

Media Influences

SUMMARY

Objective: To help students understand the role of media influence in our lives, through advertisements, music videos, television, movies, commercials, the Internet, etc. Encouraging students to be aware of media techniques may help them to make good decisions.

Process: Students will participate in an analysis of various forms of media, with a focus on media messages about tobacco, alcohol and gambling.

This lesson is one in a series of Grade 8 lessons. If you aren't able to teach all the lessons, try pairing this lesson with the "Who I Am" or "Peer Influence" lessons.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- critically analyze media influence and messages
- increase awareness of media as an influence on personal decision making
- identify personal values and how substance use or gambling fits with personal values

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

- 2.1 Media Techniques (25 minutes)
- 2.2 Media Analysis (15 minutes)
- 2.3 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Advertisements from magazines or online

Teaching about substance use and gambling can and should cross all subjects. Here are a few suggestions for use in other subjects.

LINKS TO SUBJECTS

- **Social Studies:** Consider the cultural component to media influences, and explore different messages about gambling, alcohol and tobacco in other cultures.
- **Physical Education:** Acknowledge the perceptions resulting from media influence on body image.

2.1 Introduction: Media Techniques

(25 minutes)

Adolescents are influenced by their peers and surroundings. The media have a big influence through the Internet, radio, television, advertisements, music, movies, and many other ways of reaching people. There are a number of techniques that media can use to influence people. Explain to students three of the most common techniques as outlined below.¹

- **Bandwagon:** This technique is used in the type of ads that tell you to join the crowd. Advertisers who use this technique want you to think that everyone uses this product (so it must be good), or that you will be popular if you use the product. This technique is often used in soft-drink ads, because there is close competition among the best-selling brands (e.g., Pepsi® versus Coca-Cola®).
- **Testimonial:** This technique often uses celebrities who tell you about the success of a particular product and how it has improved their life. Advertisers who use this technique want you to believe that the celebrity actually uses the product, and that because the celebrity uses it, the product must be good. This technique is often used in ads for products like weight-loss programs and diet pills.
- **Image:** These types of ads try to create a certain image based on the product and the people who use it. Advertisers who use this technique want you to believe that people will admire you for using it, that you have good taste if you use it, or that you'll be beautiful or handsome if you use it. This technique is often used in ads for products like alcohol, makeup and new cars.

¹ Adapted from Drug Awareness and Prevention Education: Middle/Jr High, by Hult Health Education Center, Robert Crown Center for Health Education, & Illinois Department of Public Health. Available from <http://www.hult-health.org>

Have a few advertisements, taken from magazines or online, that represent each of these media techniques. Show one to your class, and ask them what type of technique this ad is using. Discuss what makes them think it is that type of technique. What are they noticing in the advertisement? Is the ad using more than one technique at the same time? Ask them to think of other examples of the same technique that they have seen on television, in movies or online. Discuss with your class the following questions:

- What impact did this type of technique have on your decision to use that product?
- What were your feelings toward this ad when you first saw it?
- How has this ad influenced your decision and lifestyle?
- If this product was not advertised, would you know about it? How else would you find out about the product?

Repeat this activity and discussion for each of the three techniques above.

2.2 Media Analysis

(15 minutes)

Have your students research different areas of the media that influence us in one way or another about tobacco, alcohol and gambling. Encourage your class to pay attention to many types of media: newspapers, magazines, movies, television shows, commercials, billboards, websites, social media, and any others they notice. Mention that these advertisements can be trying to have a positive influence (like getting us to think or act in healthy ways), or can be trying to encourage us to use tobacco, drink alcohol or gamble. Use the following questions to analyze advertisements in three different media forms:

- What do you think is the main point of the ad?
- What technique is being used?
- What emotions or images is the ad trying to appeal to?
- Who is the target of the ad?
- What is the ad trying to say about alcohol, tobacco or gambling?
- How does the image this ad is portraying fit with your personal values?
- How do you filter through media influence when making choices?

2.3 Closure: Key Messages

(5 minutes)

Remind the students that we are exposed to the influence of media every day of our lives. Help them understand that by realizing the techniques advertisers use to engage their audience, they can think about what they really value and really believe, and make decisions based on their values and beliefs. The media sends out many messages, but it is important to realize that there are choices.