



Roanoke Area Youth Substance Abuse Coalition
Promoting a Safe & Drug Free Roanoke Valley

www.raysac.org

RAYSAC Radar

Media Literacy and Youth Culture

Media literacy is the ability to analyze media messages, understand the intent of those messages, and judge how the information is used. The media include channels through which messages are delivered-such as television, radio, the internet, movies, video games, magazines, and newspapers. Media is a dominant force in our culture and an important part of a teenagers' life.

Our youth face many messages from television shows and movies, video games, music, and social networking sites. These messages are filled with ideas about what it means to be young, how to handle interactions with others, how to have fun, and how to gain status as an adult. However, teens are not always equipped to critically examine the messages, and their meanings, intent, context and impact. Because media plays such an important part in the lives of our youth, it has far-reaching potential to influence their values and how they view the world.

Parents should use every opportunity to talk to their teen about media messages. The best time to have the discussion is when parents are watching television or listening to the radio with their teen. By helping our youth become more media literate, we help protect them from the pressures from advertising and other media forms that encourage smoking, drinking, drug use or eating unhealthy foods.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) explains that media literacy can help youth recognize and understand messages (subliminal or direct) delivered in song lyrics, television shows, movies, or advertisements or depicted on T-shirts and jewelry. Media literacy is defined as the ability to use critical-thinking skills in accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media. They suggest using the five basic steps of media education to help your child process, identify, analyze and evaluate media messages. **Step 1-Reality:** Media messages represent (someone's) reality. What is the message maker's point of view? **Step 2-Interpretation:** People interpret media messages differently. How does the message make you feel? **Step 3-Construction:** Each media message is a collection of words, images, and sounds. What special words, images, and sounds are used to create the message? **Step 4-Purpose:** Each media message has an author and a purpose. Who created the message and why? **Step 5-Form:** Media messages come in different forms. How is the message delivered (magazines, television, radio, newspapers, etc.)?

By helping our youth become media literate, we help them build communication skills, encourage them to consider other interpretations of media messages and improve media use habits, such as changing viewing behaviors. In addition, we can improve the media use habits of the entire family and promote more proactive behavior among all family members.

***Fact:** Magazines with the highest proportion of young readers also are the most likely to contain alcohol advertisements.*

Parents! Use Your Voice...they are listening!