



The Role of the Media – Smoking and Soaps

Aim

To consider the ways that smoking is portrayed in soap operas and the messages given to children and young people.

Resources Required

Flipchart and markers

Method

1. Facilitator to ask the group which soap operas they watch. Conduct a quick poll to discover which are the most popular and record the votes up on the flipchart. Conclude that soap operas are very popular and millions of people watch them each week in the UK.
2. Facilitator to ask the group which characters they have seen smoking in Soap Land and list these too. (There are some famous examples, both past and present in most of the soaps, but if you are not sure go online and do a bit of research. Each soap has a website, which may be a good starting place for character names etc)
3. Leave the lists up, and divide the young people into small groups.
4. Hand each group a piece of flipchart paper and a pen and invite them to consider the following:
 - ◆ Choose three of the characters who smoke in Soap Land and describe them
 - ◆ Would the characters be the same if he or she didn't? Why? Why not?
 - ◆ What messages about tobacco do you think this gives? Does it appear to be the normal, expected thing to do? Why or why not?
 - ◆ Is the smoker in the majority or minority of the cast?
 - ◆ Have you noticed cigarettes or smoking paraphernalia (e.g. lighters or matches) in the background?

5. Encourage the young people to consider gender, age, health, popularity and social status of the smokers.
6. Invite each group to share their conclusions, exploring any messages received; for example characters smoke when they are stressed to feel better. Point out that Hollyoaks has a strictly enforced no smoking policy, which means that none of the characters smoke. Ask the young people why this might be and the positive messages that it gives to young people who are the target audience.
7. Get a show of hands to see who thinks that smoking should continue to be shown in soap operas, asking the young people to take into consideration facts such as the time that most soaps are shown as well as health issues.

Reference Smoke and Mirrors Vanessa Rogers (2009) produced for Smoke Free North West www.seethroughtheillusion.co.uk

