

# Talking to 3–5 Year Olds About Healthy Choices



## KEY FOCUS AT THIS AGE:

### Building healthy habits & safe decision-making skills

At this age, kids are curious and learning through observation. Instead of discussing substances directly, focus on teaching healthy choices, body safety, and modeling what you want them to learn with your voice, body language and actions.

## Key messages to share

### **"Our bodies are amazing and need healthy things to grow strong!"**

- › Explain that good food, sleep, and exercise help our bodies feel great.
- › Introduce the idea that some things aren't safe for our bodies (without scaring them).
- › "Medicine is only for when we're sick, and a trusted grown-up gives it to us."
- › Help them understand that medicine helps when needed but isn't a treat.
- › Reinforce that they should never take something unless given by a caregiver or doctor.

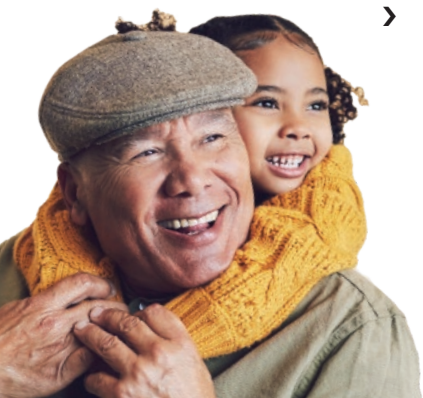
### **"A little bit of vitamins can help our body grow. Too many vitamins will make our body sick."**

- › Help them understand that vitamins are not a treat.
- › Reinforce they should never take a vitamin unless it is given by a trusted adult.

**"If you find something and don't know what it is, always ask me first!"**

### **"If you find something and don't know what it is, always ask me first!"**

- › Use examples like cleaning supplies, food, or items outside.
- › Remind them that things on the ground stay on the ground, and that it's best to not touch things that are not their own.
- › Encourage them to always check with a grown-up before tasting or touching something unfamiliar.



## How to talk about healthy choices in a natural way

- › **During mealtime:** "Eating healthy foods helps our bodies grow big and strong!"
- › **During playtime:** "Let's pretend we're doctors! What do doctors do to keep people safe?"
- › **When giving medicine:** "This helps you feel better, but too much can make you sick. Only a doctor or other grown up you trust can give it to you."
- › **If they see someone smoking or drinking:** "That's something some grown-ups do, but it's not healthy for our bodies."
- › **If they see you using a substance:** "Every body is different. Some choices that are safe for one person are not safe for someone else. It's safe for most grown-ups like me to drink a cup of coffee, but coffee can make a growing body like yours sick. Always ask a trusted adult if you're not sure."

## Simple activities to reinforce the message

**Games:** Healthy vs. Not Sorting – Show pictures of fruits, vegetables, water, soap, medicine, and cleaning products. Let them sort what's safe to put in their body and what isn't.

**Role playing:** "Who Do You Ask?" – Act out different scenarios (finding a pill on the ground, being offered candy from a stranger, seeing someone smoking) and practice what they should do or say.

**Healthy me checklist:** Help them [keep track of the healthy choices](#) they make each day, like eating healthy foods and getting enough sleep, and how those choices make them feel.

## Tips for parents & caregivers

- › **Keep it simple.** Use everyday moments to reinforce safety.
- › **Model healthy choices.** Kids learn best by watching what adults do.
- › **Reassure, don't scare.** Instead of "Never touch that, it's dangerous!" try, "Let's always ask a grown-up first!"

