

Field Trip Success

Plan ahead to make sure your child's school outing is a safe one | By Lindsey Wahowiak



For families of kids with diabetes, getting ready for a field trip is more than just signing a permission slip and packing a sack lunch. But with a little planning and cooperation, your child can be off to the museum, the zoo, or the science center, confident that he or she will receive proper diabetes care.

Crystal Jackson, director of the American Diabetes Association's Safe at School® campaign, says it is important to address field trips in your child's Section 504 plan. The ADA recommends that 504 plans be written for students with diabetes, who are covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The law ensures your child won't face discrimination by his

or her school based on disability, including diabetes. The plan covers who at school can help your child care for his or her diabetes, how and where your child will do blood glucose checks and take insulin or other medication, and how the field trip will be handled. Most families of children with diabetes set up a 504 plan with their school at the beginning of the year or when changes occur, based on a Diabetes Medical Management Plan (a document created by your child's provider that outlines the care needed at school). Private schools that are not run by religious entities are required to provide care under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Parents should work with the school to write an accommodation plan.

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Even though your child is away from the school during a field trip, a 504 plan should cover all school-sponsored activities, says Jackson. “It’s the school’s obligation to provide care on field trips,” she says, “the same level of care as outlined in the Diabetes Medical Management Plan.” To make the transition from classroom to field trip a smooth one, do some planning now.

● **Make sure field trips are outlined in the 504 plan.** It’s never too late to set up a 504 plan, but the beginning of the school year or right after diagnosis is the best time to ensure your child gets appropriate care and has the same access to school activities as classmates. Make sure your child’s school knows what he or she needs, says Anastasia Albanese-O’Neill, NP, CDE, of Gainesville, Fla. Her daughter, Cassidy O’Neill, 13, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at 16 months old, so the family has experience with field trips. “My approach has always been to educate first,” says Albanese-O’Neill. Once people at school understand the needs and rights of a child with diabetes, she says, they’re usually on board to help however they can.

● **Once you know about a field trip, touch base with the school nurse and teachers.** It’s the school’s responsibility to make sure your child’s meter and strips, glucose or carbohydrate for treating lows, and medication and supplies are on hand for a field trip. But a reminder is always a good idea, says Jackson. Looking at field trip planning as a team effort can be especially helpful, says Susan Hjelsand, manager of programs, communication, and media for the ADA’s Wisconsin office. Her daughter, Caitlin “Caitie” Hjelsand, 14, has had type 1

diabetes for almost her whole life, and has gone on many field trips safely. “Teamwork is the most important thing,” Hjelsand says. “I’ve just found, in every situation, if we look at it to be the best possible situation for Caitie to learn and be safe, we usually come up with a collaborative effort.” This could be talking about which school staff person trained in diabetes care will attend the field trip, or who should be trained to recognize and treat low blood glucose and in other diabetes care skills if that person can’t attend, says Jackson.

● **Talk to your child about his or her responsibilities.** What does your child feel comfortable doing on his or her own? That’s up to each child—and it can change from time to time, says Hjelsand. It does for her daughter. “She’s the type of kid who really gets into what they’re learning, especially if it’s a hands-on experience,” Hjelsand says. “She has told me on occasion, ‘I’d prefer to have stronger backup on this trip, because I’m afraid I’ll forget to test,’ and others where she’s said, ‘I’ve got it Mom—I’m fine.’” In those cases, the staff supervisor takes a backseat and just watches to make sure Caitie doesn’t forget to check her blood glucose or take her insulin.

● **Don’t feel pressured to attend.** Because it’s the school’s responsibility to provide your child’s care, you are not required to be a chaperone—a welcome relief for some busy parents. If you want to attend, that’s great, too, and might provide you some comfort, especially when your child is very young or first diagnosed with diabetes. But if you and the school have a good plan in place before the trip, you’ll have peace of mind, says Albanese-O’Neill. “Once you get through the first one when your child goes on her own, it really gets easier because people realize that it can be done,” she says. “If people can climb Mount Everest with diabetes, a school field trip should not be impossible.”

IT’S THE SCHOOL’S
responsibility to make sure your child’s supplies, snacks, and equipment for managing diabetes are on hand for a field trip.

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information on 504 plans, field trips, and more. diabetes.org/safeatschool