

Dealing with diabetes: day to day

Levels: 1, 2 and 3

Subject: Birthdays

TEACHER

STUDENTS

1/2



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In many schools, it has become quite popular for children to hand out candy surprises on their birthday.

There can be no denying it's great to see that special look on the face of the birthday girl, or boy, as they hand out gifts to everyone in class. And, yet, I can't help but feel that, what must, originally, have started out as something positive has, now, lost its charm and has, instead, become a source of conflict and, from an educational standpoint, a bad example.

Handing out candy on a birthday has developed an aggressive competitive edge to it; today, the number one objective is to outdo all preceding birthday handouts - both in quantity and/or in quality! Teachers and, on occasion, entire schools are being forced to intervene; some, try to discourage students, either by banning or by limiting what they're allowed to bring to class, on birthdays.

For children who suffer from diabetes, there's an added problem: most of the birthday snacks their school friends hand out, in class, are either sugar-based or contain high levels of carbohydrates. Children with diabetes will be forced to choose between refusing what their friends offer them and working out exactly how much added insulin they should inject; a complex calculation, even for expert diabetologists!

It's a situation that puts kids with diabetes in an awkward position. Not only does it create a clear distinction between them and their peers; it, also, fuels a feeling of inadequacy.

One idea might be for teaching staff to foster schoolwide awareness of the issue, thus paving the way for a common, more united approach in dealing with this situation.

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Just as it would make life a lot easier for students with diabetes, in class - if there were rules regarding what foodstuffs may be handed out - it would surely benefit all students, wanting to celebrate their birthday, if everyone agreed to bring the same type of gift.

It's the kind of subject that could be brought up at the start-of-year parents meeting, the outcome to which would, then, better allow students with diabetes to program and prepare for birthday celebrations and other similar occasions.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Two different texts are provided, for student classwork:

- One, talks about classroom birthday celebrations, and focuses on how **competitive** they've become.
- The other is an exercise in **empathy**, for a fellow student, suffering from diabetes.