

New psychotherapy service for young people with Type 1

You can now ask Diabetes Ireland to refer your child for 'talk therapy', writes **Deborah Condon**

Being diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at any age can be overwhelming, but it can be particularly difficult for children and teenagers, who are already dealing with the pressures of growing up.

Diabetes Ireland recently joined up with a new psychotherapist to work specifically with young people with diabetes and their families. Cristina Daena Magana Avila works in Dun Laoghaire in Co Dublin and her aim is to help young people who may be struggling with their diagnosis.

Ms Avila already held a degree in psychology before deciding to embark on a master's degree in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in Trinity College Dublin. She now specialises in child and adolescent psychotherapy, which she explains is a "talking therapy", aimed at helping people with mental or emotional problems.

People can self-refer to Ms Avila or they can receive a referral through Diabetes Ireland. Sessions last for 50 minutes.

"I always meet with the parents first to get information from them. I ask

them about things such as the child's history and any difficulties they may be having. I get them to fill out any relevant forms and then I give them an idea of how I work. If they are happy to go ahead, then I arrange to meet the young person," she explains.

The first meeting with the young person is key because it allows Ms Avila to assess whether they are willing to engage with psychotherapy and whether it will benefit them.

She then goes back to the parents and makes a recommendation on whether to proceed, and if so, how best to do this.

"We usually follow one of three paths. The first is that psychotherapy is recommended for the child; the second is that specific work by the parents may be enough; and the third is that the family may actually need a different service altogether," she notes.

If psychotherapy is recommended, the child will attend the sessions on their own, irrespective of age, however Ms Avila will provide regular reviews with the parents.

"It is a talking therapy, however obviously if the child is very young, I can include a bit of play therapy too. I see young people aged between three and 20 years who are dealing with all kinds of issues, including anxiety and depression," she says.

She notes that while every case is different, young people with diabetes will likely need at least three sessions.

"Problems I would expect to see include

teenage issues. For example, a teenager may use their diabetes treatment as a way to rebel, such as by not taking their meds. This, of course, will make their parents extremely anxious.

"Often, these young people are simply experiencing the normal struggles of adolescence, but with the additional complication of diabetes. Usually, underneath it all, there is some kind of struggle with relationships," she explains.

Ms Avila's service is available from 2pm onwards on weekdays and for two hours on a Saturday. This is to facilitate working parents and children's school hours. She warns that there may be a slight waiting time depending on what day you want to meet, but at most, this will be four weeks.

Sessions cost €80 and take place in her office in Dun Laoghaire, which is a child-friendly environment. To make a booking, call Ms Avila on 086 209 5941. Do not forget to let her know the issue is diabetes related.

