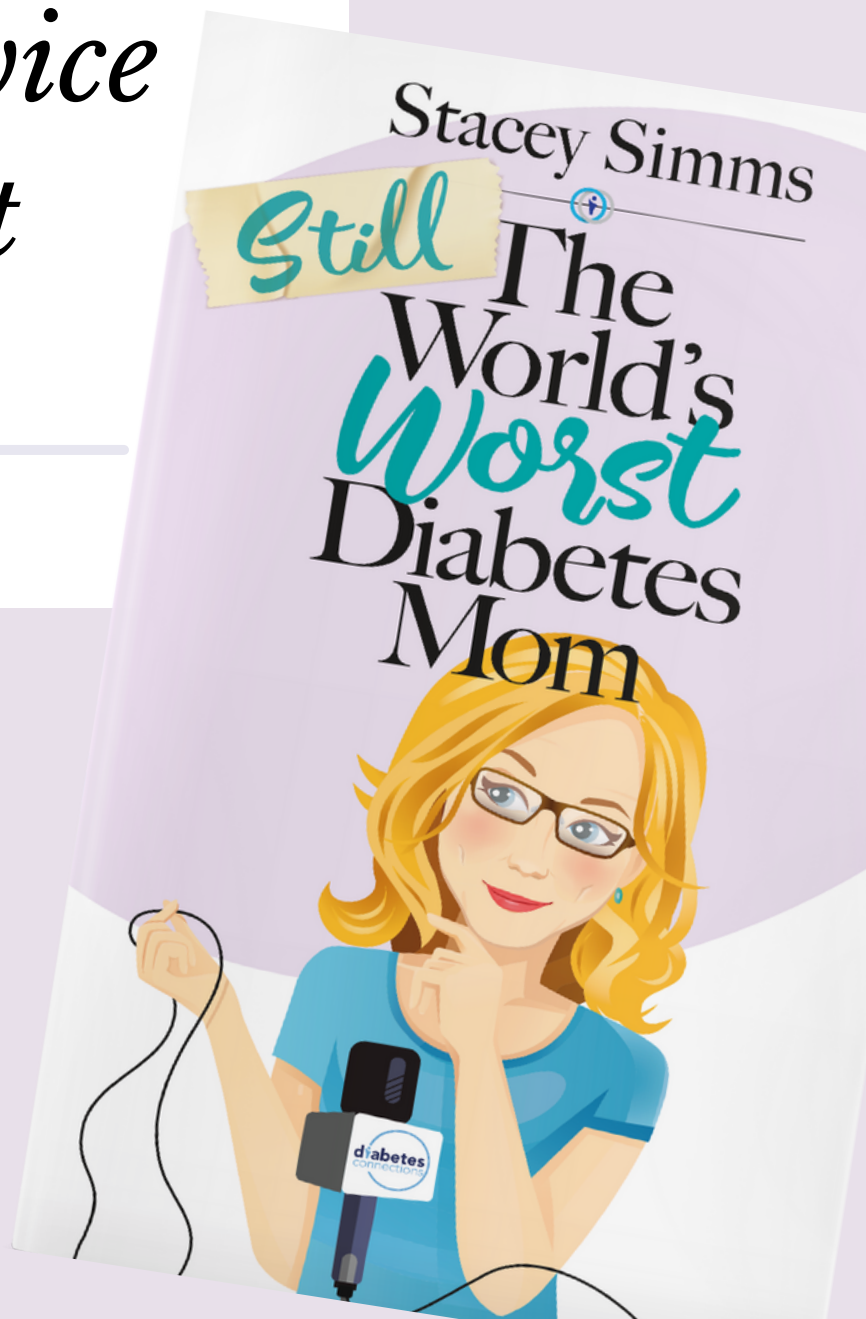


Back to School with Diabetes

*The best advice
I ever got*





HELLO!

I'm Stacey Simms and my journey with type 1 diabetes began almost 17 years ago when my son was diagnosed just before his second birthday. I know how much there is to learn and I'm here to help families navigating the uncertainty. I want you to know you are not alone!

As a broadcaster with more than 20 years in local TV and radio, I share information and inspiration about type 1 on my podcast, [Diabetes Connections](#). I speak with people from all walks of life: health care providers, tech developers, dietitians, athletes, artists and more! I also do an additional news round-up every other week. It's less than ten minutes that will get you caught up on what's making headlines in the diabetes community.

I know that this time of year can be stressful for you and your child with diabetes. Between 504 plans, meetings, and organizing supplies, you may have forgotten an important part of planning: teaching your child to advocate for themselves.

I'm excited to share with you some advice that helped my son speak up about having T1D. Here's to a great start to the school year!

StaceySimms

The World's Worst Diabetes Mom

The best advice I ever got for going back to school with diabetes is: **teach your child to speak up and ask for help when needed.**

Going back to school after a diabetes diagnosis is the beginning of lifelong advocacy and education. But what does that mean in practice? After all, asking for help as a kindergartner and advocating as a high school student are two completely different things.

