

Parenting Practices That Promote Health

Do you find it discouraging when someone says that getting your family to develop healthy habits is easy? Frankly it's not easy at all! It's far easier to drive the kids to school than worry about them safely walking there, or to pick up a pizza on the way home from work because you're tired and don't want to cook, or to "veg out" in front of the TV instead of going for a walk after dinner.

At times we all face the conflict between making healthy choices compared with coping with the realities of a busy family lifestyle. While nobody's perfect, using consistent parenting practices that support healthy behaviours can actually make life easier for everyone in the family. Here are some guidelines.

- **Structure the family environment by having clear guidelines that support healthy eating and active living and role model these positive behaviours.**

Rules are a fact of life — school rules, traffic rules, we all have to abide by them. Kids may balk at home guidelines at first but in the end all kids need limits and prefer to have things clearly laid out so they know what to expect and what is expected of them. It makes them feel loved too.

Involve the whole family in establishing healthy house guidelines. Getting "buy in" usually works better when everyone has a say in planning the guidelines. It also provides a clear message to kids and pre-teens that their opinions matter and builds their confidence in decision-making. Different approaches work for different families — make a plan that's best for yours and be consistent in how you implement the plan. Your actions speak louder than words — household guidelines apply to everyone so role model the expectations that you set together.

- **Promote autonomy in decision-making so that kids and pre-teens learn to self-regulate their behaviours.**

Kids are unique individuals with their own character, temperament, feelings, tastes and dreams. Recognizing and nurturing these unique characteristics can take time and patience but the rewards are worth it. Some ways to support their autonomy include:

- Allow kids to make choices — it presents them with opportunities to have some control in a world where it seems like adults make all the decisions.



- Provide support but resist the temptation to bail kids out of struggles — age-appropriate problem solving to meet life's challenges helps kids to build character and instils a sense of pride and confidence.
- Let kids speak for themselves when someone asks a question — it's a mark of respect for who they are.

– Let kids do things for themselves whether it's choosing their own clothes or helping with age-appropriate household activities. These are confidence and skill-building experiences.

- **Be mindful of parenting practices that control rather than support and respect kids' thoughts, feelings, needs and opinions.** Bribes and threats to encourage positive behaviours, pressuring kids to clean their plate or be more active, or not providing a clear rationale for expectations are barriers to development of healthy behaviours.

For more information on supporting kids and pre-teens to develop positive healthy eating and activity behaviours see Articles Set Guidelines for Healthy Eating, and Set Guidelines for Active Living & Sleep under the Resources tab.

CONVERSATION STARTER

What are your thoughts about developing some ground rules for our family that can help us all make better food choices? Be more active?

RESOURCES

■ Parenting Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/childhood-adolescence/parent/parenting-resources-support.html>

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