



# How to talk to my friends about my health concerns

Many kids wonder how to tell their friends about their kidney disease. It is helpful to develop a basic script of how you want to respond to questions from peers. Also, a brief and simple statement about what kidneys do in the body can be helpful. Finally, it is helpful to think of a way to redirect or change the conversation topic when you feel like you've shared as much as you are comfortable with (for example, "My kidneys need treatment, so I had to go see the doctor. What fun stuff did you do yesterday?"). You can always talk with your psychosocial team to help practice these conversations!

## **SCHOOL AGE: 5-10 YEAR OLDS**

- Ask parent/caregiver/provider to help with creating a script you feel comfortable sharing with friends.
- Practice script with family members or stuffed toys as an audience.
- You can choose if you or your caregiver provides explanation to friends. Caregiver can also be present during conversation for support.
- Use simple language and words that your friends will understand too.
- Use images/visuals, if you prefer.
- Only share what you are comfortable discussing (e.g., what you do take care of yourself).

## **PRETEEN: 11-12 YEAR OLDS**

- Share information using what you know.
- Only share what you are comfortable discussing.
- Try and use language and words that your friends will understand too! If you use medical words that your friends do not know, they may not understand.
- Ask trusted adults if you need help discussing this topic; maybe they can help you.
- Many kids these ages understand disease by symptoms observable with the five senses, try and explain this way if comfortable (e.g., "Because of my kidneys, if I drink too much, my face can get swollen.").

## **TEEN: 13-17 YEAR OLDS**

- Share what you are comfortable sharing.
- Use words your friends will understand (remember you didn't know what all of the medical terms meant in the beginning either!).
- Feel free to start out with a simple statement to summarize your medical condition and go from there (e.g., "My kidneys aren't working so I have to get a treatment that does what my kidneys can't do. My kidneys didn't work so I had to get a kidney transplant.").
- If you're comfortable, invite questions and correct your friends if they have any misperceptions (e.g., "Yes, I'm feeling fine! No, of course you can't get this from me!").

## **YOUNG ADULT: 18-26 YEAR OLDS**

- Share what feels comfortable.
- Again, use language your friends will understand (leave the medical jargon out of it!).
- A simple summary statement about your medical condition can be a good response to a friend's question or an intro to the topic for a conversation (e.g., "My kidneys don't work to filter my blood so I have to go to dialysis, which is a treatment that filters my blood.").
- You can answer questions and correct any misperceptions, if comfortable.
- Friends may wonder how this can impact your relationship. (e.g., "Yeah, I have dialysis during these times, but you can still text or call and I'll answer...and it'll give me something to do!").

