



Taking Diabetes Back to School

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Kids often say things such as, “I never get to do <insert something that they probably actually get to do all the time>” and may even ask the adults in their life why they are not allowed to do certain things. But if your child has diabetes, and they are being told “no” by someone at school to treating a blood sugar, this is a huge problem. Luckily, there are protections in place in the U.S. to keep children with diabetes safe in schools.

[The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#) is a law that helps prevent people with disabilities from being discriminated against. This includes in the workplace for adults, and in schools with public funding for children. Before the ADA law in 1990, there was first a law passed in 1973 called the Rehabilitation Act. This law created what is known as a 504 plan, which was designed to make sure children with disabilities could participate in the school’s activities and safely care for their condition.¹

The 1990 ADA law expanded upon the first protections from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, including allowing for broader definitions for disability.² The laws do not specifically list diagnoses that would be considered a disability, but defines disability as a condition that limits one or more major life activities.³ Based on this definition, type 1 diabetes certainly qualifies as a disability due to its ability to interrupt many of life’s normal activities.

Most schools in the U.S. have likely had at least one student with T1D and have some experience in making accommodations. If your child prefers to go to the nurse’s office to do a fingerstick or injection, they should be allowed to do so. And if they prefer to stay in the classroom, that also should be allowed. There are many different scenarios, and working with your healthcare team to determine what is best for your child is highly encouraged.

Here are some common items that families with kids with diabetes consider for their 504 plans:

1. Permission to use the bathroom and drink water whenever needed
2. Permission to eat food if blood glucose level is low or dropping – at school, on the bus, on field trips, during an exam, anytime! (Same goes for #1)
3. Ability to retake an exam if blood glucose level is out of range to the point that it negatively affects the child’s ability to perform on the exam.
4. Assurance that the child will not be penalized for time off or later arrivals due to diabetes care such as medical appointments, illness, or other related items.
5. Listed items that the parent will be responsible for providing to the school.
6. Circumstances that the parent wants to be notified related to the child’s diabetes.
7. Diabetes tasks that the child may require assistance with, depending on their age and development.

Preparing your child for what they will need to do for their diabetes care at school is very beneficial, and this will vary based on their developmental stage and how long they have had diabetes. Having an open dialogue with the teachers, nurses, and administrative staff (maybe even lunch crew), can also be helpful, especially when your kiddo is earlier in their diabetes self-management journey.

Most often, schools are supportive and want to help your child succeed. However, if you experience challenges with your school, you'll need to find resources to help ensure your child's safety and success in school. CWD has a [sample 504 plan](#) online, that can be used as a template in designing your child's 504 plan. The American Diabetes Association has a [website](#) with more details on 504 plans and keeping kids safe at school.

CWD has a [recorded presentation](#) from the American Diabetes Association's Safe at School Initiative's Director, Crystal Woodward and the American Diabetes Association's Safe at School Working Group co-chair, Anastasia Albanese-O'Neill, about keeping children with diabetes safe at school during the COVID-19 era. We also continue to have sessions at [Friends for Life conferences](#) where families can learn more, ask questions, and discuss their situations with experts to help resolve any challenges.

References:

1. [Laws Protecting People with Diabetes](#)
<https://childrenwithdiabetes.com/diabetes-and-school/laws-protecting-people-with-diabetes/>
2. [Protecting Students With Disabilities](#)
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>
3. [An Overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
<https://adata.org/factsheet/ADA-overview>

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