Supporting Children, Adolescents, and Parents in the Daily Management of Food Allergies
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Today’s Presenter
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Today’s Objectives and Goal
• The goal of this webinar is to give families a preliminary set of strategies that will help them cope with daily stress
• Objectives
  • Discuss common emotional reactions to food allergy
  • Use a developmental framework to address common challenges of food allergy management among
    • Young Children
    • Older children
    • Adolescents

Who are pediatric psychologists?
• Work with children and families in order to:
  • Address the psychological aspects of illness and injury
  • Promote healthy behavior in children and families
• Use a developmental framework
• Work with multidisciplinary teams
• Clinical work
• Research
• Advocate for public policy

My Goal
Help families incorporate food allergies into their life without making food allergies become their ENTIRE life
Emotional reactions to food allergy

- Frustration
- Stressed
- Worry
- Anger
- Sad
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Uncertainty

These are normal reactions!

Young Children: David

- David is a 4-year-old boy who was diagnosed with peanut, tree nut, and shellfish allergies when he was an infant. He will start school in the fall and mom will return to working full time.
  - Mom has many worries about “letting go” including:
    - The teacher won’t know if David is having an allergic reaction or take it seriously
    - David will be left out of class events
  - Mom also is concerned about the impact of food allergy on David’s older sisters

What To Do?

- Mom has many worries related to school
  - Use problem solving techniques (IDEAL) to anticipate and address situations early
    - Identify the problem
    - Define each aspect of the problem
    - Explore all possible solutions - even ones you don’t think will work!
    - Act on the solution
    - Look back and reflect on the results - try another solution if needed

Older Children: Michelle

- Michelle is a 10-year-old girl with peanut and milk allergies. She was diagnosed when she was 1 and recently had a reaction in a restaurant.
  - Michelle thinks about her allergy all the time, even when not in food-related situations
  - Michelle’s mom thinks she may be bullied at school about her food allergies because she is hesitant to go to school and wants to eat lunch with the nurse

What To Do?

- Mom is concerned that food allergies will negatively impact David’s siblings
  - Explain food allergies to David’s siblings in a developmentally appropriate way
  - Limit siblings’ responsibility for food allergy management
  - Ask about siblings’ questions and fears
  - Consider having the same foods for everyone at dinner, if that works for your family
  - Treat children individually
  - Let siblings be siblings

- Mom has many worries related to school
  - Acknowledge that sometimes you can’t change the situation, but you CAN change how you react to it
  - Every situation has automatic thoughts, behaviors, and consequences (ABC model)
    - Example of negative thinking
      - “I can’t control my child’s food allergies.”
    - Example of positive thinking
      - “I know how to explain food allergies to David’s teacher. I made all the preparations he needs. I’m a good parent and food allergy manager!”
What To Do?

Michelle worries about her food allergies all the time.
- Acknowledge Michelle’s worries in a supportive, nonjudgmental way
- Talk openly about her worries and try to understand how they are affecting everyday life
- Have Michelle write down her worries
  - Use relaxation techniques and thought challenging to manage hypothetical worries
- Help Michelle learn the difference between anxiety symptoms and allergic reaction symptoms
- Encourage positive self-statements
- Don’t belittle worries, but also don’t let them dictate activities

Michelle’s Follow Up

Michelle’s most recent blood work indicated that she may no longer be allergic to milk. Her allergist and her parents want to schedule a food challenge.
- Michelle’s mom is nervous about a food challenge and isn’t sure if she wants to schedule the appointment
- Michelle is also scared of a food challenge and thinks she will have an allergic reaction and require an epinephrine injection

What To Do?

Michelle’s mom thinks she may be bullied for her food allergies at school.
- Ask how Michelle’s day is going using open-ended questions
- Talk to another adult about the situation, get Michelle’s teacher and administrators involved, find out the school’s bullying policy
- Encourage Michelle to avoid the bully and use a buddy system, control her anger/frustration, ignore/walk away, and tell an adult/talk about it
- Sign up Michelle for activities outside of school to promote positive social interactions and self-esteem

Adolescence: Jessie

Jessie is a 15-year-old girl with milk and egg allergies. She has not had an allergic reaction in 5 years.
- Jessie and her parents get in frequent disagreements about reading food labels and carrying epinephrine autoinjectors. Her parents worry that she will have an allergic reaction while she is on her own, but want her to have a normal teen life
- Jessie has been in a relationship for 2 months and doesn’t want to tell her boyfriend about her food allergies

What To Do?

Michelle is fearful of food challenges
- Talk with Michelle about the purpose of the food challenge in developmentally appropriate terms
- Acknowledge that a food challenge can be scary
- Give Michelle options
  - How to ingest the milk—should Michelle drink it or will another dairy product work, like cheese or yogurt?
  - Bring comforting/distracting items
- Practice and use relaxation strategies
What To Do?

- Jessie and her parents frequently argue about food allergy management
  - Communicate that you are listening and rephrase Jessie’s statements
  - Avoid unnecessary conflict
  - Choose words carefully
  - Choose the time carefully
  - Negotiate, accommodate, and compromise
  - Let go of the past
  - Judiciously assert parental authority

What To Do?

- Jessie doesn’t want to tell her boyfriend about her food allergies
  - Talk openly with Jessie about her concerns about telling her boyfriend
  - Address her concerns
  - Encourage Jessie to tell him in a natural way - i.e., when they are at a restaurant and Jessie needs to check an ingredient, when at his house for pizza, etc.
  - Allow Jessie private time during her next allergy appointment when she ask her allergist about kissing

Conclusions and Resources

- There are strategies you can use to help manage the emotional concerns of food allergy
- Signs you should contact a psychologist
  - Major changes in mood, behavior, school/social functioning, sleep patterns, or appetite
- Remember that you have other resources as well!
  - FARE
  - Support groups
  - Allergists

Discussion

THANK YOU!