

Safe at School Recommendations: Going to School During a Pandemic & Mental Health Considerations

Did you know?

- Every child/adolescent responds to stress in different ways.
 - Many children are experiencing fears, worries, sadness, and isolation because they are worried about their risk for COVID-19 exposure, they are missing peer interactions and they are struggling with virtual learning.
 - Some children feel more at ease because they are experiencing less stress associated with the school environment. This includes children with histories of social anxiety.
- Children/adolescents may be at higher risk for worries, fears, and sadness due to:
 - Fears about their own risk for COVID-19 exposure
 - Fears about their loved one's risk for COVID-19 exposure, especially when their caregiver/parent goes to work or runs errands
 - Decrease in social support and social interactions
 - While some youth report a decrease in activities that serve as distractions, others report an increase in distractions in their home environment that negatively impact their ability to concentrate on their studies.
 - Increased exposure to stressors in the household.
 - Increased concern regarding college applications/acceptances/"gap" year

Tips for Parents Caregivers

- Understand the facts about COVID-19 both in general and as it relates to children with diabetes so you can provide your child with accurate, age-appropriate information.
- Be an example! Model ways to minimize risk for COVID-19 exposure such as washing your hands, practicing physical distancing, and wearing a face mask.
- Before your child returns to in-person instruction, find out how the school and teachers plan to promote safety for students and follow CDC guidelines.
- Encourage your children to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Limit your child's exposure to the news and social media.
- Stress that the pandemic is temporary, and adults are working to keep them safe.
- It can help to keep a schedule that mimics the school day. A schedule can help children and adults feel that the situation is more predictable.
- Ensure that your child's 504 Plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP) accommodations are updated to address virtual learning.

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For example: Allow students with diabetes to turn off visual transmission during class for the following: students with diabetes to turn off visual transmission during class for the following: breaks to use the water fountain or bathroom, check blood glucose and treat hypoglycemia or hyperglycemia.

- Review the 504 Plan or IEP accommodations with your child so your child is aware and better prepared to self-advocate, if needed.
- Explore opportunities for physically distant peer interactions.
 - Children can stay in contact with friends via virtual communication platforms.
 - Ask your children's diabetes care team about virtual peer support group opportunities.
 - Register your child for virtual groups that promote social interaction and physical activity.
 - **Project Power**
 - **Camp Brain**
- Seek professional emotional support including support from your child's school psychologist or school counselor, if needed. Alternative resources include referrals for therapy/counseling in your community and the ADA Mental Health Provider Directory .

Tips for School Personnel

- Understand the facts so you can provide your student with accurate, age-appropriate information.
- Be an example! Model ways to minimize risk for COVID-19 exposure such as washing your hands, practicing physical distancing, and wearing a face mask.
- Ensure that 504 Plan or IEP accommodations are updated for students with diabetes to address virtual learning. For example: Allow student to turn off visual transmission during class for the following: breaks to use the water fountain or bathroom, check blood glucose and treat hypoglycemia or hyperglycemia.
- Promote non-academic social connections by providing students with brief, fun interactive activities. At the beginning of academic quarters/semesters, provide students with the opportunity to introduce themselves and engage in "ice breaker" activities.
- Seek and/or recommend emotional support from your school psychologist, if needed.

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Resources

To learn more about the relationship between COVID-19 and diabetes:

www.diabetes.org/covid-19-faq

www.diabetes.org/coronavirus-covid-19

To read about ways to talk with children about the COVID-19 pandemic:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html

To find a mental health professional with knowledge about diabetes:

professional.diabetes.org/MHP_listing

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More information may be found at diabetes.org/safeatschool