What Does Advertising Say About Smoking? Lesson Idea

Objectives

- Recognize that the decision to smoke is influenced by advertising.
- Recognize that the ability to make responsible health decisions helps people feel good about themselves.
- Describe the logical steps in the decision-making process.
- Recognize that the use of tobacco represents a choice.

Prepare

- Ask students to bring to class one or more tobacco (cigarettes or chewing tobacco) advertisements from old magazines or newspapers. (The Tobacco Advertising Gallery at www.tobaccofreekids.org also has print ads available online.)

Materials

- Old magazine or newspaper ads for tobacco products

Explore

1. *Did you ever want to buy something because you saw it in an ad? What did your parents say?* Encourage discussion of media aimed at young people, such as those for candy, gum, soft drinks, athletic shoes and equipment, video games and toys. Students will probably respond that their parents usually will not buy a product based solely on an advertisement. Other factors, such as cost, need and value, are considered.

2. *What is the purpose of advertising?* To influence people to buy something or support something.

3. Have students look at the tobacco advertisements they found. *How does the picture on the advertisement try to make using tobacco look like something you might want to do?* Encourage students to discuss the specific images and how they are supposed to appeal to consumers.

   *What do the men and women in the ads look like? What are they doing?* (They are young and good-looking. Some show people working or engaged in an athletic activity; some show them in a pretty, romantic setting; some show people having fun with other people.) *What do the tobacco advertisers think you will do when you see glamorous people smoking in their ads or in the movies?* (Buy cigarettes or chewing tobacco so that you will be glamorous, too.) *In real life, are the people you see who are smoking cigarettes or chewing tobacco always young, good-looking and doing exciting things?* (No) Encourage students to recognize that the ads are not realistic.

4. *What else do you notice in all the tobacco ads?* (Each ad includes a warning in large print about the dangers of cigarette smoking.) Have volunteers read different warnings found in the ads. *Why do tobacco companies advertise their products when they know that they are harmful to people’s health?* (To make money) *Do you think it is wise of people to be influenced by ads or movies when they know that the product is harmful and that the company is simply trying to make money by selling its product?* Encourage discussion.

Point out that we do not always think carefully when we make decisions based on ads. We may not consciously think we will become glamorous by imitating the people in the ads. However, we are emotionally influenced by the beautiful or “cool” images in the pictures. *How can we keep ourselves from doing or buying things simply because they are advertised in an attractive way?* (Instead of simply responding emotionally, we should think carefully about the advertisement. We should ask ourselves how and why an advertiser is picturing a product in a certain way. We should evaluate the product based on realistic data such as cost, need and whether it is a wise choice for us.)
Review with students the steps they can follow in making wise decisions about not using tobacco products. Guide students to describe the process of decision-making: gathering information, evaluating it and then arriving at decisions based on what they have learned.

5. Invite students to create advertisements that promote the benefits of not smoking. Encourage them to use what they have learned about advertisements to make their ads as eye-catching and appealing as possible. Have students display their ads and, as a class, discuss which ones are most effective and why. Then display the ads in the school hallways or lunchrooms.