

author interview

Making Healthy Choices

A Story to Inspire Fit Weight-Wise Kids

by Merilee A. Kern
kidsmakinghealthychoices.com



1 Are you a first time author?

I am a professional writer and have authored many articles and also ghost-written book projects. The book, "Making Healthy Choices - A Story to Inspire Fit, Weight-Wise Kids," is the first paperback children's book I authored and published under my name.

2. Tell us a little about your book Making Healthy Choices.

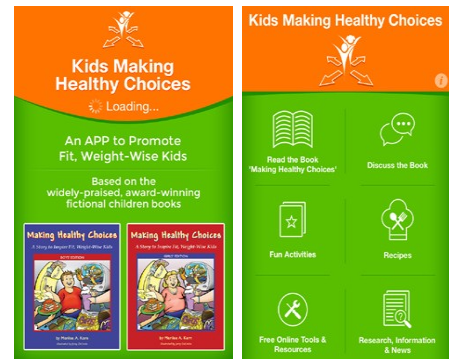
"Kids Making Healthy Choices" is the name of the APP that launched earlier this month, which is based on my award-winning illustrated children's book "Making Healthy Choices - A Story to Inspire Fit, Weight-Wise Kids." Both the boy and girl editions of the book are included in the APP along with other valuable resources for children as well as parents and educators, physicians, etc.

In this first-of-its-kind book, the important health themes "served up" in an easy-to-read style are intended to help overweight kids get on a healthy track, as well as motivate those within a healthy weight range to not only continue making wise lifestyle choices, but also better understand and empathize with peers currently struggling with

a weight problem. In this fictional tale, which garnered acclaim from Oprah Winfrey's personal trainer Bob Greene and Sally Jessy Raphael among a litany of others, the main character changes his/her life from one of unhealthy choices and negative ramifications in the first half of the book, to one of sound choices and positive lifestyle impacts that ensue in the second half of the book. This is a story of empowerment written in a relatable tone and style that engages kids with a "voice" and perspective that resonates.

3. We've read that you are an health advocate for children, tell us more about that and some of the projects you're working on.

In an effort to reach as many children as possible to inspire thought and dialogue on the issue of making healthy lifestyle choices (and how to be more empathetic toward kids struggling with weight issues), I am reaching out to individual schools and school districts that are utilizing iPads to facilitate student learning suggesting they utilize and leverage this APP (the resources contained therein) as a turnkey health or physical education lesson plan as part of the overarching health curriculum. Educational institutions are being offered 50% off the APP price to best assure it's a budget friendly line item. I also envision and am reaching out to pediatric offices, youth group organizers and others who are on the "front line" with children, who would also provide great benefit and value by sharing this APP with their respective networks.



4. Many parents struggle in getting their kids, especially the picky eaters, to eat fruits and vegetables. What have you tried, that have worked, in preparing these foods that would make kids want to even try them?

Inspiring Children to Eat Nutritiously is NOT Rocket Science!

A wise man – or woman – once said that "it's the small things in life that matter." This philosophy could not ring more true than when applied to the health and well-being of our nation's children. There is no one thing that, no matter how consistently done, will assure good health. Rather, it's the culmination of many single, relatively small behaviors that, altogether and over time, will help children foster a healthy body.

When asked what choices 'my' family makes relative to nutrition and fitness that keeps us all healthy and fit, a specific answer often varies, but it always simply conveys easy ways to make healthy options the norm in a family's daily routine rather than the exception – and without the family feeling any sense of loss or deprivation.

