

FAMILY

KIDS & SHOPPING

SHAKE OFF LABELS

HELP YOUR CHILDREN
AVOID BUYING INTO
BRAND-NAME TRAP

BY TARA KINGSTON

Teaching children how to evaluate their purchases based on more than a brand can save money while teaching them how to save and spend on a budget. Adults understand how to evaluate products based on factors like quality or taste, but children generally do not. Instead, they are told a brand is superior simply by name or image alone. There are several steps parents can take to de-brand their children and help them be better consumers.



STEP 1**Turn off the television**

Jenn Berman, psychotherapist and author of "The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy Confident Kids," said children don't understand the difference between commercials and the show they're watching until they reach their teen years, making them most susceptible to advertising pitches. "TV is one of the worst promoters of consumerism for kids," she said.

**STEP 2****Look at your own behavior**

Most of us have brainwashed ourselves into buying brand-name items, Berman said, so it's important to examine how we spend our money. Look at what messages your purchases are sending to your children. "People don't realize you can get stuff without characters on it," Berman said.

STEP 3**Help your child create his or her own identity**

Kyle Jones, an advertising copywriter and father of two, said he likes to use these branding desires to help his 5-year-old son develop his own identity. For example, if his son comes home talking about some toy his friends at school have and he wants, Jones talks with him about resisting peer pressure and being an individual. Charlotte Reznick, author of "The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success," said it's important to develop a child's inner strength. Then they will feel so confident from the inside that the outside pressures won't affect them as much.

STEP 4**Discuss advertising**

Make it a game, Berman said. Who can spot the product placement in a movie? What's a commercial and what's the show? Where are the ads placed on a Web site? All of these questions can help kids become more attuned to what they're watching and why. "You want to help your child become an inquisitive consumer," Berman said.

STEP 5**Let them handle their own cash**

Jones' son keeps a piggy bank with money he's been given for birthdays or holidays. Then when he insists on wanting a brand-name product rather than a cheaper version, Jones gives him the option of paying the difference with his own money. Berman said kids should get an allowance as soon as they can do basic addition and subtraction, and they can use that allowance to pay for non-essential items. This helps teach them the value of delayed gratification: If they don't have enough money, they'll have to save up for an item. Plus, using their own money makes kids really evaluate what they want.

