

# Pediatric Growth Discussions: A Tool for Healthcare Providers

## Introduction

Family-centred conversations about a child's growth and development are an important part of childhood growth monitoring. Approaching these discussions in a constructive and sensitive way can enhance a parent's understanding of their child's growth and promote open and positive communication.

This tool is intended to help guide healthcare providers (HCPs) through family-centred conversations about infant and child growth. It focuses on growth discussions from **birth to 6 years of age** such as those occurring at routine Well Child Clinic visits. Referrals for further investigation and intervention should be made as required to the appropriate HCP.

The tool covers general principles for discussing growth and offers suggestions for objective language to use when discussing growth patterns and potential growth concerns. The dialogue suggestions are meant only as examples and may need to be framed differently depending on the context of the growth discussion. HCPs should use professional judgment and include the child in the discussion when developmentally appropriate.

For more information and associated references see the [Childhood Growth Monitoring Guidance](#).

## Tool Outline – Steps to a Family-Centred Conversation About Growth:

<b>Step 1: Assess</b>	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.
<b>Step 2: Explain</b>	This section provides suggestions for dialogue that can be used to explain growth monitoring and describe how growth charts are used.
<b>Step 3: Explore</b>	When considering a child's individual growth pattern, it is important to explore all factors that may influence growth, along with barriers, facilitators, and readiness to make change. The examples in this section provide suggestions on how to gather additional growth-related information.
<b>Step 4: Facilitate Goal Setting and Provide Support</b>	This section provides ideas and examples for applying a family-centred approach to goal setting and support.
<b>Discussing Growth Percentiles &amp; Patterns</b>	This section provides dialogue examples to aid HCPs in describing a child's growth pattern in relation to identified growth chart cut-offs and discussing shifts in growth.

## Step 1: Assess

Discussing growth at every visit can frame it as a routine conversation rather than a response to a growth concern. It is important to assess how receptive a family is to discussing their child's growth.

### Putting Into Practice

- ✓ **Engage families in the conversation.**
- ✓ **Ask how they feel about how their child's growth is progressing and discussing growth in general.**
- ✓ **Ask about their previous experiences discussing growth.**
- ✓ **Consider if the parents are comfortable having the discussion with their child present.**

### Dialogue Examples

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

"Has a healthcare provider 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

Explain how growth charts are used and describe growth patterns 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 should be considered along with other factors to determine overall 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.**
- ✓ **Use objective language as outlined in the Discussing Growth Percentiles and Patterns section when describing a child's growth.**

### 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. This can help show if a child is following a pattern that is consistent or if they are moving in a direction that may signal a possible growth concern."

"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 child's weight has been plotting high on the growth chart. This may be natural for them 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 that your child seems to be following a consistent pattern."

"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, explore all factors that may influence growth, along with barriers, facilitators, and readiness for change.

Putting Into Practice	Dialogue Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Consider all factors that are currently affecting growth by gathering additional information.</li><li>✓ Refer to the Discussion Points in the <a href="#">Childhood Growth Monitoring Guidance</a> for topics to explore including family routines, family growth patterns, and child's overall health.</li><li>✓ Use a non-judgmental and empathetic attitude.</li><li>✓ Emphasize that growth is individual.</li><li>✓ Raise growth concerns constructively</li></ul>	<p>"Routines such as eating, activity / movement, and sleep can impact growth. Would you like to explore any of these topics further?"</p> <p>"What does a typical day of eating look like for your child? Have there been any changes to their appetite or eating routines?"</p> <p>"What has your child's activity / movement been like lately?"</p> <p>"Has your child's feeding (breast and/or formula) pattern changed recently? How so?"</p> <p>"Have there been any recent illnesses or stresses in your child's life?"</p> <p>"Do you ever worry about having enough food to feed your family?"</p>

### Step 4: Facilitate Goal Setting and Provide Support

Apply a family-centred approach and offer support whether there is a growth concern or not. 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Promote self-efficacy by allowing families to generate their own ideas.</li><li>✓ Ensure counselling is considerate of a family's cultural values and beliefs.</li><li>✓ Promote a positive feeding relationship.</li><li>✓ Focus on healthy eating patterns and lifestyle behaviours rather than weight.</li><li>✓ Encourage positive role modeling.</li><li>✓ Reinforce healthy practices.</li><li>✓ Be sensitive to possible barriers to change.</li><li>✓ Encourage changes that are gradual and achievable.</li><li>✓ Provide information about community programs and/or initiate appropriate referrals.</li></ul>	<p>"Given what we have talked about, what do you think would work for you and your family as a next step?"</p> <p>"To help promote healthy eating habits and a positive experience for the family, parents can decide <i>what</i> food is offered, <i>when</i> and <i>where</i>. Children will decide <i>how much</i> and <i>whether or not</i> to eat."</p> <p>"From what we talked about, you and your partner seem really open to trying new foods. That's great! You are being positive role models for your child by exploring new foods."</p> <p>"It's great that your family eats meals together at the table."</p> <p>"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."</p> <p>"It sounds like you are worried that your child may not be eating enough to grow well. You also mentioned that they will not eat meat or vegetables at meals. Would you be interested in meeting with a dietitian to discuss this further?"</p> <p>"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?"</p>

## Discussing Growth Percentiles & Patterns

Use these examples of objective language to help describe a child's growth pattern in relation to identified growth chart cut-offs and discuss shifts in growth.

Growth Percentile / Pattern (Based on WHO Set 2 Growth Charts)	Messages for Families	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 child's eating habits and physical activity, it seems like this is a normal growth pattern for them. Do you have any questions or concerns that you would like to talk about?"
Head circumference-for-age:  <b>Below 3<sup>rd</sup></b> percentile or <b>Above 97<sup>th</sup></b> 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?"
<b>Below 3<sup>rd</sup></b> 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 child's weight is plotting low, but they are steadily gaining weight and growing taller at the same time. Based on your child's own growth pattern, this is likely normal for them. Some children are naturally smaller than others."  "Today's measurements show that your child's weight is low compared to their height. This can happen during growth spurts, but we will want to continue to measure their weight in the next few months to see if it catches up to the increase in height."
<b>Above 97<sup>th</sup></b> percentile (4 years & under): weight-for-length BMI-for-age  <b>Above 85<sup>th</sup></b> percentile (5 years & up): 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 child's BMI-for-age suggests that their weight may be ahead of their height. Some children naturally follow a higher curve on the BMI-for-age growth chart. Since we only have one measurement to go on today, it will be important to continue to monitor your child's BMI to see how their growth pattern continues."
<b>Shift in growth pattern:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• sharp incline/decline</li><li>• movement across percentiles, nearing a cut-off point</li><li>• growth line is flat</li></ul>	<i>"Growth pattern may be changing"</i>	"Children usually follow their own consistent pattern of growth. Today's measurements show that your child's growth is moving away from the pattern they were following before. Have you noticed any differences in your child's appetite or changes in their usual routines/day to day habits?"  "Your child'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 your child's growth continues."

## References and Resources

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