

Bullying and Type 1 Diabetes



According to a JDRF study, 50% of children with type 1 diabetes have been bullied about their condition. A child with diabetes already feels isolated and different. They are often the only person that they know who has type 1 diabetes.

Diabetes-related bullying can directly affect diabetes self-management. The stress created from the bullying makes diabetes management even more challenging. For example, a child may not follow the management plan because of the reaction from classmates. They may not test their sugar or go to the office to take insulin because another student may see them. This can be dangerous and serious impact the health of the child.

Sometimes, well-meaning teachers may treat children with type 1 diabetes differently than their classmates. This has the potential of reinforcing the idea that the child with diabetes is set apart, different from the rest of the class. This can unknowingly create feelings of jealousy among classmates. Diabetes can cause a child to have extra snacks, extra trips to the office, and frequent bathroom breaks. A high or low blood sugar may mean the child can take a break or postpone a test.

Diabetes can also be scary, which can be a source of bullying. The occasional beeps from an insulin pump or continuous glucose monitor (CGM) can be a little scary and unfamiliar to classmates. The most effective means of countering this behavior is education and empathy.

Some ways to help decrease bullying behavior are:

1. Educate yourself about diabetes. Have good information from reliable sources ready to counteract misinformation from the students. If you are well educated on diabetes, you will have the tools to be able to explain the disease to others.
2. Educate the students about what diabetes is and what it is not. Help them to understand why the child is checking blood sugar, what their insulin pump is, what is hidden in their diabetes bag. Alleviating the mysteries about diabetes will help the student's peers be less afraid and more understanding.
3. Help the students become more empathetic to the child with diabetes. Liken the disease to other things that may make the other children frustrated and different. Things that may be used are food allergies, physical limitations, asthma, or learning disabilities.



Diabetes Youth Services offers classroom presentations designed to educate students about diabetes to reduce the instances of bullying about diabetes. These interactive presentations are free of charge and designed to be grade appropriate.