

# The Prevention Professionals' Primer on Media Literacy



Pacific Southwest (HHS Region 9)

**PTTC**

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network

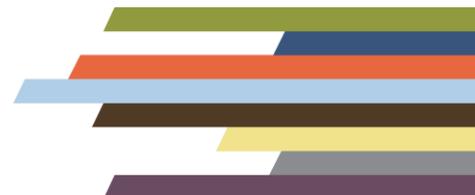
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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This work is supported by the following cooperative agreement from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Pacific Southwest PTTC: H79SP081015-01

July 2020



# Prevention Professionals Primer on Media Literacy

## *What is media literacy?*

Media literacy is the ability to identify different types of media and the messages they send. Media includes a broad range of platforms, such as newspapers, television, music, digital advertisements, tweets, billboards, etc. The goal of media literacy is to have the skills to critically analyze messages shared through media.

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*To become media literate is not to memorize facts or statistics about the media, but rather to learn to raise the right questions about what you are watching, reading, or listening.*

*- Center for Media Literacy*

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## *Why is media literacy important?*

Alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana advertising increases the likelihood that youth will start to use these substances.<sup>1,2</sup> A recent study found evidence for a causal relationship between alcohol marketing and drinking among young people.<sup>3</sup> “Youth who reported that they'd seen more medical marijuana ads also reported greater marijuana use and more positive beliefs about marijuana; they also said that they were more likely to use marijuana in the future and they experienced more consequences from their use.”<sup>2</sup> Even more concerning, research has found that adolescents are targeted specifically by advertisers, violating guidelines set by the alcohol industry.<sup>4</sup>

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Consequently, media literacy skills are crucial for adolescents to increase critical thinking regarding the messages with which they are bombarded every day. For example, youth are exposed to an average of three alcohol ads per day, with black and Hispanic youths' exposure roughly double than that of white youths.<sup>5</sup>

The good news is that research has shown that media literacy education can be effective in reducing the impact of this ever-present marketing of substances.<sup>6,7</sup>

It is interesting to note that media literacy programs may be more effective than some other prevention strategies due to a higher level of youth engagement. “It encourages that side of adolescence that wants to question authority and reality. That nourishes critical thinking.”<sup>8</sup> Due to this higher level of engagement, teachers also enjoyed implementing media literacy programs



compared to standard tobacco prevention programs.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, it can be an easier “sell” for prevention practitioners when working to have media literacy strategies implemented in their communities.

## *What are the core concepts of media literacy that prevention professionals need to know?*

The Center for Media Literacy created the following set of research-based, core concepts for media literacy with corresponding key questions:

1. All media messages are constructed.  
*Who created this message?*
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.  
*What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?*
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.  
*How might different people understand this message differently?*
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.  
*What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?*
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.  
*Why is this message being sent?*

These concepts and questions can be used to structure discussions with youth and other community members by providing a method for critical thinking and analysis of the media messages regarding alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.

## *How can prevention practitioners implement media literacy?*

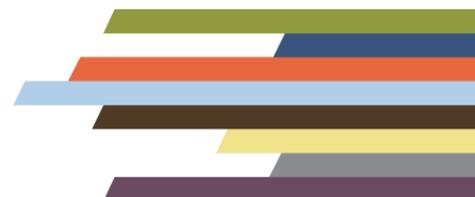
Many evidence-based curricula exist to assist prevention practitioners with implementing the key concepts of media literacy in classroom settings (see Additional Resources section for examples). However, the core concepts and key questions can be incorporated into prevention work in a variety of other ways and settings. The following are examples:

### **Enlist parents and other adults**

Teach the media literacy core concepts and key questions to parents and other adult role models so they can reinforce critical analysis of media messages regarding alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.

### **Share media analysis tips through social media**

Use your social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to share posts about how to critically analyze media messages (including the what you are posting!).



## Build support for media literacy strategies across sectors

Teach community partners (e.g., schools, community-based youth organizations, parent organizations) about the importance of media literacy to increase community readiness.

## Look for “teachable moments”

When interacting with youth, ask about what they are listening, streaming, and viewing online. Pose questions to help them critically analyze the messages being conveyed through the media using the core concepts and key questions.

## Nurture the implementation of media literacy strategies

Map existing community resources and offer small grants to incorporate media literacy strategies into existing programs.

