

Pediatric Growth Discussions: A Tool for Health Professionals

Introduction:

Discussing growth with families is an important part of growth monitoring. Approaching these discussions in a constructive and sensitive way can promote open and positive communication, enhance a parent's understanding of their child's growth, and motivate families to follow a lifestyle supportive of healthy growth.

This tool is intended to help guide health professionals through family-centred conversations about infant and child growth. It focuses on initial growth discussions that would occur at a routine clinic visit and is not meant to serve as a comprehensive tool for intervention or treatment of growth concerns. Referrals for further intervention or treatment should be made as required to the appropriate healthcare provider.

The tool covers general principles for discussing growth, provides guidance on positive growth messaging, and offers suggestions of dialogue to use when discussing healthy growth patterns and potential growth concerns. These are meant only as examples and may need to be framed differently depending on the context of the growth discussion.

Tool Outline:

Step 1: Assess	It is important to assess how receptive a family is to discussing growth. This section highlights language that can be used to engage a family in a discussion about their child's growth.
Step 2: Explain	This section provides suggestions for sensitive dialogue that can be used when educating clients about healthy growth patterns and how growth charts are used.
Step 3: Explore	When assessing a child's individual growth pattern, it is important to explore all factors that may influence growth. The examples in this section provide suggestions on how to gather additional growth related information.
Step 4: Facilitate Goal Setting and Provide Support	This section provides ideas and examples for applying a family-centred approach to goal-setting and providing support.
Key Messages and Examples for Discussing Growth Measurements	This can serve as a quick reference tool for health professionals. The table provides key messages associated with the percentile lines on the growth chart. Examples of dialogue have been included to aid practitioners in explaining these key messages to families.

Steps to a Positive Discussion about Growth:

Step 1: Assess

It is important to assess how receptive a family is to discussing their child's growth. Health professionals may assess this via a verbal discussion and/or body language cues.

Putting Into Practice

- ✓ Engage families in the conversation.
- ✓ Determine how receptive a family is to discussing growth.
- ✓ Ask about their previous experiences discussing growth.
- ✓ Consider if the parents are comfortable having the discussion with their child present.

Dialogue Examples

"The way your child grows can tell us a lot about his overall health. Can I take a minute to show you where your child is on the growth chart?"

"Has a health professional ever discussed your child's growth with you or provided you with information about growth charts?"

"Would it be OK if you and I talked about your child's growth today with your child here?"

Step 2: Explain

Health professionals can describe general healthy growth patterns and explain how growth charts are used to help enhance a family's understanding of their child's growth.

Putting Into Practice

- ✓ Explain why it is important to monitor growth.
- ✓ Use the Core Growth Messages below to help explain growth monitoring.
 - Growth assessment is a health screening tool.
 - Growth is one sign of general health.
 - Growth patterns are assessed for the individual.
 - Growth may reflect family growth patterns.
 - Growth pattern over time is more important than one single measurement.
- ✓ Avoid categorizing sizes as good or bad. Use neutral language and avoid descriptors like 'fat', 'chubby', 'obese', 'scrawny', 'lanky', or 'stubby'.

Dialogue Examples

"Growth is one sign of a child's general health. Over time, growth measurements plotted on a growth chart show a child's own growth pattern. A child's growth pattern shows if they are growing well or if they are moving in a direction that may signal a possible growth concern."

"The percentile lines on the growth chart help us see how a child is growing in relation to other children of the same age and gender. When we plot your child's weight on the growth chart it falls on the 10th percentile. This means that out of 100 children, 90 children (90%) weigh more and 10 children (10%) weigh less."

"Healthy children come in all shapes and sizes. There is no spot on the growth chart that is the goal for all children (the 50th percentile is not the goal). Each child will settle into a growth pattern that's right for them."

"Your son's weight has been plotting high on the growth chart. This may be natural for him based on what you've told me about the height and build of your family."

"If we look at today's measurement along with measurements from past visits, we can see a consistent pattern. This means that his growth is likely healthy."

"Measuring your child's growth at each visit will help us see if this growth pattern continues."

Step 3: Explore

When considering a child's individual growth pattern, it is important to explore all factors that may influence growth. It is also important to consider barriers and facilitators for the family and how ready and able they may be to make changes.

Putting Into Practice

Dialogue Examples

- ✓ Consider all factors that are currently affecting growth by gathering additional information.
- ✓ Refer to the Standard Discussion Points on p.2 of the [Growth Monitoring Summary Sheet](#).
- ✓ Use a non-judgmental and empathetic attitude.
- ✓ Emphasize that growth is individual.
- ✓ Raise growth concerns constructively.

"Growth patterns can signal us to take a look at family routines such as eating, physical activity and sleep. If you like, we can talk about these routines and discuss what is going well and any areas where you may wish to make changes."

