



Living with diabetes

Information for patients

Following a diagnosis of diabetes, most children and their parents go through a period of adjustment during which they can experience a wide range of emotions. This is very normal. Everyone experiences this process of adjustment in an individual way, and it can take varying amounts of time for different children/families.

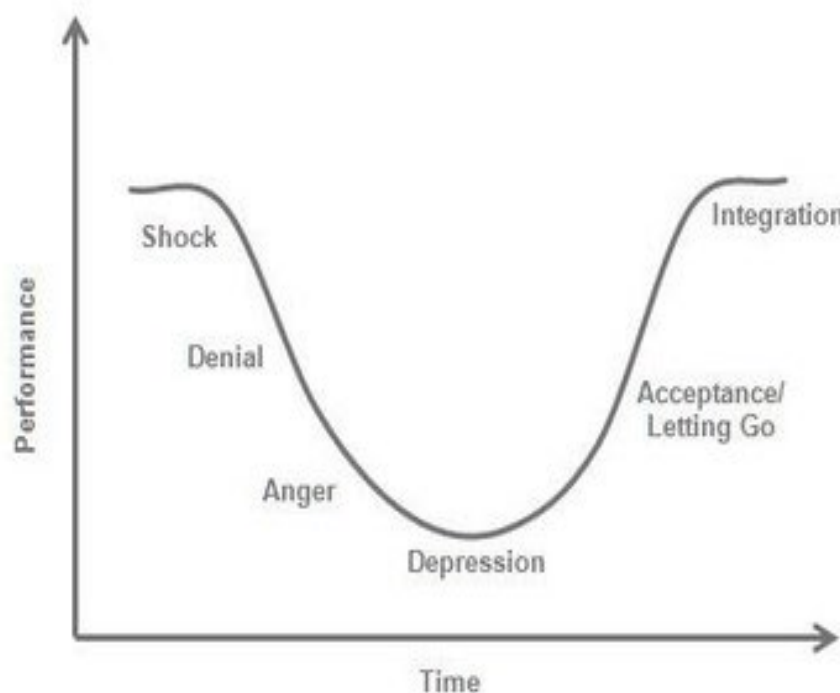
Early days

When your child is first given their diagnosis, they, you and your other children may feel shocked. Your child may have been unwell before their diagnosis and that could have been quite scary for them and you.

You may have feelings of guilt or anger if it took some time for the diagnosis to be made, or it might feel as though it came out of the blue.

As well as coping with being in hospital and coming to terms with the diagnosis itself, there is also a lot of practical information to take in around managing your child's diabetes (insulin, blood testing and diet). This can sometimes feel overwhelming.

Remember at this stage you are just starting to learn about how to manage diabetes and no-one expects you to get everything right! You can ask for help and support from the diabetes team.



Over the coming weeks and months

As the reality of living with and managing a chronic, lifelong condition sinks in you and your child may start to notice feeling more upset, angry, or worried. This is perfectly normal.

Over time most people find that these unpleasant feelings reduce, and they start to accept their diagnosis. They realise that diabetes doesn't change who they are and see that they can live their life alongside their condition.

Often at times of change (e.g. moving to high school) or times of higher than usual stress (exams, family or friendship difficulties) negative feelings about diabetes can reappear and be a focus for feeling upset, even if it's not the real problem. This is also very normal. The below suggestions may help your child cope with these difficult feelings.

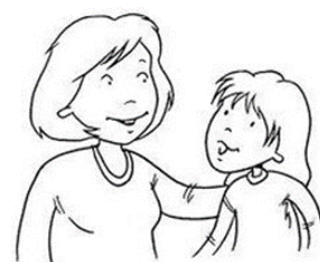
If you feel your child is continuing to experience high levels of worry or upset that are stopping them from getting on with their life, please get in touch with a member of the diabetes team to seek some advice or support.



What can help?

Although we have described that "adjustment" is a process that takes time and that everyone needs to go through, there are things you can do to help:

- Try to talk openly with your child about their feelings about diabetes. You can also encourage them to talk to their friends if they would feel able to do this.
- It can be helpful to let your child know it's OK to feel upset or annoyed. You can model this for them by talking about how you cope with these normal feelings. It is tempting to try to protect family members from feeling upset but you can give them permission to cry and express upset or angry feelings in a safe place.
- Recognise that upsets might not always be about the thing that triggered them! Your child may appear more fed up with their diabetes when they are also feeling upset or worried about something at school or a fall out with friends.
- Try to keep as many normal routines as possible e.g. bedtimes, mealtimes, and activities after school. This can help children feel safe and secure and gives them places where diabetes is the not the centre of attention.
- It is also helpful to keep your child's diabetes management routine consistent. It is common for children to refuse to cooperate with their treatment at times. It can be difficult to remain firm when your child is upset and when you have seen them being unwell.



However, maintaining the diabetes routine from the very start will show your child that it is not negotiable and can actually help them feel secure (as well as reduce arguments about injections/testing etc).

- Make sure you provide lots of praise and encouragement to reinforce your child's efforts. If your child's control is not great, rather than blame your child or yourself (which can result in feelings of guilt and shame), instead focus on solving the problem and working together to make an improvement.
- Involve your child in decisions about their diabetes care and self-management as soon as they are emotionally ready. Many parents initially feel very protective and want to shield their child from their diabetes management, but it is important to try and help support their independence in order for them to increase their self-esteem.
- Seek support from voluntary organisations, parent groups, forums, or other parents of children with diabetes. It can be helpful to know you are not alone in the way you or your child is feeling.



Remember there is no right or wrong way to cope. You need to find what suits and helps you and your child in your unique situation.

The diabetes team are always happy to speak to you if you have any questions or would like advice.