With this in mind, here are a few sure-fire, yet simple, success strategies to help children eat more nutritiously:

- First and foremost, require that your child finish his or her healthy meal before any “treat” type foods are made available. Simply put, the child can NOT have that even occasional cupcake if (s)he has not eaten those veggies! End of story.
- We live in an age where food manufacturers are the most health-conscious in history. Take full advantage of these healthy alternatives. It’s simply not an option to choose those refined sugar-loaded gummy bears when dried fruit and trail mix snacks of every sort are a mere aisle or two away.
- Make fresh fruit an exciting dessert. Yes, dessert. Low-fat and low-calorie whipped cream with just a touch of colorful sprinkles atop sliced strawberries or other berries can make children squeal with delight. Rainbow Jell-O jam packed with citrus fruit is always a crowd pleaser. When it comes to nature’s dessert, get creative, build the anticipation in advance, and offer it up with as much excitement and reverence as you would a chocolate cake.
- Don’t expect utter perfection of yourself as you work toward your family’s collective health goal. Do what you can to make healthy changes, as doing “something” is better than doing nothing. No time to make homemade oatmeal? Go for those instant bags instead! Any oatmeal is better than no oatmeal, and it’s certainly better than skipping breakfast or opting for any of those sugary cereals. You can’t get all the way there if you never get out of the starting gate!
- Don’t ask if your family wants a certain veggie or fruit with dinner. Make an executive [chef] decision and just serve it up! Knowing that such choices are not an option per se removes the possibility that your family may choose to eat a given healthy item or not. Praise the child who enthusiastically eats his or her healthy fare or at least tries it and does “well enough.” And, leverage your kid’s competitive spirit. Offer an eating challenge that he or she simply cannot resist, such as “I bet you can’t eat all of your peas in the next 10 minutes”. You’ll be surprised how far this will take you.
- Be willing to concede for the greater good. My son will only eat a healthy tuna fish sandwich with low-fat mayonnaise in a wheat pita if it has about four potato chips placed inside the pocket, too. I figure 2 or 3 potato chips is a fair concession to make for a wheat pita full of Omega-3 fatty acid-packed tuna. With kids, all or nothing doesn’t work – be willing to find that middle ground!

Ensuring a child eats nutritiously is not about denial which, especially with the younger set, will surely prove self-defeating. Rather, it’s about strategy, systems, consistency and moderation to establish a balance of what is, and is not, health-promoting. It’s not rocket science...it just takes some forethought and some good old common sense.
 [*Kern, Kids Nutrition: Simple Changes, Big Rewards*]

5. Some parents are a little hesitant about their kids in the kitchen. But we notice that you encourage this with your kid-friendly recipes. What is your suggestion to the parents?

Kids love to be a part of the planning/shopping and meal preparation process. When they are more vested in these procedures, they are far more apt to eat the end result. It's also great bonding time with children and often a learning experience (about the benefits of various food items, etc.). So, yes, it's wise to bring your kids into the kitchen.

6. We especially liked the questions and discussion prompts at the back of the book. From your experience, do you find that this works effectively in preparing children or a family in their transition to a healthier lifestyle?

Parents are also encouraged to read this book, especially aloud with younger kids, so they can key in on those specific depictions that resonate with the child. Generally, it's expected that the majority of overweight or obese kids will relate to one or more of the main character's "bad choices", as well as the implications of being an overweight child.

The Discussion Questions effectively use non-confrontational methodology to present this vital subject to better ensure kids don't get defensive in discussing the character's struggles, and they can genuinely feel inspired by his achievements.

If parents have yet to establish dialogue with their child[ren] regarding their health, or are simply at their wit's end having seemingly "tried it all", this fictional story offers a non-combative opportunity for children to see that someone "does" understand their struggle and that relatively easy changes can be made that WILL result in a better lifestyle.

7. What's next? Are you currently working on another book?

Right now my efforts are focused on getting the newly launched APP to as many parents, caregivers, educators and physicians as possible. From there, I'll further develop the APP with new and exciting features. [[More about the APP on Examiner](#)]

Children's health advocate, health industry veteran and two-time fitness champion, Merilee Kern, is the creator of the ground-breaking "Kids Making Healthy Choices" APP for children, parents/caregivers and educators (available on iTunes), which is based on her award-winning, illustrated fictional children's book, "Making Healthy Choices – A Story to Inspire Fit, Weight-Wise Kids." She may be reached online at: www.KidsMakingHealthyChoices.com.

