



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

Your Parents & Your Diabetes

Get ready for an incredible journey. It's a trip into one of the darkest, scariest places you can think of. Full of alien forms, creepy shadows, and endless mazes.

Step inside the brain of a grownup.

Why in the world would you want to go there? Well, for better or worse, the way grownups think makes a difference in the lives of kids. That's especially true if you're a kid living with diabetes. And if you know how grownups think and why they act the way they do, you can make your journey with both diabetes and grownups a whole lot easier on yourself.

So let's go exploring.

The Valley of a Thousand Questions

Before you go too far, stop and listen:

"Should you be eating that?"

"Get any exercise today?"

"You will be sure to be home on time for dinner, won't you?"

"Have you put those glucose tablets in your backpack yet?"

"Do you have to eat every time you go to the mall?"

"Are you doing your blood checks when you're supposed to?"

"Aren't you going to the bathroom a lot?"

"I don't care what the other kids do!"

Sound familiar? The words may be different, but nearly every kid who deals with diabetes deals with questions like these.

It's enough to drive you crazy.

But those questions - or at least the concern that's behind them - can help keep you healthy, can even keep you alive.

Sometimes grownups get upset or angry about diabetes. When this happens, they might go overboard on the third degree. Remember that it's not you they're worked up about—it's diabetes.

Here are a few tips to help you get through the Valley:

- ★ Answer the questions, even if you think they're dumb. Your grownup may have good reasons for asking. And, answering is the quickest way out. It shows you are responsible and may even get them to quit asking so many questions!
- ★ Don't argue.
- ★ Ask questions. Show you're interested in learning about diabetes and keeping yourself healthy.

- ★ Ask yourself, “Why are they asking me this question?” You might be able to open up a dialogue with your parents by asking them a careful question. This might help them tell you what’s really on their minds. For example, they might say, “I’m asking if you checked your blood sugar because I’m worried that”
- ★ Get permission to get on an online chat room where you can talk to kids going through some of the same things you are. Post a message to the Wizdom Round Table panel at www.diabetes.org/wizdom

The Forest of Everyone Who Cares

Even though you may be the only person in your family who has diabetes, you're not the only person who has to deal with it.

In fact, on the day the doctor told you that you have diabetes, the lives of everyone you know changed. Especially the lives of the people who are closest to you, who live in the same house or apartment you do.

Things your parents, foster parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters never worried about before became important when you got diabetes. Things like what you're eating, how active you are, even how much you're growing became more important than it ever was before.

Before we journey any farther, let's agree on one thing: **no one likes diabetes!** But still everyone in your family has to deal with it.

For you, dealing with diabetes means keeping it in control by watching what you eat, staying active, testing your blood and urine, and taking your medicine.

In some ways, parents and family have a tougher job than you do. They can't eat

the right things for you or take medicine at the right time. They trust **you** but they don't trust diabetes. It scares them. Since they can't deal with it for you, they ask questions - lots of questions.

Why do they care?

There are a bunch of answers to this one. The biggest one is the simplest: they love you. They care for you. They don't want anything bad to happen to you.

A lot of parents feel guilty when their son or daughter gets diabetes. They think it's their fault. That's not true. No one knows for sure what causes diabetes.

Have you ever had a friend or a pet get hurt, and even though it wasn't your fault, you felt awful because you couldn't do anything to make it stop hurting? That's the way parents feel. Most of them would do anything to keep you from having diabetes. But there's nothing they can do. And for a lot of people, that's even a worse feeling than having diabetes themselves.

Here's another reason why grownups care so much about your diabetes: it's their job. Well, diabetes really isn't their job, but keeping you safe and healthy is. Making sure you have a roof over your head, food on the table, and clothes to wear are things grownups think about just because they're grownups. It's up to them to keep you safe and healthy. So when the doctor told them you have diabetes, they went to work doing their job - taking care of you by helping you keep your diabetes under control.

Another thing to keep in mind is that kids and parents think differently. It's a

fact: Kids are usually focused more on the here and now— what matters **today**. Parents, on the other hand, tend to think more about your future—what kind of job you'll have, preventing diabetes complications, etc.

To help get around in the Forest:

- ★ Think about the things your parents are doing **right**. What do they do that makes you feel good?
- ★ When the questions are driving you crazy remind yourself they are asking because they want you to be healthy.
- ★ Encourage your parents to call the American Diabetes Association to see if there are support groups for parents of kids with diabetes.
- ★ The more you share with your parents, the more they will trust you, and the more they will understand that you are doing your best.
- ★ Your parents might want to find a chat room online, too. One for parents of kids with diabetes.
- ★ If things get really bad, try this simple exercise: Sit down with them and say something like, "When you _____, I feel _____" For example, "When you keep asking if I tested, I feel that you don't trust me." It's a healthy way to open up the lines of communication.
- ★ Here's another simple exercise to try: Write a letter to each other. The topic could be "How diabetes makes me feel," "What frustrates me most about diabetes," or maybe "What I wish my mom and dad knew about me and my diabetes?" and "What I wish my son/daughter knew about diabetes."

The Bumpy Road of Mood Swings

Do you feel the same about diabetes day after day? Probably not. If you're like most people with diabetes, some days are better than others. Some days everything is going great, you're eating right, running, and playing. It doesn't even feel like you have diabetes!

