

## **Advertisers must act on child sexualisation fears – EDITORIAL**

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ONE of the fundamental responsibilities we accept as adults in our society is the protection of children. And one of the most obvious ways we do that is by allowing them to be children - by not subjecting them to adult ideas or experiences before they are mature enough to cope with them. With that in mind, readers have responded with almost uniform anger and concern to a recent series in *The Sunday Age* highlighting the sexualisation of children through advertising and marketing, and one mother's campaign to stop it.

The selling of sex to children, or the selling of sex in forums where children are exposed to it, is an issue that ought to be taken seriously, and it is pleasing to see that, as we report today, the Australian Association of National Advertisers is listening to parents' concerns and considering lifting its standards.

We hope that this is more than talk and does in fact translate into action - something we will follow closely. In the meantime, it is an issue where balance is needed and we should be careful not to become hysterical. We should also consider what we might do on a positive note to counteract children's exposure to negative or inappropriate sexual imagery.

Sex is part of life and children will find out about it eventually - whether it's through a soap opera, a book or their best friend's older sister - and some of that information will be unreliable at best. So perhaps we need to be more proactive in ensuring they receive accurate information appropriate to their age and development, while continuing to put pressure on advertisers and marketers to be more responsible about where, when and in what context they use sex to sell their products.

Australians have long been strangely reticent about talking about sex, particularly to the young. Sex education in our schools is ad hoc and so is the information children receive from their parents. We will continue to monitor this debate as it unfolds. In the meantime, we should keep talking to each other, to teachers and, perhaps most importantly, to children.