel guilty if they just offer their child water or milk - they feel that fizzy drinks are normal. We've been bombarded with adverts showing happy kids consuming junk so often that we believe this is the norm.

## **Facts and Figures**

Advertisers sometimes use facts and statistics to make a product look good. Sometimes these figures are misleading. For example: “Lucozade sport helps top athletes go 33% longer” (this statement is not true. The “athletes” in question were college students who had been starved overnight).

## **Repetition**

Adverts keep popping up...the same one over and over again... If you hear the name of a product over and over again, manufacturers think you might be more likely to buy it.

## **Turn it down!**

Sometimes the volume of the adverts is louder than the sound for the programme, and adverts often contain cool music (e.g. McDonalds).

## **Lies, Damn Lies, and Adverts**

The law requires advertisers to tell the truth, but they often use tricky ways to bend the truth. For example, most breakfast cereals contain very little fat...and adverts make a big deal about this, even though the products are usually full of unhealthy sugar and salt. They're not lying, but they're not telling the whole truth either.

## **Lies in the Classroom**

It may be hard to believe, but the Beverage Council of Ireland (formerly the The Soft Drinks and Beer Bottlers Association) fund a website aimed at primary school children. The site claims to educate children about the importance of liquids as part of a healthy balanced lifestyle. School principals throughout the country have been provided with this so-called "educational" material, and it isn't immediately obvious that this initiative is funded by soft drink companies.

The website, [liquids4life.ie](http://liquids4life.ie), insidiously promotes unhealthy soft drink consumption in children. The website uses colourful cartoon characters that appeal to children, and places sugar laden carbonated drinks in the same category as water as a source of good hydration. Education? We don't think so!

Hopefully you will now be able to spot when advertisers are trying to influence your behaviour, and when they are trying to brainwash your kids. Contact us if you spot any other tactics used to push junk food on kids, and we'll highlight this on our web.

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