

Talking to Your Child About Diabetes

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<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/talking-diabetes.html?ref=search&WT.ac=msh-p-dtop-en-search-clk>

If your child has been diagnosed with type 1 or type 2 diabetes, you may feel shocked, sad, or even angry or guilty at first — feelings that are perfectly normal.

But the more you learn about diabetes, the better prepared you'll be to talk about it with your child.

Getting Started

Be sure to talk to your child in an age-appropriate way and to always tell the truth. And don't be put off by your child's questions — answering them can help you learn more about diabetes, too.

Kids who've been diagnosed with diabetes may feel that they've done something to have caused the disease. It's important for parents to make it clear (especially to younger children) that this isn't so.

Make sure your child knows that diabetes is not going away, and that it's OK to feel sad or upset about having it. Encourage your child to talk about it openly. Also discuss the diabetes diagnosis with your other kids, who might be jealous of the extra attention their sibling is getting or concerned about developing diabetes themselves.

Sending the Right Message

The words you use can send a powerful message about diabetes — and your child's role

in managing it. Be positive. Emphasize that together you can get diabetes under control.

Avoid using terms like "cheating" and "being bad" if your child veers from the diabetes management plan. Instead, help your child understand how eating and exercise affect [blood sugar levels](#).

Kids look to their parents for guidance, so how you deal with diabetes can affect how your child talks with you about it. If you overreact about a high blood sugar level, for example, your child might be less than honest with you about future blood sugar readings.

It's also hard to expect kids with diabetes to limit sugary treats or get regular exercise if siblings and parents don't do the same. Have a family discussion about why living a healthy lifestyle is important for everyone — not just people with diabetes. Include all family members in meal planning and other activities so your child won't feel alone in diabetes management.

Diabetes Talks by Age

Here are some tips for diabetes discussions suited to a child's age:

Infants and toddlers don't understand why they need to have shots or get their fingers poked. To help, try to make blood sugar testing and giving [insulin](#) part of your child's daily routine, like diaper changes or going down for a nap. Perform diabetes care quickly and gently, in a

soothing manner, and reassure your child with calming words afterward.

Preschoolers still rely on parents for their diabetes care. Explain diabetes-related tasks in simple terms. Parents can also help them feel some sense of control by letting kids tell them where they'd prefer to have their [insulin injection](#) and which finger to use for a blood glucose test.

Kids in grade school through middle school should be learning how to take on some of their diabetes care, but still need parental involvement. Be supportive, but don't push as your child gradually takes on self-care responsibilities. Your doctor or [diabetes health care team](#) can guide you on which tasks are appropriate at each stage.

As kids grow, they become more interested in doing things independently and more sensitive about seeming different from their peers. Offer praise whenever your child assumes a new self-care responsibility, but be understanding of temporary setbacks — which can be especially common when kids feel stressed. Avoid being overprotective, and reinforce the expectation that kids with diabetes can do anything that kids without diabetes can do. Also discuss how having your child take responsibility for diabetes can make it easier to go to fun events like parties and sleepovers.

Teens may make poor decisions regarding their diabetes care because of peer pressure, the fear of being different from their friends, and a feeling of invincibility. It's important to talk about [drugs](#), [alcohol](#), [sexuality](#), and other issues

with your teen and how they could affect their diabetes and overall health. There is a fine line between offering support and lecturing, so express your concerns in a caring manner.

For kids of any age, finding a support group can help them connect with other kids with diabetes so they'll feel less different.

Honest, open communication is key when talking to kids and teens about diabetes. The more you talk with and involve your child in diabetes care, the better prepared you'll both be when you're apart.

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