

How does tobacco target youth?

Nathan McGee, R2TEC Program Director/CXII Coordinator for the Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group A submitted the following letter which he reports was written by a teenager from Duke High School. The letter references how the tobacco industry targets children.

“Tobacco is talking to our kids every day: in convenience stores, in magazines, online, and through special promotions designed to lure them into thinking that smoking is cool or a way to express their independence. Tobacco companies intimately study youth behavior and use their findings to create images and themes attractive to youth. They spend enormous resources tracking the behaviors and preferences of youth under 21. They knowingly place advertisements in magazines popular with youth. They send direct mail pieces to youth without verifying their age. They use youth-targeted flavors in their tobacco and smokeless tobacco, such as Cherry Skoal, and candy-flavored cigarettes. They promote cigarette-sized cigars and push youth-targeted promotional items to promote their brands.

Tobacco in the movies and on television is portrayed as fun, exciting, sexy, rebellious or connected to wealth and power. That reinforces common advertising themes of the tobacco industry and increases youth smoking. When tobacco use is viewed as normal, it implies that smoking is acceptable and is another factor in encouraging youth people to use tobacco. When leading actors light up or make anti-tobacco statements, it sends a powerful message to young people about tobacco use. Regardless of the intent, putting tobacco into the hands of the “bad guy” may also encourage teenage tobacco use. However, when anti-tobacco messages are included in movies or on TV, it has the opposite impact and may discourage young people from starting to smoke.”

For more information about how to help fight tobacco use among children, contact Nathan McGee at 580-482-1290.

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