

SESSION 6

Beware of branding: The power of food advertising

BACKGROUNDER FOR EDUCATORS

Canadian children and youth are exposed to more food marketing than ever before, and over 90% of products advertised during children's TV programming are high in sugar, salt or fat.^{xvii} Unhealthy foods and beverages are also being advertised on kids' websites, video games, magazines, radio, and packaging. The majority of food advertisements targeting children in Canada are for pre-prepared meals, restaurants, and grain products such as white bread and sugary cereals; by contrast, whole fruits and vegetables are rarely advertised at all.^{xviii} The impact of marketing unhealthy food to children has been related to high levels of childhood obesity, which has tripled since 1981 with almost 1 in 3 children being overweight or obese.^{xix} Currently in Canada, the marketing of food and beverages to children is largely unregulated, however in Quebec, a ban on unhealthy food and beverage advertisements that target children has resulted in fewer children eating fast food.^{xx}



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Kids will learn that advertising is often misleading and explore the power of corporate food brands in our society.



SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pencils, markers
- Grocery flyers, food cards
- Examples of food advertising
- **Sharing Food Traditions questionnaire** (in preparation for session 7)



SAMPLE TIMING AND FLOW

- 10 min Name that Brand
- 10 min Kids are the Target
- 20 min Getting Excited About the Good Stuff
- 25 min Garden Activity
- 40 min Meal Preparation
- 15 min Meal Sharing
- 5 min Clean-up

Before this session ends, handout the "Sharing Food Traditions" questionnaire for the next session

ACTIVITIES

NAME THAT BRAND

What you'll need:

In preparation for this session, collect a series of flyers that are advertising brand name foods, as well as menus from fast foods restaurants. Use post-it notes or black permanent marker to cover the name of the brand and part of their logo, leaving just enough to give a hint as to whose logo it might be. Also collect a number of pictures of vegetables, fruits, grains, kitchen tools from a grocery flyer, or use our **food cards**. Try to find some less common foods and cooking tools. These should be individually cut out.

What to do:

Begin this activity by explaining to the group that the challenge is to "Name that brand." Instruct kids to raise their hands if they think they know the answer. As you make your way through the different brands and foods, keep a mental tally of which items kids recognize correctly. In our experience, fast food logos and common convenience foods are most likely to be recognized.

After you've quizzed the group on all the brands and foods ask: which brands or foods were most easily recognized?

Encourage a discussion around why we are able to recognize brand name logos so easily (even when they are partially hidden).

Suggested Dialogue:

Why were the logos, brands and convenience foods more easily identified?

- Very visible: TV, billboards, internet ads, strategic placement on store shelves
- Eat these foods most often

Food companies spend millions on advertisement. Why is it so important that people recognize their logos?

- Choose foods we recognize, and know what to expect
- Sometimes we want to eat foods because everyone else is (peer pressure)



SUGGESTED GARDEN ACTIVITY

Extend the branding theme to the garden and make your own garden signs by painting rocks.

Why can it be more difficult to recognize the “whole foods” and the tools needed to prepare whole foods?

- We may choose pre-prepared foods more often compared to cooking from scratch
- Pre-prepared foods are designed to be convenient for cooking and cleanup, which means they don't require many kitchen tools. These may be less used and less familiar.

Food companies spend millions directing their advertising to kids your age. Do you think you're being affected by their ads? Can you think of ways they influence what you eat?

- More likely to purchase brands you recognize
- Incentives like toys, access codes to online video games

KIDS ARE THE TARGET

Direct your conversation towards food advertising focused on kids. Here are some questions to guide your discussion.

How much do you think fast food restaurants spend yearly on advertising to children and youth? A) 10 million B) 100 million C) over 1 billion?

- In 2012, US fast food restaurants spent \$4.6 billion on advertising to children and teens.^{xxi}

**Note: we are using American statistics since our Canadian government doesn't require food companies to report on their child-targeted advertising spending.*

What kinds of food do you most remember seeing ads for? Are they healthy foods?

- Approximately 95% of food ads are for unhealthy foods.
- Snacks and candy > cereal > fast foods > dairy > fruit juices. No fruits and vegetables!

What are some of the tricky ways that advertisers are trying to get kids attention? Not just flashy colours, they are getting really high tech.

- Attractive packaging
- Strategic placement on shelves (at kids' height)
- Sponsoring kids' camps or sports teams
- Product placement in movies and TV shows
- Ads on Facebook, and other social media that encourage kids to share, join, invite friends.
- Many food and beverage companies create branded video games, quizzes and contest.

