BY JUDI ZIELKE, RN, CDE

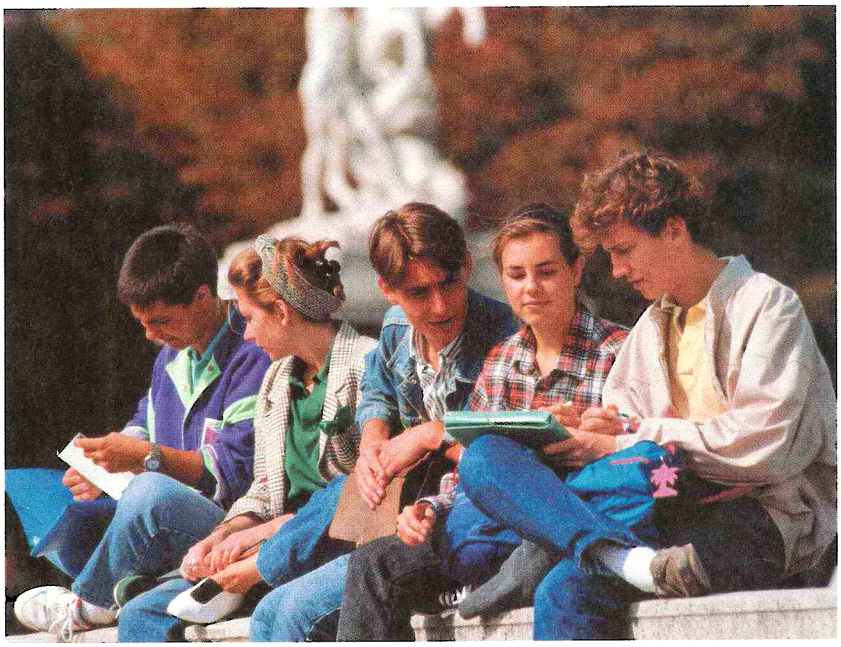
[just for teens]

Safe At School

Our ninth grade class recently went on a field trip to a local museum. We spent most of the afternoon walking, including many flights of stairs and a long walk through the parking lot. When I was on the bus returning to school, I could feel a low blood sugar episode coming on; I got shaky and had cold sweats. When I pulled a package of cheese and crackers out of my backpack to treat my low, the bus driver started to yell at me and told me there was no eating on the bus. I tried to explain what was happening, and I even had my meter out, checking my blood sugar, but he was so mad at me. Luckily I was able to eat the crackers quickly before he made me stop.

When we returned to school, I felt fine. However, I was called to the principal's office because the bus driver had reported me for breaking the rule of no food or drink on the bus. The principal assigned me to Saturday detention.

My mom and dad are so angry, they are thinking about transferring me to another school. But I don't want to leave all my friends. I feel stuck in the middle of a problem that shouldn't even be a problem.



GERARD LOUCEL/GETTY IMAGES

Judi Zielke, RN, CDE, responds: You are so right about this event not needing to be a problem, but unfortunately, it was for you. These types of situations are not uncommon, but luckily they are happening less often because people are becoming more aware of what is needed to manage diabetes safely in the school setting, or anywhere in your "real world." You need to know that it is *legally* your right to check your blood glucose or treat a low blood glucose episode when at school or participating at school events.

The first step in making sure this doesn't happen again is to arrange for a meeting with your parents, principal, school nurse, and other adults that you routinely interact with at school. The advocacy department of the American Diabetes Association (ADA) suggests that you "educate, negotiate, litigate, and legislate—in that order." Use this meeting time to explain what *you* need to safely manage your diabetes during the school day

Besides checking your blood glucose and treating low blood glucose, you will want to mention other issues, such as that at times you may need to use the bathroom or drinking fountain more frequently, should not be excluded from sports, should have time to finish your meals, and should not be left alone when feeling ill with either high *or* low blood glucose. You also want to make arrangements to have trained school personnel available to help you if you have very high or very low blood glucose and need assistance. Often, school officials just don't understand diabetes and are not intentionally discriminating.

This is a good opportunity to develop a school plan to keep on file. It is called an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or a Section 504 plan. There are laws that require all public schools and most private schools to accommodate the special needs of its students. When setting up your plan, you should include information from your doctor or health care team. Be reasonable in your requests, but stand firm if you feel your needs are not being accommodated.

If after your meeting you still feel your needs are not being recognized, you may need to take stronger action, including filing a complaint. Contact the ADA at 1-800-342-2383 The Association's legal advocate can help your family work through the situation and educate you about available resources.

Transferring to another school will not solve the issue. You may face these same problems in the new school. It is better to solve the problem now, it will allow you to continue your education at your school of choice.

ADA has launched a "Safe at School" campaign to ensure that every student with diabetes is able to effectively manage his or her diabetes at school and during school-related activities. You have the support of many people, you now need to get the word out at your school so that the school staff will understand better how to help you.

(For more on this topic, read "Safe At School," page 44, in the May issue of Diabetes Forecast.*)*

write to just for teens

Write to Just For Teens, *Diabetes Forecast*, 1701 N. Beauregard St., Alexandria, VA 22311. Please understand that it takes several months for questions to appear in this column, so you should also talk to a parent, doctor, or diabetes educator.

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