

## Create family-friendly checkout aisles

**I**t happens every day: Hundreds of families visit supermarkets only to be accosted by lewd headlines and scantily clad women on magazine covers prominently displayed in the checkout lanes. Most assume their only option is to cover their kids' eyes or turn their backs to the racks. But Christians can do so much more. Here's how:

### STEP 1: COMPLAIN VERBALLY

Remember, you have the advantage: As one of the most competitive businesses in the nation, supermarkets depend on customer loyalty. So don't be bashful about asking an on-site manager to remove offensive magazines. When making your point:

**Be polite, but firm.** "Assume they want to do the right thing for their customers," advises Randy Sharp of the American Family Association, which helped convince Wal-Mart to reconsider its display policy. Treat the manager, not the magazine, as the enemy.

**Have evidence in hand.** "The greatest ammunition you've got is the wording on the front cover," advises Robert Peters of New York-based Morality in Media. A mother with small children pointing to headlines describing sexual foreplay is enough to shame many managers into action.

**Do the math.** Mention how much your family spends each month at the store. Based on current prices, "the supermarket would have to sell an additional 156 magazines a month to replace the profits lost by one family of four who chooses to buy groceries elsewhere," says Sharp.

### STEP 2: GIVE ALTERNATIVES

**Don't give up** if the manager resists. Be politely persistent by suggesting alternatives.

**Option 1: Relocation.** Suggest the store move inappropriate literature to the magazine or book aisle instead of the checkout counter.

**Option 2: Blinders.** If that doesn't work, suggest putting crude magazines behind rack blinders that cover everything but the title. "That is where we've seen the most success," says Sharp. "For example, Kroger, as a company policy, covers *Cosmopolitan* with a blinder."

To bolster your suggestions, use these arguments:

**Checkout lines are a captive audience.** "Unless you want to start a garden in your flower box, you've got to go to the supermarket. ... You've got to walk through those checkout counters, and that's when you get an eyeful," says Morality in Media's Peters.

**Family stores should protect children:** Since supermarkets aggressively target families, they have a responsibility to avoid exposing children to lewd language and images.

**Crudity turns away customers.** Nearly three quarters of Americans consider sexually explicit headlines at checkout counters "inappropriate," and 60 percent favor a store policy of covering distasteful wording, according to a 1999 national poll conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide.

**Offensive magazines treat women as commodities.** (You might find unexpected allies of this argument among local feminist groups.)

For more tips, sample letters and petitions, visit these sites:

[www.moralityinmedia.org](http://www.moralityinmedia.org)

[www.afa.net/glossy/glossy1.asp](http://www.afa.net/glossy/glossy1.asp)

### STEP 3: COMMUNITY ACTION

If the manager still doesn't budge, it's time to escalate your protest.

**Recruit others.** Ask neighbors and church friends to write letters to the editor of the local newspaper and contact the manager. Most store managers "don't receive more than two or three calls a week, so if they get 10 in the space of two or three days they're going to take notice," says Sharp.

**Distribute fliers.** Just the possibility of negative publicity is often enough to change managers' minds. So you can increase pressure by distributing fliers portraying examples of currently displayed, offensive magazine covers. It's also helpful to circulate petitions or pre-addressed comment cards with your fliers.

**Contact corporate headquarters.** If your store is part of a national chain, organize a letter-writing campaign to the headquarters. Letters should:

- list examples of offending material
- give clear suggested action
- ask for a response

To get chain stores' corporate addresses, visit the American Decency Association's (ADA) Web site at [www.americandecency.org](http://www.americandecency.org).

ADA president Bill Johnson, credited for convincing Kroger to cover up *Cosmopolitan*, says persistence is key: "If people don't continue to be the salt and light in their stores, what's going to stop [stores] from having pornographic magazines?" ●

*What tips could you use to increase your effectiveness as an activist? Let us know at How To, c/o Citizen, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO; or e-mail [citizeneditor@fotf.org](mailto:citizeneditor@fotf.org)*