

For Parents



More Wit and Wisdom for kids with diabetes
(and their parents)

Diabetes, School, and the Law

When it comes to diabetes, you and your child have a lot of things to think about. Meal plan. Exercise. Blood sugars. Treating highs and lows. Medication. Sick days. With all that going on it really helps to have the people in child's your life on your side. Having family, friends, your child's health care team, teacher and principal pulling for you and doing what it takes to help him* control diabetes makes all the difference in the world.

Unfortunately, sometimes people just don't get it. They don't understand your child's need to check blood sugar levels, treat low blood sugars with glucose or foods with carbohydrate, and they don't even want to think about needles!

Sometimes teachers and principals don't understand that what your child needs to stay safe and healthy can be different from what other kids in school need. That sometimes your child needs special conditions or arrangements that allow her to take care of her diabetes.

Even though their lack of understanding can be difficult to deal with, it all comes down to this: your child, your family, and your health care team must do whatever

it takes to allow your child to control her diabetes.

The best way to make sure this happens is to do some educating right up front. Your family, your child, and your health care team should make a packet of information for your child's principal, school nurse, teacher, and coach. The American Diabetes Association can supply you with good information to explain diabetes and how it's treated and how to recognize hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and hyperglycemia (high blood sugar). Call us at 1.800.DIABETES and ask for our free brochure, "Children with Diabetes: Information for Teachers and Child Care Providers." Also ask for a copy of "Managing School", or download it from the Youth Zone at diabetes.org/wisdom/pod.asp.

Once you've got all this, add your child's personal information to the packet: his medical treatment plan, daytime phone numbers for you, your spouse, or other adults in your family, and instructions on when to call. Schedule a meeting with your child's principal, teacher, school nurse, and other school officials and go over the packet and your child's requirements with them.

* To avoid the unwieldy "he/she" and still remain gender inclusive when referring to the child with diabetes, we have switched between "he" and "she" by paragraph throughout this document.

What happens if, in spite of everything you've done and all the information you've shared, the principal says, "That doesn't matter. We have rules. And rules say your child can't eat in class no matter what." Or a teacher says that your child has to wait until class is over to test your blood. Or a coach says, "We can't deal with diabetes during a game. Sorry, your child can't be on the team." Well, then your family goes to the next step for the sake of your child's health. And because his health is serious business, there are laws to make sure he can take care of his diabetes in school.

There are three important laws you should know about—"Section 504," IDEA, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They all have funny names, but the messages of these laws are serious. Basically these 3 laws say that your child has the right to go to school, to take care of his diabetes at school, play a sport, join a club, and do activities that kids without diabetes do.

When someone treats your child unfairly because he has diabetes, that's discrimination. Discrimination is against the law. The laws mentioned above -- Section 504, IDEA, and ADA -- help protect your child's rights at school. And there are actions you and your child can take to stop the discrimination.

The first step is up to your child. Be sure he knows what his rights are, and encourage him to tell you if he feels that he is being treated unfairly. Be sure he knows that it's his right to do whatever kids without diabetes do, and that he has the right to do whatever he needs to do to take care of his diabetes at school.

The next step for you will probably be to review the packet of diabetes information with the school officials. Remember that sometimes when people discriminate

against others they simply don't know any better. They might believe they are doing what is best. That's why it is so important to begin this process with education.

If a plan for taking care of your child's diabetes at school was not written when you first gave the packet of information to the school officials, now is the time for you, your child, and the school officials to make one. Include your child's medical treatment plan, how his diabetes will be taken care of during school and after-school activities, daytime phone numbers for you, your spouse, or other adults, and instructions on when to call. Your child should always have a Health Care Plan. This outlines your child's basic medical needs. Your child may not have a 504 Plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These plans would include other accommodations your child might need to care for diabetes in school.

If a plan was written, now is the time to review it with the teacher, principal, school nurse, and coach. The plan might need some changes or some additions to help correct whatever is causing problems now.

Maybe the school has forgotten that it's their responsibility to train staff about diabetes. You can offer to help set up the training or to provide instructions on what exactly your child needs, but ultimately it is the school's responsibility.

Sometimes problems with the school will persist despite your efforts at communicating your child's needs. If continue to have problems, it's time for you to meet with the school to discuss the specifics of the problems and how they will be solved. It will be very

helpful for you to take written materials about laws which protect your child's rights in school. You can get these materials from the American Diabetes Association— call us at 1-800-DIABETES (342-2383) and ask for an education discrimination packet.

You might think about asking someone from your child's health care team to go with you to this meeting. Sometimes a doctor or certified diabetes educator can be more convincing than parents.

Another helpful thing you might try is to contact other parents of kids with diabetes. If two heads are better than one, imagine how good a whole group is. This group will probably have many ideas and lots of information to help solve your discrimination problem.

Hopefully the problem has been solved by now and your child is able to do the things needed for her health, happiness, and well-being. But if the problem is still around, there are other people in your community who might be helpful. These include elected officials - the mayor, a school board member, or a state representative. You might also turn to the media for help, for example, a newspaper reporter or a local television reporter.

You may also need to pursue the matter through an administrative claim or a lawsuit. Contact a lawyer who is knowledgeable about Section 504, IDEA, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Your local office of the American Diabetes Association may be able to help you find one. Call us at 800-DIABETES (342-2383).

To Learn More:

- ★ Wisdom: If you don't already have it, get the American Diabetes

Association Wisdom™ kit. They're free to kids with diabetes and their families. Just call us at 1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2383).

- ★ For more information on school, diabetes, and the law, log on to our Web site at <http://www.diabetes.org/wizdom/parents/discrimination.shtml>
- ★ Magazines: **Diabetes Forecast** is published monthly just for people with diabetes and their families. It's free to members of the American Diabetes Association. Become a member by calling 1-800-806-7801
- ★ Want more Wisdom? We've got titles on school, discrimination, and parenting issues with more on the way. Call us at 1.800.DIABETES and we'll send them to you.
- ★ For more advice and answers, log on to our Parents' Place Community Forum at diabetes.org. Click on "**Community and Resources**," then "**Community Forums**."
- ★ Questions or comments? Send us an e-mail at wizdom@diabetes.org