## Write an op-ed article for your local newspaper

Contact your local newspaper with an offer to write an op-ed piece on media literacy. Include the core concepts and key questions in your story.

## Enlist the help of your local librarians

Meet with your local librarians to enlist their help with media literacy education during the one-on-one support that they deliver to the general public.

## Leverage higher education resources

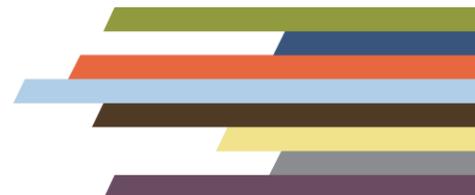
Offer to provide workshops to local college students regarding media literacy or to demonstrate how to integrate media literacy education into college class offerings.

## Contact your local television station

Find out if any shows are looking for people to interview and offer to discuss media literacy core concepts.

## *Additional Resources*

The resources below are tools that substance misuse prevention practitioners can access to enhance their own and others' abilities to sort fact from fiction in messages from the media and on digital platforms. However, not all media literacy strategies have been researched or evaluated to determine how effective they are. Moreover, states, jurisdictions, tribes, and communities have different criteria to serve as a standard for evidence. It is important to be critical thinkers in determining if the evidence of effectiveness for the resources below meets your criteria and standards for evidence; the degree to which it supports your existing efforts; whether it aligns with the risk and protective factors you aim to change; or if it is consistent with any other considerations you might have.



## General Media Literacy

### [Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit](#)

This kit includes a research-based teaching strategy to assist schools and communities in organizing and structuring teaching activities using a media literacy lens. The *MediaLit Kit*<sup>™</sup> documents can be used individually or together, for training workshops, in-services, library reference and parent/community education, as well as in the K-12 classroom.

### [Crash Course Media Literacy](#)

This course presents a 12-part video series that goes beyond the typical media literacy topics, digging into things like the history of media literacy and how policy affects the media we consume.

### [Digital Citizenship Curriculum](#)

Features free K-12 lessons on news and media literacy.

### [Media Literacy Video Library](#)

Links to short videos on the following topics:

- Why News Matters
- How to Choose Your News
- How False News Spreads
- How to Spot a Misleading Graph
- How Statistics Can Be Misleading
- Not All Scientific Studies Are Created Equal
- Pros and Cons of Public Opinion Polls
- Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers
- Why the News Isn't Really the News
- Understanding Unconscious Bias
- How to Spot Fake News
- Helping Students Identify Fake News with the Five C's of Critical Consuming
- What is Information Literacy?
- How Social Media Filter Bubbles Work
- The Language of Lying

## Digital Literacy

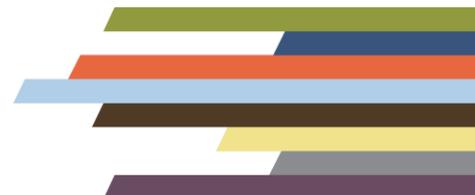
### [Navigating Digital Information](#)

In 10 episodes, John Green teaches how to navigate the internet. He partnered with MediaWise, The Poynter Institute, and The Stanford History Education Group to develop this curriculum of hands-on skills to help evaluate the information read online.

## Spotting Fake News

### [How Does Fake News Become Real News?](#)

This video identifies the way misleading or false info (intentional or not) spreads and how to recognize it when it's happening.



### [Deep Fakes: Can You Spot a Phony Video?](#)

This is a good overview of this shocking new evolution of manipulated media.

## Tobacco and Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems/Vaping

### [Smoke Detectors! Deconstructing Tobacco Use in Media](#)

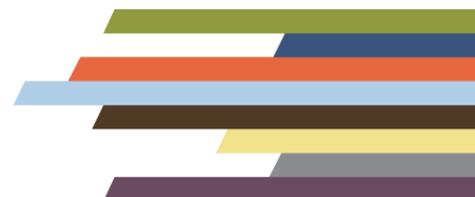
*Smoke Detectors!* is a comprehensive program to reach communities, parents, local organizations, churches, and schools. Although providing educational training and curricula is a key component of the program, the driving concept behind *Smoke Detectors!* is to engage citizens and spur individual action.

### [How to Use the Vaping and Juuling Trend to Teach Media Literacy](#)

A free curriculum that helps 6-12 grade students recognize and analyze age-old advertising tricks.

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