



How Cigarette Advertisements Influence Teens

By: Carol Duh-Leong, MD, MPP, FAAP

Each year, tobacco companies spend billions of dollars to promote their products, including electronic cigarettes ([/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/E-cigarettes.aspx](#)) that are especially popular with young people. Research shows these advertisements reach, and strongly influence, children and teens.



Smoke Signals

Nearly 7 out of 10 middle and high school students say they've seen e-cigarette ads, for example, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/ecigarette-ads/index.html>). Statistics like these worry public health experts, since studies show the more cigarette ads teens see, the more likely they are to try smoking. Research also suggests that seeing characters who smoke in movies makes them more likely to try cigarettes.

Many teens who try smoking don't stop. In fact, about 9 out of 10 smokers began the habit by age 18, according to a U.S. Surgeon General report (<https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use/factsheet.html>).

Teens go through big developmental changes, forming their own identities and taking more risks. They also begin to pay more attention to being accepted by friends. One study (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/139/6/e20163353>) found that cigarette ads may make teens feel like smoking would make them popular, sophisticated, attractive or tough.

What Parents Can Do

Be aware of and discuss how seemingly subtle points in cigarette ads can send a powerful, and potentially harmful, message to teens.

- **Talk with your teen.** Teens really do value the opinions of their parents. If you are with your teen and you see a cigarette ad, talk about it. Tell your teen that his or her feelings are important, and start a constructive and respectful discussion where both of you can express your feelings and opinions about smoking.
- **Think beyond tobacco.** E-cigarettes and other electronic smoking devices, such as hookah ([/English/health-issues/conditions/tobacco/Pages/Hookah.aspx](#)), might be advertised as less harmful to health than regular cigarettes. Ads may make a point of saying that e-cigarettes vaporize flavored "vape juice" rather than burning tobacco. Make sure your teen knows the nicotine from vaping is still highly addictive. In addition, research (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/11/30/peds.2017-1832>) shows teens who use e-cigarettes are more likely to smoke regular tobacco. This research supports the concept that e-cigs serve as a "gateway" to traditional cigarettes.
- **Monitor screen time.** Many teens exposed to cigarette ads, especially those for e-cigarettes, report seeing them on the internet and TV (unlike ads for regular cigarettes, e-cigarette ads are legally allowed to air on TV). A 2018 study (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/12/29/peds.2017-2927>) in Pediatrics found that teenagers who watched videos about tobacco products online, for example, were more likely to try and use tobacco products more frequently. They were also less likely to stop using the products. Make a family media use plan ([/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx](#)) to help limit the influence of these ads on your children.

- **Identify your teen's talents.** Adolescence is a time when teens are trying to find their identity. It is important for parents to be positive about their teen's talents and goals—whether it be basketball or social studies. This will help them develop a strong sense of identity outside of potentially unhealthy habits. [Back to Top](#)
- **Get involved in the community.** Whether it be with the school's parent-teacher association or local health programs in your city, parents have a strong voice in the community (/english/family-life/community/pages/default.aspx). You can say no to cigarette ads in places where your child lives and plays.
- **Shop Around.** If your local pharmacy or mini-mart displays cigarette ads, consider shopping at stores that do not sell traditional cigarettes or e-cigarettes.

Remember

Cigarette ads can have a strong influence on children and teens. But there are steps you can take to protect against their powerful pull, helping kids avoid a future clouded by tobacco and nicotine.

More information:

- 5 Unhealthy Ways Digital Ads May Be Targeting Your Child (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/5-Unhealthy-Ways-Digital-Ads-May-Be-Targeting-Your-Child.aspx)
- For Teens – Straight Talk About Smoking (/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Teens-and-Smoking.aspx)
- Smoking in the Media – The Influence on Children (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Smoking-and-the-Media.aspx)
- Glamorizing Addiction: The Problem with Smoking in Movies (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Smoking-in-the-Movies.aspx)

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