

# A day at the fair turns into fearfest for couple

Dear Dr. Brothers: I know this problem isn't the end of the world, but I am wondering if I made a mistake. My husband and I took some little girls to a fair. My daughter, 7, insisted on having her picture drawn.

We tried to explain that the cartoonist drew caricatures, but she was totally shocked when he handed her a picture with ears sticking out, a big nose, buck teeth and so forth. She cried all the way home, in front of her little friends. Do you think she will have a problem with her self-esteem as she matures?

— C.W.

**Dear C.W.: My goodness. That worry of yours is quite a leap, but I can see you are feeling very guilty about exposing your daughter to something that was so upsetting to her.**

**You probably should have recognized that the cartooning was not really age-appropriate, although I'll bet the other little girls had plenty of laughs poking fun at the picture of your daughter. That's what really hurt her feelings.**

**Kids that age are still developing their self-image. In fact, that will be going on for many years, as you will see when your child starts experimenting with various hairdos, makeup, peer groups, cliques, academic interests and hobbies. So, for someone so young to encounter such an unflattering portrait of who she is can understandably be a bit overwhelming.**

**I don't believe she is going to dwell on this, although her carrying on might have gotten her some attention, which she seemed to desire.**

**Some kids need a lot more than others. If she is still upset, have her draw a picture of you or her dad, with features exaggerated.**

**Then laugh about how silly you both look. Give her some behavior to model — such as not taking all this so seriously. And next time at the fair, try a silhouette!**

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Dear Dr. Brothers: I have mixed feelings about what has happened to my seventh-grader this year, and I want your opinion. She has always been very shy and



**Dr. Joyce Brothers**

● Ask Dr. Brothers

had few friends. But she has a knack for writing, and by discovering blogging on one of the teen journaling sites, she really has started coming out of her shell — she has lots of "friends" now and has even talked to a few of them on the phone. I'm happy for her, but should I encourage this?

— L.P.

**Dear L.P.: Let's look at your daughter's situation. She is a young teen, shy and inexperienced.**

**She is braver when she can hide behind the keyboard, but she's still not friendly with the kids at school and is still sitting at home by herself.**

**It seems as though this blogging might be helping her learn to socialize and reach out to others — that's good, as long as she isn't giving out too much personal info because she feels safer on the Net than in real life. And could she isolate herself even more at school?**

**My reasoning goes like this: As long as she is having such a good time online, she can probably use these "relationships" to carry her through the lonely days at school, which might make her even more dependent on her cyber life.**

**There is also a very good chance that your daughter could be approached by inappropriate people — older adults — who frequent these sites looking for lonely young teens to meet. Be careful.**

**Encourage her to use her new skills to join the newspaper or yearbook staff, and limit her time online.**

**Shyness often is a passing stage for a middle-school child. Don't push her, but help her gain the confidence to interact in real time with her real peers.**

**It will get easier as she matures, but if she starts with one or two confidantes, she'll be on her way.**

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## Children's ads provide junk food for thought

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a child's buffet of food commercials, more than 40 percent of the dishes are candy, snacks and fast food. Nowhere to be found: fresh fruit, vegetables, poultry or seafood.

For years, health officials have warned that kids were being inundated with commercials about not-so-healthy foods. Now, researchers have put numbers to those warnings in the largest-ever study of commercials aimed at children.

"The vast majority of the foods that kids see advertised on television today are for products that nutritionists would tell us they need to be eating less of, not more of, if we're going to get a handle on childhood obesity," said Vicky Rideout of the Kaiser Family Foundation, which conducts health research.

The foundation's researchers monitored 13 television networks. The viewing took place primarily between late May and early September 2005.

They saw 2,613 ads featuring food and drinks that targeted children and teens.

Children ages 8-12 see the most food ads on TV — an average of 21 a day, or 7,600 a year.

Teenagers see slightly fewer — 17 a day, or about 6,000 a year; and children ages 2-7 see the fewest — 12 a day or 4,400 a year.

"Since (preteens) are at an age where they're just becoming independent consumers, understanding what type of advertising they are exposed to is especially important," Rideout said.

In December 2005, the Institute of Medicine concluded that marketing practices from the food and beverage industry are out of balance with recommended diets for children and contribute to an environment that puts children's health at risk.

The institute recommended that companies shift their advertising to emphasize food and drink that are substantially lower in calories, fats, salt and sugars.

In November, 11 major food and drink makers, including companies such as McDonald's, The Coca-

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Cola Co. and PepsiCo Inc., agreed to adopt new voluntary rules for advertising. The companies said they would devote at least half their advertising directed to children to promote healthier diets and lifestyles.

The rules have not gone into effect yet.

However, researchers believe that the study released Wednesday will serve as an important benchmark that will help determine whether the voluntary guidelines lead to any significant changes in advertising content.

Margo Wootan, director of nutrition policy at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said the federal government should take a more active role in regulating the content of television ads aimed at children.

"The industry is not as serious about self-regulation as they say they are," Wootan said.

"Give us a chance to see what we can do," said C. Lee Peeler, president and CEO of the National Advertising Review Council, an organization that promotes truth in advertising through voluntary regulation.

Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., said he would prefer self-regulation by the advertisers.

He said that intervention by the federal government would actually delay the changes in ad content that so many seek.

That's because legislation would lead to opposition from various interest groups as well as potential court challenges.