

Diabetes: A Family Matter **Participatory Photography**

Overview:

This activity will be useful for diabetes support groups, families, and other groups of people. It is an activity that involves everyone and provides a way to share what people know and believe about their personal experience with diabetes. This is an excellent way to get conversation about the topic of diabetes started and obtain full group participation. It allows people to share ideas that are important to them.

Brief Description:

This is an audience-centered and low-cost method to assess individuals' experiences with diabetes. This activity provides a way to engage the audience and include their voice in a diabetes discussion. In this activity, you will ask participants questions, but you will request the answers in the form of photographs. The participants will tell stories about the photographs and how the images relate to their life with diabetes.

Objectives:

1. Increase awareness of diabetes prevention and self-management.
2. Help participants connect with each other and generate relationships with persons managing with diabetes
3. Help individuals understand the impact of diabetes on families and the community.
4. Make diabetes prevention and management more visible.

Participants:

This activity can be used with a diabetes support group or a group of family members. It could also be an activity that others in the community might use to raise awareness. Although this activity is geared toward adults, any age group could be involved. Children, in particular, could be invited to participate to speak about diabetes from their perspectives. Diabetes, through the eyes of children, could be an eye-opening experience for adults.

Activity Duration:

- Explain the Activity: 15-30 minutes
- The discussion: About 1 hour (may vary based on participant numbers and talkativeness of groups)
- Period for taking and printing the photos: 2 week or longer (you set the guidelines, getting the pictures developed may take several days).
- Longer activity: If you desire to make this part of a community activity or fun day, then you will likely need to approach some things differently. For example, you may want to advertise locally about the activity, even make it a contest. Or, you may want to include some school children or a senior citizen group. Everyone does not have to have diabetes in order to participate. This can be a good way to discover what people know about

diabetes and get people talking. You may want a short written description to accompany the photos and then plan for a display at a local library, community event, or other local place where things can be viewed. Be sure to get the media involved and let them help you tell the diabetes story in your community. Also, don't forget to get some local photographers involved, they can be great help in spearheading a community activity.

Materials Needed:

Disposable cameras with 12-24 exposures (number of cameras depends upon participant numbers). Some participants may have a digital camera that they own and prefer to use it for this activity.

A larger community activity might specify opportunities for persons to use digital photos, black and white, color or other photographic forms to convey ideas. Getting a local expert photographer involved in the project could turn this into a community event that includes children, families, extended family, and others in the community. Local churches could all participate and then have a shared event. School children might add a different perspective, especially if compared to what a senior center group might consider. Be creative and have fun with the activity. Get your community involved!

Costs:

Purchase of the cameras and film development. Costs may vary based upon whether you plan to provide the cameras and film development. Some participants may not be able to afford paying for this out of their pocket. If cost is going to be a problem, you may have to consider other ways people might participate.

Instructions:

1. Invite individuals with diabetes or persons have a family member with diabetes to participate in the activity. A minimum of 4 to 5 persons are needed for the discussion. Inform participants about the activity and the timeline for taking photos, getting them developed, and the date, time and place for the meeting where they will be discussed.
2. Pose question to the participants that they will answer by taking pictures, for example:
 - a. *What is diabetes?*
 - b. *What aspects of your life have been changed by diabetes?*
 - c. *What forms of support do you get from your family?*
 - d. *What troubles you most about living with diabetes?*
 - e. *What is the best thing about having diabetes?*
 - f. *What is most troubling about living with diabetes?*
 - g. *What is everyday life like with diabetes?*

You may want to ask a single or several questions and have participants take several or a single picture to answer each question. Or you may want to only focus on a single

question and let everyone take photos to answer that question. Another way to do this is to assign different questions to each participant. No right or wrong way of doing the activity exists. Decide what will work best for your group and feel free to be creative as you conduct the activity. Taking the photos causes participants to be reflective and consider what is involved with living diabetes. The fun and informative part comes when you get together and discuss the photos.

3. Be sure all participants know what is expected. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer to the questions; responses are based on their experiences.
4. You may want to instruct persons to take 2 to 3 pictures to answer each question posed, and use any remaining pictures for family and friends. However, variations as suggested above may be better choices for your group.
5. Give the participants a time-frame to take their pictures. This could range from 24 hours to one month (this period is entirely dependent on the planned schedule). Set a date for the return of the cameras if you plan to develop the photos.
6. Develop the pictures at a local photo store. Determine whether a discount for cameras and developing might be obtained. Offer the manager publicity if this is to be a public discussion or if pictures will be publicly displayed. You can request that copies of the pictures be placed on CDs if you wish to use a projector during a public discussion.
7. If time is an issue during discussion time, you may want to ask participants to choose a few of their photos for each question to be discussed. However, you may want to spread this activity out over several meetings to allow a greater time for sharing individual ideas.
8. Have participants narrate the stories behind the pictures. Groups might want to discuss photos when time allows.

Alternative Procedures

1. After processing the pictures for the participants, organize a private meeting with all participants and have them select their pictures and discuss the stories among themselves then. In a more private meeting, participants would explore their stories with each others, get reactions and interact further with one another.
2. Have the participants choose their top 2 or 4 and then have them present the same reasons and stories in a public setting in front of the community at another date.

Ways to Extend the Activity:

If you plan to use photos publicly, be sure to obtain signed permissions from those in the photographs. While most people do not mind the sharing of photographs, some might have some objections.

Exhibitions

1. Ask participants to choose their top photograph. Ask them to write a short story about the photograph, in no more than 100 words, for instance.
2. Enlarge and frame the photographs.
3. Place the name, county of residence of the photographer and the short story in frame of the photograph.
4. Organize an exhibition of the photographs e.g. at local community centers, local libraries, local post offices and university libraries.
5. The exhibition could also be used at local fairs and other community events which require information on diabetes

Albums

1. Place copies of the pictures, names of photographer, and the short story in an album. This album could be used at local fairs, other community activities or in private conversations with persons struggling to manage diabetes.
2. This is an easy and convenient way of traveling with and protecting the pictures.

The important thing is to allow the photographs to give voice to people's experiences. Find meaningful ways to use these photos to make diabetes more visible in your community.

Final Word:

If your community completes a participatory photography activity where health or diabetes is the focus, please be sure to go to the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website <www.diabetesfamily.net> and share with others what worked and what did not work. A place on the **Communicate** Section of the website will be available for sharing your ideas. Others will be interested in learning about what you have done and what the outcomes were. If you have a website, please be sure to post the link so that others can take a look.