



## Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

c/o Judge Baker Children's Center  
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Website: [www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org)

**PLEASE NOTE:** This letter was sent to 24 companies, not just Mattel. A complete list can be found at: [www.commercialfreechildhood.org/actions/holidaymarketers.htm](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/actions/holidaymarketers.htm)

October 27, 2008

Mr. Robert Eckert  
Chief Executive Officer, Mattel  
333 Continental Boulevard  
El Segundo, CA 90245

CCFC  
STEERING COMMITTEE:

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Dear Mr. Eckert:

As families struggle to cope with the global economic crisis, we are writing to urge you to suspend all holiday marketing aimed at children. With fears of a recession or even a depression intensifying, Americans routinely list the economy as their number one concern. There is little doubt that many parents will have to scale back their holiday purchases significantly and experts predict that parents will spend less money on toys and gifts for children this holiday season.<sup>1</sup> Under normal circumstances it is unfair to bypass parents and target children directly with marketing, but with an uncertain future and budgets tighter than ever, it is particularly egregious to foment family conflict by advertising toys and games directly to kids that their parents may not be able to afford.

Research demonstrates that children's exposure to advertising is linked to the things they ask their parents to buy and family stress.<sup>2</sup> Using advertising to encourage children to nag for products may be good for sales, but it creates considerable family conflict. Even in normal times, buying holiday gifts causes financial strain for many families. A 2005 poll found that approximately one-third of Americans took more than three months to pay off their holiday credit card debt and 14% carried credit card debt into the next holiday season.<sup>3</sup>

Early reports indicate that spending on advertising to children will not reflect the current economic downturn. To date, spending forecasts for fourth quarter television advertising on children's television have not been affected.<sup>4</sup> If parents are cutting their purchases back this holiday season while commercial pressures on children remain at record levels, the burden on families will be tremendous.

As you know, children are more vulnerable to advertising than adults. Seductive advertising designed explicitly to exploit their vulnerabilities will create unrealistic expectations in kids too young to understand the economic crises and will make parenting in these uncertain times even more difficult. **We understand the need to create awareness of your products. We urge you to do that by advertising directly to parents instead of enlisting children as lobbyists for**



**their holiday gifts.** Since it's parents, not children, who can truly understand their family's financial situation in these difficult times, it is more important than ever that you respect their authority as gatekeepers: Target parents instead of children this holiday season.

Please note that we are sending this letter to CEO's of all the leading toy and game manufacturers and will be happy to offer public praise for any company that puts America's families first by suspending their holiday advertising to children. We would also welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you further.

Sincerely,



Susan Linn, Ed.D.  
Director, CCFC



Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D.  
for the CCFC Steering Committee

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, M. (2008, Oct 8). Holiday spending on toys expected to be less. *The Associated Press*. Accessed October 17, 2008 from <http://www.thenewstribune.com/1031/v-lite/story/502479.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Buijzen, M. & Valkenburg (2003). The effects of television advertising on materialism, parent-child conflict, and unhappiness: A review of research. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 437-456.

<sup>3</sup> Center for a New American Dream (2005). Hot Holiday Gift For Kids This Year? - A Piggy Bank, Say Fed Up Americans. Accessed October 17, 2008 from <http://www.newdream.org/holiday/poll05.php>.

<sup>4</sup> Freidman, W. (2008, Oct 13). So Far, Kids' TV Saved From Ad Hits. *MediaPost's Media Daily News*. Accessed October 17, 2008 from [http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art\\_aid=92573](http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=92573).