

Teaching Honest Persuasion — Activity Plan

Design one activity that grows both halves of the skill at once — making a fair case, and catching it when someone else isn't.

The skill you're growing

Persuasion and manipulation use the same tools. The only difference is whether the person using them respects the other person's mind enough to let them see the whole picture and still choose freely. You're teaching your child to use those tools honestly, and to spot it instantly when someone else doesn't.

Early (~5–9) — your plan

The ad or ask

One real commercial (toy or cereal ads work well), or a real moment of asking-for-something in your own house.

The question you'll ask

"Is this trying to help me decide, or trying to trick me into wanting something?" Let them notice things first — don't supply the answer.

Fair-asking vs. trick-asking

If using the household version: write the fair way to ask for something and the trick way (guilt, threat, exaggeration) side by side.

Middle (~10–13) — your plan

The real ad or clip

One real example — not invented. What's the single technique you want them to name in plain language (bandwagon, false appeal to authority, exaggeration, etc.)?

The honest-pitch flip

Have them write a short, honest persuasive pitch for something they actually want, using only fair techniques — a real reason, an honest story, an answer to your best objection.

The trick-version compare (optional)

Write a second version using one dishonest technique on purpose, so they can feel the difference side by side.

Older (~14–18) — analyze real persuasion

The piece

One real ad, op-ed, speech, or debate clip with genuine craft behind it — not a cartoonish example.

The claim, in one sentence

State exactly what the piece is trying to get the audience to believe or do.

Techniques found

List every persuasive technique at work (story, statistic, appeal to authority, fear, humor, fallacy) and judge each one fair or manipulative, with a reason.

The honest version

For at least one manipulative technique found, have them write what the honest version of that same argument would sound like.

Facilitation reminders

Ask more than you tell — "what do you notice?" beats supplying the label

Use real material every time; manufactured examples don't carry the same weight

Steel-man before you critique, even on ads or arguments you personally dislike

Name it out loud when you catch yourself using an unfair technique on your own kid

Spend most of the time on technique (is this fair?), not on conclusion (is this true?) — skill, not side