



Conversation Starters for Health Professionals: Healthy growth and lifestyle management for children and their families

Routinely assessing the growth of children is an important part of good quality clinical care. However, raising the issue of a child's growth and weight status can be challenging and sensitive.

This resource supports health professionals to initiate important conversations about healthy growth in a sensitive and non-stigmatising way. Use these conversation starters to guide your situation. You may find it takes time to make progress, or that continued conversations take place over a number of consultations.



TIPS

- Always practice good clinical judgement. If you have concerns that a growth assessment and conversation may be triggering for a child or family, reconsider the assessment. There are clinical situations where it may not be appropriate, or does not enhance patient care.
- Frame your discussion in a positive and motivational tone.
- Use supportive lifestyle messages, in a non-judgemental and sympathetic approach when offering advice.
- Practice growth assessments and discussing results with children in a healthy weight range.



For more information and access to resources,
visit Healthy Kids for Professionals
pro.healthykids.nsw.gov.au



healthykids
for professionals

Step 1 – Ask the child, parent or carer if you can measure growth

“Before we start today, would you mind if we checked how you are growing?”

It is important to explain to the child, parent or carer why growth assessments are being taken.

“Monitoring a child’s height and weight is really important. Just assessing them by looking at them is not enough.”

“I routinely measure height and weight and plot BMI on a growth chart for all children. It helps me to identify any health concerns early and determines the type of support I can provide my patients and their families.”

Once you have parental and child consent it is important to talk to the child throughout the measurements.

You may like to use phrases like

“Let’s see how you are growing today.”

What to say if a parent refuses:

If you sense strong resistance, stay positive, acknowledge this, and move onto their reason for presentation.

“It’s ok if you prefer we don’t record height and weight today. Perhaps next time. If you change your mind, your GP or any health professional is happy to talk to you about how you / your child is growing.”

“All NSW Health facilities are working towards routinely measuring children’s height and weight, so you might be asked again at your next appointment or by another health professional.”



Step 2: Discuss the outcome of the growth assessment with the child or carer

Review the patient's medical history before advising. This presents an opportunity to reflect on previous results and comment on any change over time.

Introducing the results of the growth assessment:

"By using [child's name]'s height and weight we can calculate their BMI, and plot it on a growth chart."

"Growth charts are very useful for us to see whether a child is growing in a healthy way."

"As you can see, [child's name]'s weight is in the [green/yellow/red] range."

If the child is above or well above a healthy weight:

"Ideally, when we look at children at a similar age to [child's name] we expect them to be growing within the green zone."

"The yellow zone represents children who are above a healthy weight range. The red zone shows children well above a healthy weight range."

PROMPTS TO PROMOTE DISCUSSION:

"Is this what you expected?"

"Would it be okay if we talked about this? Is now a good time?"

"Do you have any concerns?"



Step 3: Provide a brief intervention

Children and their families may be visiting you for what they consider a non-weight related health concern. Try to understand if there is a priority health issue for the family and use this as an opportunity to give practical advice using 8 Healthy Habits.

Offer brief advice about healthy lifestyle that relate to the child's interests and existing lifestyle.

8 HEALTHY HABITS

The '8 Healthy Habits' (8HH) resource is designed to support discussions about healthy lifestyle behaviours for all families and weight status. Some health professionals find it useful to start the conversation with 8HH and a couple of current lifestyle behaviours. It's important to listen and affirm behaviours that the family is doing well. Recognise their ideas, encourage them, and provide positive support for areas of focus.

Using the 8 Healthy Habits resource:

"There are some simple things that you and your family can do to support the whole family to be healthy."

"Which of these habits do you do well?"

"Are there any of these habits you could work on?"

"What are some things you feel you could do as a family?"

Identify if the child, and their family have made any recent changes, recognise their ideas and encourage these!

"That's great! Keep going with these changes as it does make a big difference to you and / your family's health!"

