

THE ROLE OF A CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST IN DIABETES

The UMass Memorial Children's Medical Center Pediatric Diabetes Clinic's team includes a certified child life specialist to help with your child's psychosocial and educational needs. These experts in child development support coping and adjustments by using therapeutic play, diagnostic education, age-appropriate preparation, and expressive activities to enhance understanding and assist with challenging experiences.

Diagnosis of diabetes may create feelings of anger, sadness and guilt. These are normal emotions, and you're not alone. Our certified child life specialist can help you and your child cope and adjust to life with diabetes.

WAYS A CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST CAN BENEFIT YOUR FAMILY

- Help your child prepare for and cope with medical procedures (e.g., blood work, finger sticks, IVs, insulin injections, taking medications)
 - Encourage them to express their feelings about their health care experience.
 - Reassure your child that it's okay to cry.
 - Praise them for what they're doing well.
- Help children manage medical treatments and schedules
- Help you understand your child's perspective of diabetes and its treatment
- Support siblings to understand a brother/sister's diabetes
- Explain diabetes in a way in which your child can understand
- Offer ideas about how to talk about diabetes with children's friends and classmates
- Engage children in meaningful play to reduce stress and help them feel more comfortable during office visits

CHILD LIFE SPECIALISTS SUGGEST AGE-APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES TO COMMUNICATE WITH AND REASSURE CHILDREN

INFANTS AND TODDLERS (NEWBORN TO 2 YEARS OLD)

- One of the most effective ways to prepare a young child for a procedure is for the parent to be prepared for the experience. When a parent is calm and at ease, the child senses this and responds in a similar way.
- Diversional items and activities during procedures are developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers. These include bubbles, cause-and-effect toys (such as pop-up toys), light-up toys, toys that play different sounds and songs, and peek-a-boo).
- Use a soft, comforting voice, soft music, a gentle touch, and comfortably position your child in your arms or lap during medical tests.
- Preparing for a procedure can include medical play by first demonstrating the procedure on their favorite stuffed animal or doll.

PRESCHOOLERS (2-5 YEARS OLD)

- Be truthful to this age group. They learn best by simple and concrete explanations of what's going to happen, so that they don't misinterpret or develop unrealistic fears of the procedure. This age group has a very active imagination and will make up their own explanations if not provided appropriate information.
- Use diversional activities during procedures, including blowing bubbles or a pinwheel, singing a song, or sharing a special experience.
- Use relaxation techniques, such as storytelling, discussing a favorite activity, listening to calming music, dimming the lights and comfortably positioning the child on your lap.
- Reassure them that they did nothing to cause their diabetes, and that painful procedures and hospitalizations are not punishments for bad behavior.
- Give your child appropriate choices whenever possible, but make it clear that they don't have a choice about insulin injections, IVs, blood draws and blood sugar finger sticks. An appropriate choice would be: "On which finger would you like to have your blood sugar finger stick done?"

SCHOOL AGE (5-12 YEARS OLD)

- Use diversional activities during procedures, including *I Spy* books, *Where's Waldo?*, pop-up books, glitter wands and music.
- Use relaxation techniques, including deep breathing, blowing bubbles or a pinwheel, and listening to a favorite story.
- Ask questions and encourage them to express feelings about the hospital and diagnosis. Answer all questions honestly, and help your child work through their feelings.
- Validate their feelings and reassure them that it's okay to feel mad or frustrated.

ADOLESCENTS (12 YEARS AND UP)

- Allow and encourage the teen's participation in their diabetes care and decisions.
- Encourage visits from friends when it's appropriate. Peers and friends are important at this age.
- Use relaxation techniques during procedures, including deep breathing, music, thinking about a favorite place.
- Explain the reason for procedures and describe exactly what will occur.
- Continue to support and encourage your adolescent. Speak with them often, and offer help, encouragement, and positive reinforcement. Although adolescents are becoming more independent, they still need the support and supervision of their parents or guardians.

Call 774-443-7183 to schedule an appointment with a diabetes child life specialist Monday to Friday, 8 am to 4:30 pm.