

How the Media Affects Teens & Young Adults

Sutter Health – Palo Alto Medical Foundation

People all over the world use the media every day. Whether it's using a computer, watching TV, reading a newspaper, talking on the phone, or listening to the radio – many of us interact with media daily.

Through the media, you can find out about important news, listen to your favorite music, or watch your favorite TV show. But **there are also negative sides of the media that can be especially harmful to teens and young adults** like you.

Listed below are some of the ways that certain types of media can negatively affect your life.

School

According to Common Sense Media, kids who watch a lot of TV have smaller vocabularies and lower test scores in school. Also, these kids do not read as well as kids who watch less TV.

Another study shows that the people with the highest degrees watched less TV as kids and teenagers. A third study shows that different forms of media affect schoolwork differently:

- Third-graders who had TVs in their bedrooms did worse on their schoolwork than their peers who did not have TVs in their bedroom.
- **Third graders with computers in their bedrooms did better than their peers without computers in their bedrooms.**

The results apply to older kids as well.

Obesity

Did you know that **if you watch more than two hours of TV each day, you have a higher chance of being obese when you grow up?** If you are sitting in front of the TV or computer, you are probably not exercising.

Getting enough exercise is key to staying healthy and preventing obesity.

In general, people also tend to eat more when watching TV than sitting at the dinner table because the TV distracts them. People may be full but not realize it, or they might unconsciously eat more when they see a commercial for something that looks appetizing.

Advertising & Commercials

Advertisements are everywhere – TV commercials, pop-up ads on the computer, magazines ads, and billboards – and they have a huge impact on what people buy. Even though it is mostly adults who spend the money, commercials are often aimed at kids. If the advertising for a product is successful, kids will ask their parents to buy the product.

Marketers have obviously found success in advertising to kids: **children ages 12 and under convince their parents to spend more than \$500 million a year**. Some young adults are able to buy the products they see advertised on their own.

Stereotypes

Unfortunately, most of the media you are exposed to do not show people in a realistic way. **Characters on TV are often shown with unrealistic, "perfect" bodies.**

Women are shown as too thin and men are shown with larger-than-life muscles. Photographs in magazines or billboards are edited on the computer to erase flaws and imperfections. Even if you know that what you see is not normal or not real, it can still impact you.

Many teens and young adults want to be like the characters they see on TV. Also, some forms of media do not show the real diversity of the world. According to Common Sense Media, 74 percent of the characters on TV are Caucasian, and 64 percent of video game characters are males.

Violence

The media teaches kids that violence is acceptable. In video games, the way to beat an opponent is to punch, kick, or knock him out. In some video games, you might even kill your opponent. In movies, the good guy wins when he violently defeats his enemy.

A study showed that **4-year olds have a greater chance of being bullies when they are older if they watch a lot of violent TV**. Seeing violent behavior on TV or through other forms of media can also make young adults act more violently.

Sexuality

A study done by the RAND Corporation shows that **teens are twice as likely to have sex or engage in sexual acts if they see similar sexual behavior in the media**.

Many objects in the media that involve sex target teens. Reality TV shows and teen dramas often portray the "cool kids" as the ones who are having sex.

Tips on Using Media Safely

After reading all this, you might think that the media is scary. Your job is to learn how to safely use the media.

Here are some tips to help you do that:

- Separate media from meals. Do not eat in front of the TV. Turn the TV off and focus on the people around you.
- Do not watch TV while doing homework.
- Set aside a part of your day for non-educational media, such as TV, and keep the rest of your day separate. **Do not go over your limit.** Common Sense Media suggests that you do not spend more than one or two hours in front of a screen – TV, computer, and movies – each day.
- Limit media in your room. Keep TVs and computers in common spaces, such as the family room or den.
- Make sure visitors are aware of your family's media rules. For example, the babysitter should know when you and your siblings can use media.
- Once your media limit is up, find an activity that exercises your brain or body. **Spend one minute doing something mentally or physically active for each minute you are exposed to the media.**
- When you see an advertisement, think about whom it is targeting, whether it is realistic, and what makes it appealing.
- Be able to separate fiction from reality in the media and use your judgment.

You have been around the media your entire life. You've had more media exposure than your parents had when they were growing up. Hopefully, after reading this article, you are more educated about how the media can affect your life.

Use this knowledge to stay safe and healthy. Remember: Just because you are growing up in a world run by media does not mean you have to be one of the media's statistics!

<http://www.pamf.org/teen/life/bodyimage/media.html>