

Building Resilience in Youth with Diabetes using Social Support Discussions

A summary of International DECA workshop 2020

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Slam Dunk for Diabetes Camp

Resilience theory states that “Protective processes and behaviors buffer the impact of adversity risk factors on an individual child’s development and functioning”.

Despite the challenges of living with diabetes many youth have good psychosocial and health outcomes.¹ Psychologists have identified that consistent assets such as intelligence, humor, and support can help to overcome adverse risk factors as low chronic disease, low SES, dysfunctional family life, and drugs.² The goal in developing resilience in youth with diabetes is to promote protective skills and behaviors that contribute to optimal health such as self-management skills, high QOL, and glycemic control.

A measure of resilience behaviors in youth, the Diabetes Strength and Resilience (DSTAR) tool developed and validated at Baylor, assesses strengths and strategies associated with overcoming challenges.³ These strengths can be categorized into two domains:

1. Confidence in one’s own abilities
2. Access to help from close others

The DSTAR measure is increasingly used at diabetes camps, in research, and in clinical situations throughout the U.S. We have used the DSTAR in Slam Dunk Diabetes camps and found that much like that reported in the literature, youth scored fairly high in self-confidence measures.³ In contrast, youth scored lowest in seeking help from others--in particular friends. Indeed, the lowest score 3.09 out of 5, was for “If I need help taking care of my diabetes I can count on my friends”. This is alarming given that most youth met national guidelines of exercising more than 1 hour daily but one in three have 1-2 episodes of hypoglycemia weekly. Every three months one in three youth have a severe hypoglycemia event requiring assistance from others.⁴

This failure to feel you can call on friends if needed is important given that young people spend more time away from their parents and peers become increasingly important in the teen years. The ability to advocate for oneself and seek support from peers can be both emotionally and physically lifesaving. Helping children learn self-advocacy and develop social support networks is crucial to optimal long-term health.⁵

We conducted a workshop with international camp leaders (DECA) in February 2020 and shared this data along with results from a follow up parent survey to identify topics parents felt was

very important for their youth to share with friends.⁶ Of the seven topics identified by parents, the 3 most important areas are:

1. Blood glucose testing importance, meaning and use (100%)
2. Hypoglycemia recognition and treatment (95%)
3. Importance and role of insulin in child's wellbeing (83%)

Camp leaders overwhelmingly agreed with addressing resilience and the value of sharing personal needs to obtain the social support necessary. Many are using DSTAR, or plan to as they identified the unique opportunity camps offer. Together they identified a need for:

- Scenario based discussions/education curricula for youth to promote sharing and seeking social support as currently none exists. Scenarios could be used for:
 - Live camp discussions
 - U-tube video scenarios for education
- Education that recognizes diversity in age, gender, cultural ethnicity and addresses individuality of each person.
- Ways to maintain interaction/support/education with kids year-round to sustain learning and behaviors.
 - Identified they work closely with school nurses who want to address the same issues
 - In discussions with National Association of School Nurses (NASN) they identify the need for engaging brief education for classmates of children with diabetes.

Given the unique opportunities available for discussion in camp, many ideas were generated. Unfortunately, with the current COVID-19 situation, several camps will likely not be conducted this year. Because examples of ingenuity from camp staff were observed in every session during the DECA meeting, new and unique learning situations will most likely be created and hopefully shared over the coming months. There is no doubt that the diabetes camp community will continue to grow and thrive.

References

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