

Parents Matter

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Discerning Wants and Needs in the Face of Persuasive Advertising

As parents, we often hear about the importance of helping our children distinguish the difference between wants and needs. In a consumer driven society where children are bombarded by the media with messages promoting the latest gadgets, designer brand clothes and must have toys - perspective on what they actually need vs. what they want is critical. It's also helpful for them to see their list of needs and wants in relation to children from other cultures, many who live on \$2 a day.

However, children's wants are invaluable. They provide us with insights into their passions, interests, curiosity, and sense of self. They can illuminate the directions in which our children long to go. And they can indicate a longing for social acceptance and a struggle to fit in. For these reasons, it's important to help our children embrace and understand what they want and why they want it.

I'm not advocating for giving in to every desire a child has or allowing him or her to purchase anything on a wish list. But as adults we know that to want is a great motivator. Teaching a child how to work for something he or she desires, how to save money, how to strategize, how to resist being impulsive and how to be a smart consumer are lifelong lessons that can easily be taught when your child longs for something.

As a result, knowing which desires are best to promote for this type of learning and growth is important. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself and your child as you consider making a purchase:

1. What will it give you?
2. What interest does it serve?
3. What learning does it promote?
4. How does it relate to who you want to become?
5. How does it influence your feelings of being socially accepted?
6. Who will you be if you have it?
7. Who will you be if you don't have it?
8. What are the costs of buying it (financial, time, shift in habits, etc.)?
9. How willing are you to wait and work for it?
10. How will it be a part of your life in one month, six months, one year, five years?

Not all of these questions are relevant to every situation, but the bottom line is to help children assess how a certain purchase will serve them, entertain them, promote a passion, etc. and what are both the seen and unseen costs of making such a purchase. The ultimate goal is to help our children think critically about their wants and desires, and to promote conscious decision making abilities—all in the face of persuasive advertising.

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Another Parent Tip From...

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