

WHEN YOUR CHILD HAS DIABETES

by Henry Lew, psychologist

Parenting a child is not easy. It becomes more challenging when the child we are taking care of has diabetes. The range of challenges of taking care of a child with diabetes is diverse and changes according to their developmental years. We take a look at how to manage some of these challenges that may arise for school-aged children between six and 12:

✓ **Regular consultation and contact with the healthcare team.** As your child experiences growth spurts, you may need to adjust the way his diabetes is managed. It is essential that you keep to the regular follow-up appointments your child has with the healthcare professionals.

✓ **Always check before making any conclusions.** Growth spurts may contribute to some instances of hypoglycaemia. Some parents may wrongfully “blame” their child for hypoglycaemia, thinking that the child has neglected taking insulin behind their back when it could have been due to growth spurts. Check with your doctor or diabetes nurse educator before jumping to any conclusions.

✓ **Sort out if it is a medical or behavioural problem.** Hypoglycaemia may make a child emotional or irritable. In some instances, parents of younger children have been advised by healthcare professionals to monitor the child’s blood sugar levels when the child is emotional to ascertain if it is hypoglycaemia or just a tantrum. Following medical advice would be needed if the tantrums are due to hypoglycaemia, while setting limits and being firm would be the course of action if the child is losing his or her temper.



Emphasise your children’s strengths and let them know you noticed them. Encourage them to pursue their interests as much as their health allows them to.

✓ **Grant them their feelings.** Your child may feel angry or frustrated at the strict regime he or she has to keep to for health's sake. Acknowledge their feelings.

✓ **Allow them to express their feelings and coach them to share it in a socially accepted manner.**

Diabetes has already taken a lot from them and you would not want to even take away their feelings by asking them to suppress it or by you ignoring their feelings.

✓ **Treat them like any normal child.**

Your child probably feels different from other children. As much as diabetes and the healthcare regime are an essential part of their daily life, try not to make it so HUGE that they are nothing else but a child with diabetes.

✓ **Emphasise their strengths and let them know you noticed them.**

Encourage them to pursue their interests as much as their health allows them to. As

much as you would want to remind them to take care of their health, make it a point to talk to them about things other than their health.

✓ **Get the whole family involved.**

Very often it is encouraging to the child with diabetes and benefits every family member's health if the whole family decides to make healthier diet choices. Children with diabetes feel left out or feel it is unfair that they are not able to eat what their siblings can have. It also teaches our other children to be sensitive and empathetic.

✓ **Connect them through support groups.**

Let your child get to know other children with diabetes. This helps them to make friends with children who understand what they are going through and realise that they are not alone in their struggles. They can

also draw inspiration from peers and role models who have succeeded in living a normal life.

Always check before making any conclusions. Growth spurts may contribute to some instances of hypoglycaemia. Hypoglycaemia may also make a child emotional or irritable.

1 Tailor parenting advice to your child's needs. It is inevitable that you will come across many and sometimes even contradicting advice and tips. Every child is different.

2 One helpful way to help you feel less helpless in parenting your child is to view each attempt as an experience that will only make you wiser and more resilient and in a better position to help your child.