We've been there. My son was diagnosed before he was two and is now a freshman in college. My mom-level, "been-there" advice can help you and your child set the foundation no matter what age or stage of diabetes.

Here are five suggestions to get you started:

1. **Practice asking for help.** Many children are shy and don't want to call any attention to themselves. Roleplay a little about raising a hand and asking for help. It may seem silly, but experiencing how it feels and sounds to say out loud, "my pump site is leaking," or "I feel low" may give your child the confidence to do it for real if needed. You also find out a lot about what your child is thinking during these exercises, which can lead to some great conversations.

With older kids, you might ask them to think through what they might say without roleplaying an entire conversation. And with teenagers, it can be a good exercise in how to advocate while still being polite.

2. Assure them that you have their back. We always told my son he couldn't get into "diabetes trouble" at school. That meant he should take care of urgent diabetes needs, even if the teacher told him no. Your parenting style may be different from ours, but I believe children need to know their parents will stand up for them when it comes to T1D. It may surprise you that a lot of kids don't assume this. And if yours are rule-followers like mine were, it may horrify them to think about eating on the bus to treat a low when the driver's rule is "no snacks," or leaving to see the nurse if the teacher has said no.

Talk out when this might happen (with a substitute teacher for example) and what your child could do. This obviously does not apply to breaking regular rules at school. I'm not coming to his rescue if he's leaving class to stroll the hallways or if he's playing games on his phone during a quiz.

3. Remind them not everyone knows diabetes as well as we do. After a few months or years of living with T1D, many things come very naturally to our kids and it can take them by surprise that not everyone understands T1D management. We explained that this ignorance isn't "bad" or "wrong." After all, none of us knows everything about what everyone else is going through.

It does mean your child may have to advocate and explain over and over again that yes, he can eat that birthday cupcake you brought to school or that she really does that that phone, it controls her insulin pump. Acknowledge any frustration and commend them for staying patient. We can try to lighten this load as much as possible, but it's an unavoidable part of T1D.

4. **Discuss a T1D goal every school year.** What does your child want to accomplish with diabetes that year? It could be a big move toward independence, something small, or even something silly. In first grade, my son wanted to buy lunch at school so he could eat cafeteria food. In 5th grade he wanted to dose insulin for lunch without anyone looking over his shoulder. As a junior in high school, he asked me to stop texting him for anything but urgent low alerts. Your kids may roll their eyes at this as this discussion as they get older, but I promise they appreciate being heard! If their goal is something you aren't ready or willing to grant, it may lead to a conversation about compromise. Where can you meet in the middle?

5. **Lead with empathy.** Remember the compromise in that last tip? That applies to us parents as well. We all have our non-negotiables, but as your child gets older, I'd encourage you to stay flexible. Diabetes independence doesn't happen all at once; be willing to listen and to maybe change your expectations as your child grows older. Letting go a little bit each year can really help their eventual diabetes independence. Mistakes will always happen, at school and at home.

My son certainly doesn't "do diabetes" like I did when he was small. As a college freshman, he's a lot more relaxed than I was, but he's still responsible. Being empathetic toward our children and not expecting perfection is a more powerful tool than many of us realize.

One more thing!

I don't want to end back-to-school advice without mentioning 504 plans, Diabetes Medical Management Plans or students' rights.

For more information on those issues, please visit:

American Diabetes Association Safe at School resources:

<https://diabetes.org/tools-support/know-your-rights/safe-at-school-state-laws/training-resources-school-staff>

Your child's rights state by state:

<https://diabetes.org/tools-support/know-your-rights/safe-at-school-state-laws>

JDRF School Advisory Toolkit for Families:

https://www.jdrf.org/wp-content/docs/JDRF_School_Advisory_Toolkit.pdf



Did this help? Let me know!

Drop me a line at stacey@diabetes-connections.com.

ABOUT STACEY

Stacey Simms serves the diabetes community with the award-winning news and information show, Diabetes Connections. Think NPR's "Fresh Air" but for people who use insulin. After her son was diagnosed with type 1 in 2006, one month before he turned two, Stacey started blogging about her family's experience. She launched the podcast in 2015 and passed two million downloads in 2023. Stacey's books "The World's Worst Diabetes Mom" and "Still the World's Worst Diabetes Mom" are memoirs of her parenting philosophy of "not perfect, but safe and happy." She also hosts Diabetes Connections presents: Moms' Night Out events in different cities. Stacey was named to Diabetes Forecast Magazine's "12 People to Know" and honored as one of the Forty under 40 by the Charlotte Business Journal. She lives near Charlotte, NC with her husband, two children and Freckles the dog.

LET'S CONNECT!



Share this guide with a friend!