

How to talk to school staff about your child's diabetes

How can parents of children newly diagnosed with diabetes work with their schools to help kids get the proper care during the school day?

As with any health care situation — peanut allergy, chronic condition, acute illness — open communication with the school is key, says Tom Karlya, vice president of the national Diabetes Research Institute Foundation, which raises money to find a cure for diabetes. Two of Karlya's three children, who went through the Patchogue-Medford school district, have diabetes.

People with the disease — Type 1 or Type 2 — don't make enough insulin to keep the body's blood sugar at the proper level. They must frequently test their blood sugar and add the hormone insulin through injections or pump.

Start by setting up a meeting with the principal and the school's health-care personnel, Karlya says. The school may have established procedures to help kids with diabetes, he says. "Most schools are absolutely wonderful," he adds.

You are entitled to establish a 504 plan for your child, which provides accommo-



datations for students with disabilities, Karlya says. At the same time, remind your child that the disease doesn't have to change his or her ability to participate in school activities, including sports and class trips, he says.

Karlya and wife, Jill, used to send a letter to their children's teachers explaining what diabetes is, emphasizing that it isn't contagious and inviting the teacher to contact them with any questions. "It's important that they're not afraid of it," Karlya says. November, incidentally, is Diabetes Awareness Month.

The Diabetes Research Foundation offers a guide to help parents interact with school personnel and child-care providers at nwsdy.li/diabetes. Karlya also recommends a Facebook group for parents of kids with diabetes called PEP Squad, which stands for Parents Empowering Parents, at nwsdy.li/fbdiabetes.