"Is your son eating different foods than usual? Has he been eating more or less than usual? What does a typical day of eating look like for him?"

"What has your child's activity level been like lately?"

"Is your son breastfeeding less often than he used to? Has his feeding pattern changed? How so?"

"Have there been any recent illnesses or stresses in his life?"

"Do you ever worry about having enough food to feed your family?"

Step 4: Facilitate Goal Setting and Provide Support

Health professionals can assist families by applying a family-centred approach and by offering support whether or not there is a growth concern. Health professionals can reinforce positive family practices, facilitate goal-setting for possible areas of change, offer education/resources and arrange for follow-up or referral.

Putting Into Practice

Dialogue Examples

- ✓ Promote a positive feeding relationship.
- ✓ Focus on healthy eating and lifestyle behaviours rather than weight.
- ✓ Promote self-efficacy by allowing families to generate their own ideas.
- ✓ Encourage positive role modeling.
- ✓ Reinforce healthy lifestyle practices.
- ✓ Ensure counselling is culturally appropriate.
- ✓ Be sensitive to possible barriers to change.
- ✓ Encourage changes that are gradual and achievable.
- ✓ Provide information about community programs and/or initiate appropriate referrals.

"It's great that your family eats meals together at the table."

"To help promote healthy eating habits and a positive experience for the family, parents should decide *what* food is offered, *when* and *where*. Children will decide *how much* and *whether or not* to eat."

"Given what we have talked about, what do you think would work for you and your family as a next step?"

"Small changes that improve the health of your family are much easier to make and maintain than drastic ones. Too many big changes at once can be overwhelming."

"From what we talked about, you and your husband seem really open to trying new foods. That's great! You are being positive role models for your child by exploring new, healthy foods."

"It sounds like you are worried that your son may not be eating enough to grow well. You also mentioned that he will not eat meat or vegetables at meals. Would you be interested in meeting with a dietitian to discuss this further?"

"I understand how hard this must be for you. There are programs in your community that can help support your family with some of the challenges you are facing right now. Would you like to talk about them?"

Key Messages and Examples for Discussing Growth Measurements:

Growth Measurement (Based on CPEG Growth Charts)	Key Messages	Dialogue Examples
Growth measurements are on or between identified cut-offs (outlined below) and consistent with previous growth pattern.	<i>"Growth pattern appears normal"</i>	"From these measures and what you've told me about your son's eating habits and physical activity, it seems like his growth is normal for him. Do you have any questions or concerns that you would like to talk about?"
Head circumference-for-age: Below 3rd percentile or Above 97th percentile	<i>"Head circumference is small" or "large"</i>	"Your child's head circumference is plotting high on the growth chart. This is likely not a concern because it is following the same pattern as before. It also seems to follow what you have told me about your family's pattern/size." "Your child's head circumference is not growing in the same pattern it was before. Growth seems to be slowing. There could be a number of reasons for this change. Perhaps we can look into why this might be happening and connect you with an expert in the area. Would this work for you?"
Below 3rd percentile: weight-for-length weight-for-age length-for-age BMI-for-age height-for-age	<i>"Weight may be low"</i> <i>"Length/height may be low"</i>	"Your son's weight is plotting low but he is steadily gaining weight and growing taller at the same time. Based on your son's own growth pattern, this is likely normal for him. Some children are naturally smaller than others." "Today's measurements show that your son's weight is low compared to his height. This can happen during growth spurts, but we will want to continue to measure his weight in the next few months to see if it catches up to his increase in height."
Above 90th percentile: weight-for-length 85th percentile: BMI-for-age	<i>"Weight may be ahead of length/height"</i>	"BMI is a way of looking at weight together with a person's height. Your son's BMI-for-age suggests that his weight may be ahead of his height. Some children naturally follow a higher curve on the BMI-for-age growth chart, but in some cases a high BMI can put children at risk for health problems later in life. Since we only have one measurement to go on today, it will be important to continue to monitor your son's BMI to see how his growth pattern continues." "Increased weight gain is normal during puberty because youth are growing taller and building muscle and bone. It is important that we continue to measure your son's growth to make sure he does not gain more weight than is needed for his height."
Shift in growth pattern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sharp incline/decline • movement across percentiles, nearing a cut-off point • growth line is flat 	<i>"Growth pattern may be changing"</i>	"Children usually follow their own consistent pattern of growth. Today's measurements show that your son's growth is moving away from the pattern he was following before. Have you noticed any differences in his appetite or changes in his usual routines/day to day habits?" "Your son's growth is showing some changes. Children are not expected to grow at an entirely steady rate, but it is important to look for any changes in their growth pattern. A follow-up appointment could be made a bit earlier than planned to see how his growth continues."