

Unhealthy Influences and Stress: Making Healthy Choices

As children grow, they have more opportunities and freedom, which don't involve parents. The best way to prepare children for this independence is to help them make healthy choices so they don't make unhealthy ones instead.

Children are curious - may not consider consequences.

It's important not to panic; Experimentation and curiosity is normal for children. **We can prepare children to make safe choices.**

Parents can equip their children with the **skills to recognize options** and make healthy choices.

Why is curiosity important? Children can:

- Discover new ideas
- Opens new worlds and possibilities
- Develop critical thinking skills
- Creates excitement

Why may children experiment with unknown substances?

- Curiosity/fun-seeking
- Peer pressure
- To look more mature
- To assert their independence
- To escape problems/fill gaps/cover feelings
- A lack of coping skills
- Family or community norm



Scare tactics don't work. We can help teach children the skills they need to **make choices that are good for them and others.** Children need to learn how to listen to their own feelings and **develop healthy ways to handle stress** and difficult situations.

We can help young people meet their needs without turning to substance use by providing opportunities for them to develop their own **resilience** by:

- Giving children skills they need to make **healthy choices**
- Allowing them to **experience a degree of risk**
- Allowing them to make choices, increasing their sense of **personal power**

Protective Factor: Characteristics or conditions that moderate risk. They help reduce the negative effects associated with risk factors and help youth better handle challenging situations.

Family Protective Factors:

- Relationship based on family bond
- Positive support within the family
- Parental supervision
- Respect for friends by parents
- Affection between parents and children
- Consistent disciplinary methods

What Can Families Do?

- Help your child build a **strong sense of identity** and self-esteem so that he or she can resist pressures.
- Provide your child with **healthy food choices** and information about healthy eating.
- Provide your child with opportunities to be **physically active** – encourage your child to participate in sports and recreational activities at school and in the community.
- When appropriate, engage preteens and teens in **straightforward conversations** about healthy intimate relationships and reproductive health.
- When children mature earlier than their peers, **prepare them** for dating and delaying expectations for dating and relationship behaviours.
- Set clear boundaries related to communication and honesty - **involve young people in setting these boundaries together**.
- Talk with **other parents** about helping young people make healthy choices.
- Have clear, appropriate **consequences** for going beyond the limits that are agreed to ahead of time and consistently enforced.

Two-Way Communication

You can help support protective factors by providing **encouragement, information, and open communication** with your child.

Some questions you can encourage your child to ask when facing a hard choice:

Talk with your children. Some question to discuss might be: Who would you go to for support, in difficult times? What are this person's values and beliefs that make you trust them?

- Is this going to hurt anyone?
- Does this help anyone?
- Do I trust this person?
- Is this person looking after my well-being?
- Are there options that will give the same outcome without hurting myself or others?



It is important to engage your child in conversations about decision-making. **Listen to his or her concerns and ideas.** The more children feel listened to and able to negotiate, the less likely they are to end up in peer groups that promote risk-taking behaviours.

Adults are role models in helping young people learn how to make healthy choices. When we are able to communicate with our children, we support the development of critical thinking skills and ability to make decisions that are good for everybody.

What are some ways you model healthy choices for your child?