Other days are just the opposite. You feel crummy. It seems like your blood sugar goes through the roof if you even think about food. You don't feel like doing anything, especially testing blood glucose or riding a bike.

The grownups in your life have those days, too. Good days. And really awful bad days. Sometimes, they'll be on the top of the world, trusting you to control your diabetes. Other days, they turn into complete grouches. Nothing can make them happy. Nothing you do is right. (Or at least that's the way it seems.)

So why are they so mad at you? It could be they're not at all upset with you. It could be they're mad at diabetes. It has more to do with all the things they'd like to do to help you with your diabetes (mainly get rid of it), but can't. That's enough to make anyone grumpy. Or sad. Or frustrated.

To help smooth the mood bumps:

- ★ Record your blood sugar every time you check. Watch to see if how you feel matches the highs and lows of your blood checks. Work with your health care team to level out your blood sugars and your moods.
- ★ Talk to your parents about the discoveries you make recording your blood checks. If they can help you figure something out or

see that you figured it out, they may not feel grumpy or sad or mad as often.

- ★ Try telling your parents how you are feeling. For example, "I'm feeling _____ because my blood sugar is _____." This won't fix the problem (your blood sugar), but it will help your parents see where you're coming from.

The Land of You

So far, this journey through the brain has been pretty easy for you. All the crazy questions and most of the dumb things have come from grownups.

But what happens when you eat something you know you shouldn't, forget to check your blood, or just don't take care of yourself the best way? What happens is you prove you're human. And instead of getting down on yourself, you need to admit you made a mistake and work to do better.

Sometimes it's hard for parents to understand all that. Remember, they want you to be healthy, and to do well with your diabetes. They may see a mistake as a step back.

At times like those it's important for you and your grownups to remember that diabetes lasts a lifetime. You're going to make mistakes, and have some days that are better than others. The important thing is that you learn in a way that allows you to have more good days than bad.

To make yourself king or queen of You Land:

- ★ Talk to your parents or grownups about those times. Let them know that you understand it was a mistake and tell them what you learned. Remind them how tough diabetes can be for you and tell them how you feel about not doing everything just right. But

remember, you're in charge of your diabetes. If you think you need a break, talk with your parents about it. Maybe you can find ways to share the diabetes care a little more for awhile. Learn from the bad times and celebrate the good times.

- ★ Talk to your doctor about what to do when you forget to check your blood, eat too much, or do anything else that could be risky. Share what you learn with your parents or grownups. Make a list of things that could go wrong, and match it with a list of what you would do if any of them happened.

The Top of Mount Trust

Here's the most important thing you can learn on this journey: What parents really want is for your diabetes to be controlled so you can stay healthy.

Depending on your age and how long you've had diabetes, your grownups will probably have a lot to say about what you do, when you eat, and how you live. But as you get older, and as you get more experience in taking care of yourself, your parents will start to let you make more and more decisions. Showing them you can take care of yourself and make good decisions tells them they can trust you to handle your diabetes.

Your parents probably won't let you make decisions on your own as fast as you think they should. They may never stop asking at least a few questions about how you're doing with control. And they'll always worry because they'll always care.

To reach the top of the mountain:

- ★ Talk to your parents about what places or situations scare them the

most. Then work together to see if you can agree on guidelines or how to solve a particular problem. For example, if your grownups are concerned about you staying overnight with a friend, talk about it. Figure out when and what you'll eat, where your test strips and glucose tabs will be, and what information to share with your friend's mom or dad.

- ★ Tell them what places and situations scare you the most and let them help you come up with guidelines. Your honesty will help them trust you even more to take care of yourself.

Making Sense of this Long Trip

Journeys are hard to plan and tiring to take. But in the end they should always be fun. Whether it's your journey through a grownup's brain or through life with your diabetes. Learning about things and making plans will help you understand your grownups, and help them understand you. And while it will always be "your diabetes," you'll have some great people helping you along the way. Think about it. Then talk to your grownups and hit the road to good health.

To Learn More:

- ★ **Wizdom:** If you don't already have it, get the American Diabetes Association Wizdom™ kit. They're free to kids with diabetes, so get permission from a parent or guardian and call 1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2383) today.
- ★ **Youth Zone:** Log on to our Web site at www.diabetes.org, or check out the new ADA Wizdom Youth Zone™ Web site just for kids and teens with diabetes—www.diabetes.org/wizdom
- ★ **Books online:** You can read a lot of ADA books on our Web site. Go to store.diabetes.org and click on the button that says "Read It." If you don't have a computer at home, check your local library, community center, YMCA, or Boys & Girls Club.
- ★ **Magazines:** **Diabetes Forecast** is a monthly magazine for people with diabetes and their families. It's free to members of the American Diabetes Association. Join today by calling us at 800-DIABETES.
- ★ **Want more Wizdom?** 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.
- ★ **Give your parents a hand:** Invite them to check out our online parent forums. Tell them to go to our Web site at diabetes.org. Then click on "**Community and Resources**," then "**Community Forums**."
- ★ **Questions or comments?** Want to tell us how you're doing? Send us an e-mail at wizdom@diabetes.org

