

5

CHILDREN



Principle

Care should be taken when featuring or addressing children in marketing communications.

The way in which children perceive and react to marketing communications is influenced by their age, experience and the context in which the message is delivered. Marketing communications that are acceptable for young teenagers will not necessarily be acceptable for younger children. The ASA will take those factors into account when assessing whether a marketing communication complies with the Code.

Definition

For the purposes of the Code, a child is someone under 16.

Rules

Harm

- 5.1 Marketing communications addressed to, targeted directly at or featuring children must contain nothing that is likely to result in their physical, mental or moral harm:
 - 5.1.1 children must not be encouraged to enter strange places or talk to strangers
 - 5.1.2 children must not be shown in hazardous situations or behaving dangerously except to promote safety. Children must not be shown unattended in street scenes unless they are old enough to take responsibility for their own safety.
Pedestrians and cyclists must be seen to observe the Highway Code
 - 5.1.3 children must not be shown using or in close proximity to dangerous substances or equipment without direct adult supervision
 - 5.1.4 children must not be encouraged to copy practices that might be unsafe for a child
 - 5.1.5 distance selling marketers must take care when using youth media not to promote products that are unsuitable for children.

Credulity and unfair pressure

- 5.2** Marketing communications addressed to, targeted directly at or featuring children must not exploit their credulity, loyalty, vulnerability or lack of experience:
- 5.2.1** children must not be made to feel inferior or unpopular for not buying the advertised product
 - 5.2.2** children must not be made to feel that they are lacking in courage, duty or loyalty if they do not buy or do not encourage others to buy a product
 - 5.2.3** it must be made easy for children to judge the size, characteristics and performance of advertised products and to distinguish between real-life situations and fantasy
 - 5.2.4** adult permission must be obtained before children are committed to buying complex or costly products.
- 5.3** Marketing communications addressed to or targeted directly at children:
- 5.3.1** must not exaggerate what is attainable by an ordinary child using the product being marketed
 - 5.3.2** must not exploit children's susceptibility to charitable appeals and must explain the extent to which their participation will help in any charity-linked promotions.

Direct appeal and parental authority

- 5.4** Marketing communications:
- 5.4.1** must not actively encourage children to make a nuisance of themselves to parents or others and must not undermine parental authority
 - 5.4.2** must not include a direct appeal to children to buy an advertised product or persuade their parents or other adults to buy an advertised product for them.*

(This rule reflects a prohibited practice from Schedule 20 of the DMCCA. See note in Section 3 for more details).

- 5.5** Marketing communications that contain a direct appeal to buy a product via a direct-response mechanism must not be directly targeted at children. Direct-response mechanisms are those that allow consumers to place orders without face-to-face contact with the marketer.

Promotions

- 5.6** Promotions addressed to or targeted directly at children:
- 5.6.1** must make clear that adult permission is required if a prize or an incentive might cause conflict between a child's desire and a parent's, or other adult's, authority
 - 5.6.2** must contain a prominent closing date if applicable (see rule 8.17.4)
 - 5.6.3** must not exaggerate the value of a prize or the chances of winning it.
- 5.7** Promotions that require a purchase to participate and include a direct appeal to make a purchase must not be addressed to or targeted at children. See [Section 8: Promotional Marketing](#).