



Talking to your kids about making healthy choices is a no-brainer, but did you know that children learn healthy habits differently depending on their age? Studies show that kids develop differently at every age group, meaning that a six-year-old will process information about health and fitness differently than a 12-year-old would.

When having conversations with your kids about their health and physical activity, YMCA child care expert Lorrie Huggins recommends using the following three rules:

1. Teach through experience

Children learn through experience, which must be modified to suit the age and cognitive ability of the child. Here are some ways to give your kids sensory experiences while talking about the importance of health:

6-8 years old	9-12 years old
Give him a glass of milk as you tell him how milk will help him grow up strong.	Allow her to choose a glass of milk, then praise her for making a healthy choice by choosing a drink that's filled with calcium to strengthen her bones.
Ask her to point out the veggies on her plate – what about the meat?	Talk about the importance of a balanced meal, and ask him to identify food groups – can he point out the fibre and the protein on his plate?
Explain that he's eating orange slices during his soccer practice tonight because orange is a healthy fruit that will help him run faster.	Tell her about the benefits of nutrient-rich fruit like oranges. Did she know that the vitamin C in oranges helps strengthen her immune system?

2. Show your kids how to live a healthy lifestyle

As a parent, you need to be your children's ultimate role model -- demonstrate what you advocate, otherwise your kids won't take your healthy conversations seriously. Even your youngest kids will pick up on your healthy (or unhealthy) habits, so practice what you preach. For instance:

6-8 years old	9-12 years old
Take turns reading each other bedtime stories every night.	Ask for help with your Sunday morning crossword.
Bounce a ball around the park and tell stories about which sports you played as a kid.	Shoot some hoops and teach her your best moves!

3. Healthy habits must be fun

Children will only participate in healthy habits and conversations that are fun, so make sure you do what they love! Remember, kids are motivated by what's fun to play, not by what is ultimately good for their health:

6-8 years old	9-12 years old
Play a bunch of activities in the yard – which one does he enjoy most?	Ask her which sport is her favourite. Why?
What games does she play with her teacher and classmates at school? Can she teach you?	What's his favourite bike trail? Can he show you some time?

Remember, you know your child better than anyone. You have a firm grasp of which concepts they'll understand and which ones will confuse them. Tailor your conversations to suit your child's abilities and they'll soon be well on their way to a healthy lifestyle!

Which rule did you find most effective? Follow us @ymcagta and use #convoswithourkids to share your story.