

To Tell, or Not to Tell?



As MS warriors, most of us at one time or another have been faced with a crucial question: To tell, or not to tell?

Deciding to tell someone about your diagnosis is a difficult decision because it's so personal. Also, your choice can vary depending on the person asking, the situation, or even how you're feeling that particular day.

A close friend or family member? Typically, that's an obvious yes.

But what about your child's teacher or coach? There could be times it's helpful for them to know. But other times, it might be unnecessary.

In the five-plus years since my diagnosis, I've asked myself this question numerous times—to tell, or not to tell? My answers have been dependent on the situation—some of which were a little more awkward than others.

Like the time the decision was made for me—while sitting down to dinner with a friend I hadn't seen in years. Conversation was flowing smoothly, until my then 6 year old blurted: "My mom has to take shots forever."

There have also been times I was sure I would be completely fine talking about my MS—but the moment I brought it up, I immediately started crying.

Both situations were awkward for sure, but here's the thing about awkward moments—they aren't always bad in the end.

In the case of my chatty kiddo, the initial moment of embarrassment quickly passed—this was a friend with whom I'd planned to discuss my diagnosis and treatment eventually. Though it took me by surprise, you could say that it helped speed up the conversation topic!

Also, even during those vulnerable moments when I've cried, the person on the receiving end of my tears has reacted with such kindness that it turned it into a positive experience.

The key is to remember that it's always your choice whether or not to tell someone, or how much of your journey you want to share. Set your own boundaries that make you feel comfortable.

If you're thinking about sharing your story with someone, here are some questions you might want to consider:

- Is this person trustworthy—someone who will be supportive and understanding (and confidential if needed)?
- Will I feel differently after telling them? Will I feel embarrassed that they know, or empowered/supported?
- Will they treat me differently after I tell them?
- Am I emotionally prepared to handle the situation if telling them doesn't go well?
- Do I have the energy to answer any questions they might have about my illness?

If and when you do choose to share your story with someone, remember that almost anyone you tell will do their best to be helpful and supportive.

Above all, please also remember that when the question arises—to tell or not to tell?—the answer is always up to you (you might just have to remind your little ones of that!).