

# Media Smarts: Tips for Being a Smart Media Consumer

by Pippi Kessler

*[Reprinted from the Beit Rabban School Tashma newsletter, 2013]*

If you have concerns about the impact of media on your kids, you're not alone! Media is everywhere—on billboards, in movies, on cell phones, and online – and it can be tricky to decide how you want to address it in your family.

If you feel like media is more pervasive than it was when you were a kid, you're right! Changes in production techniques and fewer regulations have altered the media landscape, and more marketers are targeting kids.

People who produce media want to get people to consume more of it – to watch a show again, to buy more products or magazines. That goal isn't always in line with what we care most about as people charged with educating children and raising healthy, self-reliant adults.

New research shows that mainstream media makes kids more materialistic and exposes them to stereotypes about race, gender, sexual orientation and class. It can alter the way they view themselves and cause violent behavior later in life. Research also reveals that media can interfere with developmental tasks, such as language acquisition and social interaction.

## **What Can We Do?**

If you're thinking of starting to make some changes around your family's media use and you're not sure where to start, here are some tips to consider:

Focus on what you CAN control. Set boundaries in your home. Talk to your children about media and teach them how to use critical thinking to analyze what they watch. Consuming media with your children empowers you to talk about it with them in an informed way. If you'd like to see a cheat sheet of persuasion techniques to point out to your kids while they're watching commercials, for instance, [click here](#).

Check in with yourself and with your family. For many of us, the reason we watch movies or go online is because consuming media fills certain underlying needs that we have. For example, you might turn the TV on to keep your kids safely occupied while you take a shower. Or maybe you find that your kids turn to the computer after they've been socializing all day and need a moment to be alone. It's important to listen to your needs because if you try to limit media use but don't address the underlying needs that provoked them, your new boundaries won't work for you and they won't stick for your family. Ask yourself, "What are some of the underlying needs my family has and, how can we make sure those needs are met?"

Check the research. It can feel overwhelming to add another item to your to do list, but you don't have to do it alone! One of the benefits of being connected to a community like Park Avenue Synagogue is that you can collaborate with other people in the community find information you need. You can also visit [www.mayan.org](http://www.mayan.org) to view our resource guide or contact the Ma'yan staff for recommendations.

Check in on your child. Think about how your child responds to media. Different kids have different needs. Is your child especially sensitive to intense imagery? Does your child need to spend time with you to process what he or she has seen? Your family's specific needs can help you decide how to shape your approach to media.

Check in and adjust. Don't hesitate to evaluate and fine-tune the media boundaries you set. If they are not working well, readjust them!

Thinking about media consumption isn't easy! While you can't control everything, focusing on what you can control – your family boundaries and your own learning and reflection – can help you raise healthy children who grow to be critically-thinking adults.

*Want more information about media? Contact Ma'yan Program Director Pippi Kessler at [pip-pikessler@gmail.com](mailto:pip-pikessler@gmail.com)*