

Psychosocial Impact of Type 1 Diabetes and COVID-19

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Objectives

Psychosocial impact of type 1 diabetes

- Strategies to promote adjustment, overall development, and well-being for children and adolescents with diabetes in a school setting.
- Providing psychosocial support to children and adolescents with diabetes in the school setting.

Psychosocial impact of COVID-19

- Psychosocial adjustment to COVID-19, social isolation, and extended time away from school.
- Adjusting back to school following COVID-19 and how to prepare for expected adjustment challenges.

Psychosocial Impact of Type 1 Diabetes

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Living with type 1 diabetes

- It is tough living with and managing diabetes (chronic illness)
- Succumbing to the cumbersome demands (extra step)
 - Checking blood glucose
 - Carb counting
 - Match Insulin w/ blood sugar
- Feeling overwhelmed is very common – Looks different
- Medical component talked about frequently but the psychological burden of living with a chronic condition is often not address. Causing one to suffer in silence

Shared decision making

American Diabetes Association reports that shared decision making can improve self-efficacy

- Students ability to participate in diabetes care should be determined collaboratively with school staff, healthcare provider, and parent(s)/legal guardian(s).
- Students should play an integral part in self-care related to diabetes management within the context of appropriate age, developmental stage, and experience.
- Students capability and willingness to provide diabetes self-care should be assessed in an ongoing basis and respected within reason.

Psychosocial Developmental considerations

Preschool and toddlers

- Developmentally appropriate explanations. Simple and honest.
- Getting Cooperation with injections and blood glucose checks
 - Don't apologize. Explain why and collaborate.
- Anticipatory anxiety can be worse than the injection or checks.
 - Watch your emotional cues
 - Have equipment ready
 - Distraction at diabetes tasks
- Age – hard to distinguish blood glucose influenced or toddler behavior
- Routine/structure can decrease food refusal

Elementary school

- Harness the power of show and tell when readiness to share is reached.
 - Explore how to respond to peer questions
- Children start to feel different and express diabetes is unfair.
 - Normally – magical thinking – invincible.
 - Allow processing and explore how all have unique traits.
 - Insulin helps the body work the same as other children
- Start to assess capability and willingness to manage diabetes and include in diabetes care plan

Psychosocial Developmental considerations continued

Middle school

- Children are managing similar developmental psychosocial aspects as elementary school with the addition of puberty
- Insulin resistance due to puberty can increase frustration/irritability/worry.
- 504 or other accommodations
 - Taking snack, rest, bathroom breaks, delaying tests until blood glucose is in range.

High school

- Adolescents are managing similar developmental psychosocial aspects as middle school with the addition of:
 - Risk taking (experimental) behaviors
 - Rebellion from authority and increased conflict
 - Strive for independence and redefining boundaries
- Diabetes burnout is highest in youth during this age/stage.
- Nonadherence is also highest in youth during this stage.
 - Exploring function of behavior can help target support

Tips

- Start talks with normal conversations before exploring diabetes to build and maintain rapport.
- Watch your tone and body language when discussing diabetes.
- Normalize and validate emotions.
- Explore support system. Help utilize established or create new supports.
- Provide praise of diabetes related tasks completed.
- Help youth see that blood glucose does not reflect them as a person. It just shows what they need to be healthy.

COVID-19 and its Psychosocial Impact

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Children's understanding of illness etiology

Age	Category	Examples
0-2	Invisible	Not understanding; "a cold is during vacation"
2-7	Distance	External activities recognized by a child; coincidental connection
	Proximity	Becoming ill originates through contamination by nearness
7-11	Contact	Contact with dirt/germs can cause disease
	Internalization	External germs or unhealthy bodily condition that can affect the body
11+	Body Inside	physiologic; external trigger for non-functioning of organs; awareness that their owns actions can influence the outcome
	Body-Mind Inside	Psychophysiological insight; thoughts and feelings can influence and change body functions

Communicating with children about COVID-19

- Talk about COVID-19 and its prevention in an honest and developmentally appropriate way
- Reassure their safety and take responsibility for their safety
- Ask the child what they want to know
- Limit exposure to media
- Praise good hygiene to reinforce continued behavior
- Developmental considerations:
 - Social distancing: “respecting our neighbor’s physical space” “giving our friends room to wiggle”

Potential Reactions

- May be experiencing a loss of control and social support
- Irritability
- Clinginess
- Regression
- Acting out
- Arguing
- Anxious
- May ask questions related to death and dying

* each child responds differently!

**children with a history of anxiety and depression may have exacerbated symptoms and be more at risk for difficulties with adjustment

Recommendations for parents

- Keep as many everyday routines as possible
- Provide choices
- Connect with peers/family virtually
- Normalize and validate children's worries and feelings
- Encourage self-regulation (e.g., exercise, deep breathing)
- Set limits when needed
- Model healthy coping
- Encourage expression through creative play
- Make this time special

School Considerations



Distance Learning

- For individuals with special education services, if educational services are still being provided then **“online learning tools should be compatible with any assistive technology that students use”** and **“the student has a right to continue to receive a free appropriate public education”** (U.S. Department of Education)
- If services are not received because the school is not continuing educational services or services are unable to be provided through alternate means, then compensatory services may be necessary

Distance Learning Tips for Parents

- Structure the day for learning, free time, meals and snacks, and physical activity
 - Allow flexibility!
- Help children pace themselves (how much time do they think it will take them and then add a little extra time) - a great life skill!
- Communicate any challenges to the child's school
- Find ways to make learning fun

Reminders for parents

- You are not professional teachers!
- The best teaching you can do is ensure that your children feel safe and loved
- Some of the best lessons may be lessons in increasing independence

The Return to School

- It will be an adjustment and may feel overwhelming
- There may be anxiety about the virus/health and potentially separation from parents as well
- Some tips:
 - Reestablish bedtime, wake time, and mealtime routines at least one week before school restarts
 - Prepare children for the return to school
 - Invite discussions about worries, validate feelings, and reinforce ability to cope
 - Maintain expectations that children go to school