

## Family relationships and Type 1 diabetes: Information for parents

A diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes can affect the whole family, not just the young person. It is really important that everyone in the family feels listened to and heard. It is also important to reach out for help and support if you or anyone in your family needs it following a Type 1 diabetes diagnosis.

### Sibling rivalry

While you are getting to grips with your child's diabetes, it is natural that a lot of your time and attention will be pulled towards this. It's important to hold in mind that siblings can be affected by your child's diagnosis too. For example, it could be that they:

- Feel their sibling is getting special treatment and they are not sure why
- They are worrying that their sibling will get really poorly
- They may even be scared that they will develop diabetes themselves

Rivalry is common in most families, and a diagnosis of diabetes can cause upset between siblings. Regular hospital visits, attention to diet and everything else that goes with diabetes care may contribute to sibling rivalry or upset. Remember it is only natural in the early days of diagnosis for you to be anxious and focus a lot of attention on your child with diabetes. Talking to and explaining this to siblings can help them to understand that they have not done anything wrong, or are cared for any less.

- If you feel that it is appropriate and could be beneficial, try to get siblings involved with diabetes management, so that they feel a part of it
- During upsets, try to listen to all sides of the argument, validate the emotions they are experiencing, and be sensitive to claims that it is 'not fair'
- Be specific about what you expect from each of them
- Try to give each child the same amount of attention or arrange quality time together as family e.g. an enjoyable activity, film night
- Try not to put family life on hold, it is really important to try and keep things as normal as possible

### Advice for coping with sibling rivalry

It can be challenging to manage a child's diabetes if they live in two homes. Whatever your relationship with your ex-partner, it is important to work together to make sure your child's diabetes is managed well.

- Make sure you both learn what is involved in diabetes management from your paediatric diabetes team
- Work out how to keep the other updated in terms of any changes to your child's treatment or routine
- Discuss how you will involve any potential new partners
- Avoid making your child 'the messenger'

## Separated parents

## Lone parents

As a lone parent, you may find yourself having particular difficulties as all the pressures fall onto you alone. It is important to try and consider the following:

- Who you could call if you need help
- Who would be able to help you in an emergency
- Who can support you when you are struggling emotionally
- Who can look after your child should you need some time off (extended family, friends, babysitter etc.)
- Involving any siblings in diabetes care, being careful not to give them too much responsibility
- Trying to find time to look after yourself too!

When your child receives a diagnosis of diabetes, it is natural for grandparents, aunts and uncles etc. to be just as upset and worried as you are. They may try to be in constant contact with you, asking for updates or wondering how they can help, or they may leave you alone to concentrate on your child. Some advice for dealing with extended family:

- Keep one person up to date, and they can update everyone else. Group texts (like WhatsApp) and emails work well for this
- Ask for the help you need. Perhaps you would like someone to look after your other children, do some shopping for you, or walk the dog. People often want to help but they are not sure what to do
- Try to keep the future in mind. Your family will be living with diabetes from now on, so how can your extended family best support you? If your child is used to staying at relatives homes, it is important that the extended family learn about managing diabetes safely so that your child can still stay over. If family members are worried about looking after them, try to get them involved in the diabetes care. You could also consider bringing them to clinic appointments so they could learn more and ask questions
- Most importantly, just try to be honest with them, tell them how you are feeling, and ask them to help keep your child's life as normal as possible

## Extended family