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## Parenting 101: Making Healthy Choices Without Wrecking Your Budget

How we teach our kids to make [healthy choices](#) now lays the groundwork for the choices they will make for the rest of their lives. From choosing fruits and vegetables over candy and processed foods to walking away when offered drugs or alcohol, healthy choices make both the body and mind stronger. Our own choices and behaviors also influence our children — they watch and learn how we handle stress and responsibility. That's why teaching your kids how to make healthy choices starts with a desire to be healthier in your own life.

Is it time to [inspire your children](#) to make some behavior changes or start motivating them to see the benefits of, and maybe even prefer, making healthy choices? It's never too soon or too late. Learn about ways to encourage your children to make healthy choices starting right now, such as saying no to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco and saying yes to healthy foods and exercise — and you can do all of this without completely destroying your household budget.

### **Saying No to Substances**

Kids and teens will always find themselves in moments of great decisions — with their friends on one side and their parents' instructions on the other. At their first high school party — or maybe even earlier — they might be offered a beer, a cigarette, a joint, or worse. How can we empower them to make healthy choices when their social lives are on the line? Prepare them for this situation by practicing [refusal techniques](#) so they are more comfortable and less caught off-guard when offered drugs or alcohol. Make sure they know to call you to pick them up regardless of the situation.

Remember: Your kids don't have to be at a party to experience the temptation of using drugs or alcohol — it can happen right in their own homes. Keep grown-up belongings like cigarettes and alcohol out of your kids' hands by locking them away securely and rarely — if ever — consuming these items in front of them. Thankfully, you don't need to invest in an expensive liquor cabinet to keep alcohol away from your children — an affordable [child lock](#) on a cabinet should keep these dangerous items from curious hands.

### **Saying Yes to Healthy Eating and Exercise**

In our overpacked, fast-paced world, it is often far easier to stop for fast food or order a pizza than take the time to prep and cook a healthy dinner. But teaching your kids to plan, prepare, and prioritize [healthy meals](#) now will create healthy habits that last well into the future. Do weekly meal prep together, letting your kids come up with healthy recipes to make ahead of time for lunches and dinners. When it's time for a snack, supply them with pre-packed homemade healthy snacks like peanut butter and celery, grapes and cheese, or carrots and hummus. Healthy grab-and-go snacks give your kids more chances to make the right choice. What's more, the experts at Money Crashers have a [guide to eating healthfully](#) without spending a lot. Again, your children will adapt to healthy eating more easily if you model healthy eating behaviors as well. One way to show your children how to get more nutrition is by adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet. Drinking a [healthy beverage](#) that contains superfoods is an easy way to boost your health. Consider getting a subscription to save money on your green drinks.

Diet is only one aspect of teaching our kids how to live [healthy lifestyles](#) — exercise is another. It's up to us to encourage them to participate in team sports (which can also improve social skills) and make playing outside, biking, jogging, and hiking everyday activities. We can help these activities become more fun — and get fit ourselves — when we make it a [family effort](#). A nature walk or a family dance class can motivate not just your kid but you and your partner, as well.

Healthy choices turn into healthy habits on any budget. For example, getting your kids to reach for water before soda or ride a bike before playing a video game will turn into habits that stick with them always. They'll have the confidence to stand up to peer pressure and walk away from situations where drugs or smoking is happening. These choices will impact their ability to make good decisions at school and work, as well as be a positive influence on those around them. Healthy choices lead to healthy lives — mentally, physically, and emotionally.

