

HEPATITIS B

Mortality

A Parent's Perspective

The Day My Son Recognized His Mortality

By Karen W.

My son was 8 years old when he realized he was going to die. I saw the shadow cross his face and our eyes locked for a very long second.

His look tore at my heart because I knew he had begun to acknowledge his mortality, something I hadn't done until middle age was nipping at my heels. My baby knew that it wasn't always going to be someone else. My child suddenly realized that someday his turn would come.

I ached with sadness that he had crossed that line before experiencing reckless teen and carefree early adulthood years. And I hated the virus for forcing that realization on him at a time when he was just beginning to define himself in relation to the world, to find his place.

We had been careful over the years to explain why he had to get shots, have so many blood tests, see so many more doctors than his brothers did. We started with simple explanations, told him that he had to take special care of his liver because a germ had hurt it. We let him explain it to his brothers, hoping to arm him with some power in the face of this yet invisible foe.

I dreaded the day that he would realize that one day his liver could betray him in spite of everyone's best efforts. Ironically, it was his younger brother who one day asked whether the doctors could just take out his bad liver and put in a new one.

Three pairs of eyes were fixed on me, waiting for an answer, a safe, happy ending. Moms are supposed to fix everything, aren't they? This is so hard.

