



SAMHSA's Award-Winning Newsletter  
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## Underage Drinking & Media Literacy

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Kids and teens are bombarded with media messages at every turn—whether it's product placement in a television program or an ad on their Facebook profiles. Sometimes those messages—whether purposefully or inadvertently—promote activities like drinking and smoking to kids and teenagers.

SAMHSA's [Too Smart To Start](#) Web site includes age-appropriate resources for tweens and teens, as well as resources for families and educators, to shed light on media messaging.

### What Is Media Literacy?

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.

According to [Too Smart To Start](#) resources, media literacy is not “media bashing.” Because media are dominant forces in our culture and an important part of teenagers' lives, media should be evaluated fairly. Media literacy can help youth keep perspective.

### Asking Questions

The road to media literacy involves starting a discussion with teens. Although this activity can be conducted formally in a classroom, the richest opportunities may arise when parents are watching television or listening to the radio with their kids.

[Too Smart To Start](#) offers a model for discussion based on the [Media Literacy Ladder](#) (see graphic). Ultimately, the goal is to get kids asking the right questions about media messages. Those questions include:

- Through what medium is the message delivered?
- Who created the message and why?
- What words, images, or sounds are used to create the message?
- How does the message make you feel?
- What is the message maker's point of view?

The resources offer a sample script for an impromptu conversation that can lead to answers and get kids thinking. For example, if they are watching a music video, parents can ask simple questions like, “Who made this video?” and “What is this video about?” or “Why do you think they made the video?” With enough practice, kids may start to ask those questions on their own.

Media literacy doesn't happen overnight; it's a process. [Too Smart To Start](#) offers some tip sheets to parents for working through difficulties. They include “[Reading Between the Lines](#),” “[Talking with Teens about Media Literacy](#),” and “[What Are Some Ways I Can Work With My Teen?](#)”

For more information about media literacy and underage drinking, visit SAMHSA's [Too Smart To Start](#) Web site.

### Climb the Ladder!

The media literacy ladder can teach teens to look deeper into media messages and not take them at face value—especially those about drinking. Each step includes a question that leads teens deeper into the heart of the message.

**Step 5**—What are the message makers trying to accomplish—sell a product, promote a belief, etc.?

**Step 4**—How does the message make you feel?

**Step 3**—What words, images, or sounds are used to create the message?

**Step 2**—What's the purpose—who created the message and why?

**Step 1**—How is the message delivered (e.g., TV, billboard, the Internet)?

The ladder helps teens make comparisons, link cause and effect, distinguish fact from opinion, and investigate bias and slant.

## **Previously in *SAMHSA News***

[Underage Drinking: What Parents Need To Know](#)

[Parent Awareness of Youth Substance Use Varies](#)

[How Much Are Young People Drinking?](#)