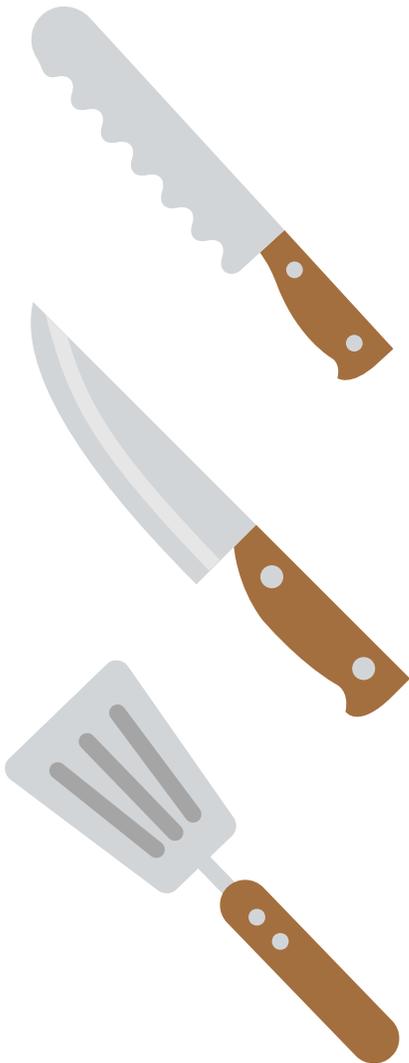
Why kids?

- Brand Loyalty: Advertisers know that if they get children to want to buy their product from a young age, these kids are more likely to buy their product for the rest of their lives.
- Children influence their parents' purchases. Children influence more than \$1 trillion of spending in North America per year. Advertisers call this “pester power.”

Who here has nagged their parents to buy something for them?

Did it work?

- Food companies know this, so they are trying to make their food look as good as possible to YOU so that you help them sell their foods and drinks to your parents.



GETTING EXCITED ABOUT THE GOOD STUFF

Imagine if the same amount of time, effort and money were put towards advertising healthy food. As a group, brainstorm strategies not to fall victim of advertising.

Inspect those packages: What are they doing to make you want their foods? What are they trying to hide from you? Are they targeting you especially?

Expensive is not always best: Often you'll pay more for certain brands of food or drink, but they won't always be better (in taste, texture or nutrition).

Because WHO said so? Just because a celebrity or cartoon or movie character is featured on a package does not mean they actually like or eat this food. They are being paid lots of money to do a job!

Trust your taste buds: Don't let others influence your food choices just because something is "cool" or "trendy."

Scrap the Package! Avoid foods with packaging. Shop on the outside of the grocery store; this is where the less processed food can be found.

Ask: What if vegetables and fruits were advertised in similar ways? How can we get vegetable snacks to look more appealing to kids?

Here are two examples of veggies ads: **Broccoli vs. Kale** and **Baby Carrots**

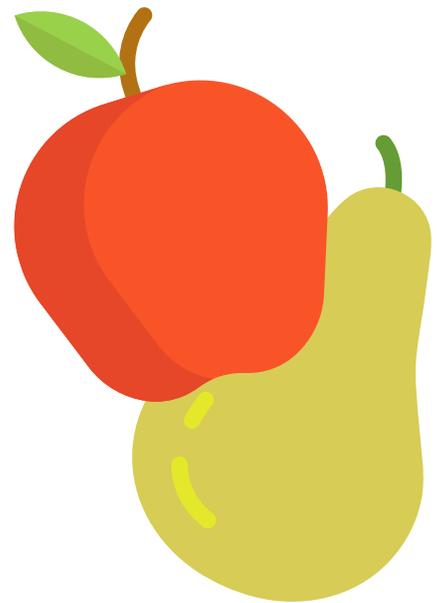
Now that we know that unhealthy snacks are the main foods that are being advertised to kids, then how can we change this? One way is to learn how to make your own healthy and delicious snacks at home.

Split the group into teams. Introduce the challenge: Make a healthy snack and come up with the best way to sell your snack to the group. Encourage participants to work together and strategize the best way to sell it. Create a paper ad with flashy colours, association with celebrities/TV shows/movies, fancy packaging, catchy slogan or improvise a TV commercial. After making your ads and preparing your snacks, ask the different teams to present their healthy snack ad to the whole group.



EXTRA RESOURCES

- Visit the **Stop Marketing to Kids Coalition** and educate yourself on the realities of food marketing that targets children.
- Watch this **Food MythBusters video** and learn more on the sneaky tactics of food marketers.



RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

Healthy snacks that can be the subject of the "healthy ads" described to the left. Try hummus, kale chips and green smoothies.



FOOD FUN FOR ALL!

Be sensitive to group dynamics. Friends are great, but being able to connect and get along with different types of people is an important skill and also creates a more positive group dynamic. Encourage group mixing and different partnering. Break down barriers with silly games (get them laughing!), "Get to know you" icebreaker and shared group goals or challenges.