Day 5

Interview

Interview with Dr. Susan Linn

Dr. Susan Linn studies the impact of advertising on kids—on how they see the world, and on how they play. Her organization, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, CCFC, works for the rights of children to grow up without being influenced by commercial interests. She’s also a master puppeteer and teaches children and grownups all over the world about the importance of creative play. Her puppet, Audrey Duck, helps her get this important message out to parents, children, teachers, and even advertisers!

Arun: Thanks so much for talking to us today. We were wondering if you could address how advertising affects kids like us.

Dr. Linn: Well, Arun, I think childhood should be a time for creative play, discovery, and learning. But instead, advertisers are telling kids what they should want, what they should buy, and what they should play with. The more they can influence kids, the more money these companies make.

Susana: So are you saying that if I want a particular toy to play with it’s because I’ve seen it on TV or in the movies?

Dr. Linn: Yes, I am. And kids are not only buying toys that are marketed to them every day on television and in the movies; they’re also being persuaded to eat certain foods and to want things they don’t need. Do we really need 200 dollar athletic shoes? Expensive video games? Why do we think we need them? Life choices should be ours – not the decision of a company, celebrity, or famous athlete.

Arun: Well, what do you think Susana and I and our peers could do to make better decisions that are not influenced by television advertisements?

Dr. Linn: Well, the first thing kids should do is take back their own creativity. A long time ago, before television became so important to everyone, kids spent hours in creative play. Think of the last time you expressed yourself by tapping into your own imagination. If you can’t, maybe it’s time for a change.

Susana: So you’re saying that we’ve been so influenced by commercials that we don’t know how to create our own fun?

Dr. Linn: That’s right, Susana. We’ve become very materialistic because of these influences. So what can we all do? Stop buying things we don’t need. Stop believing the messages that advertisers are sending us. Be critical consumers. In other words, think before you ask your parents to buy something and ask yourself: Why do I want this? Do I really need this? Remember, the decision to buy is entirely up to you and your parents. You can help stop advertisers from influencing kids.

Arun: Wow, Dr. Linn, you’ve really given us a lot to think about! I think my mom is really going to like your message to kids.

Susana: For some strange reason, Dr. Linn, I suddenly feel powerful. Like I have the power to make my own decisions instead of letting someone tell me to get something that’s in fashion or that I need the same toys that other kids have. It’s an awesome feeling! Thank you so much!

Dr. Linn: You’re so welcome, intrepid reporters. Keep asking the hard questions and keep in touch!

Susana and Arun: Will do, Dr. Linn! Say hi to Audrey Duck for us!

Dr. Linn: I sure will!

Turn and Talk: Can you think of an advertisement that has persuaded you to buy something? Why did this advertisement appeal to you?