Find examples linking to your area of work or expertise:

Example for Asthma

"Did you know there is a lot of research that suggests being a healthy weight reduces the symptoms of asthma?"¹

"What do you think your family could try from 8 Healthy Habits to help improve some of Ben's symptoms?"

Example for Oral Health

"Diet and overall health is closely linked with oral health. Reducing sugar sweetened drinks and drinking water instead of soft drink, juice or cordial can benefit both your dental health and overall health."^{2,3}

What if families are not ready to have a healthy growth and lifestyle discussion?

Some parents or families may seem hesitant to have a healthy growth and lifestyle discussion. Reassure that growth assessments are conducted on all children. Acknowledge that it's difficult to live a healthy lifestyle and that many families struggle to maintain good practices.

"As part of routine care we look at the growth of all children, to ensure they are growing well"

"Most families need some assistance to improve healthy lifestyle habits."

"The world we live in makes it hard for families to make healthy choices all of the time. However, as children are still growing, small changes as a family can make a big difference."

Above all, it is important to practice good clinical judgement. If the child or family member is still not ready to have a healthy lifestyle discussion, acknowledge this and provide a future opportunity.

"It may not be a good time for us to discuss this now. Please feel welcome to talk about your / your child's growth with me another time."

Step 4: Arrange referrals, if appropriate

All children should be offered 8HH and the Healthy Habits fact sheet to take home. There are also free state-wide programs and family-focused lifestyle management services available for children who are above a healthy weight, and their families.

Translating and Interpreting services are available to assist with referrals.

“If you need an interpreter to help you contact our service, telephone the free Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450 for assistance. Tell TIS the language you speak and the name and telephone number of the service.”



How do I introduce Go4Fun?

“Go4Fun is a free, 10 week healthy lifestyle program for kids aged 7-13 and their families. The weekly 2 hour sessions are run after school (during school terms) by trained health and community professionals. The program is practical and focuses on improving eating habits, fitness and self-esteem for families in a fun and interactive way.”

How do I refer to Go4Fun?

- Visit the Go4Fun website www.go4fun.com.au: Complete and email referral form to contact@go4fun.com.au, or fax to 1300 325 301
- Clinical Software: MedicalDirector, Best Practice, Titanium, eMR/CHOC (available in some LHD's); Other platform: HealthPathways



How do I introduce the Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service®?

“The Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service® is a free, confidential telephone-based coaching service, offering 10 sessions over six months for people aged 16 and over. The Service is delivered by University qualified Health Coaches including Dietitians and Exercise Physiologists and is great for parents or adolescents who are looking for ongoing support to develop or maintain healthy behaviours.”

How do I refer to the Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service®?

- Visit the Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service® website www.gethealthynsw.com.au Complete and email referral form to contact@gethealthynsw.com.au, or fax to 1300 013 242
- Clinical Software: MedicalDirector, Best Practice, eMaternity; Other platform: HealthPathways

How do I introduce the Active Kids program?

“The NSW Government has established the Active Kids program, providing two \$100 vouchers for parents, guardians and carers of school-enrolled children to use toward sport and active recreation costs each year. Vouchers can be used with a registered activity provider for registration, participation and membership costs.”

All Active Kids providers can be found on the Service NSW website www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/find-active-kids-provider

For more information about starting conversations, videos, resources and referral options visit pro.healthykids.nsw.gov.au or email MOH-ClinicalPolicyAndEngagement@health.nsw.gov.au

1. National Asthma Council Australia. 2019. Australian Asthma Handbook: Obesity and asthma. Viewed 23 July 2019. <https://www.astmahandbook.org.au/clinical-issues/comorbidities/obesity>
2. NSW Health. 2014. Early Childhood Oral Health Guidelines for Child Health Professionals, 3rd Edition. Viewed 23 July 2019. https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/GL2014_020.pdf
3. World Health Organization. 2018. Oral health fact sheet. Viewed 23 July 2019. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/oral-health>