

Help Your Teen Take Responsibility for Their Health

The teen years are a time of growth and change as your teen moves from being a child to an adult. Teens need involved parents, but they also need some privacy when it comes to their health. With privacy, they can talk openly to their health care provider about their concerns. Without privacy, they may avoid seeking care for certain services that they can receive from their health care providers. These may be called “confidential” or “sensitive” services.

For most types of medical care, parents need to give consent and they can get information about their teen’s doctor’s visits. But under federal law teens can get private care without parent consent for some “confidential” or “sensitive” visits, such as those for:

- Birth control
- Pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Sexual assault services (12 years old or older may consent to care if a parent or legal guardian cannot be contacted within the short time span in which the examination is necessary)
- Emergency mental health counseling (for ages 12 and older)
- Emergency alcohol and drug counseling

Don’t I have a right to know what medical care my teen is getting? Why can my teen go to the doctor for these serious issues without me knowing about it?

Every state has laws for youth under 18 to get certain kinds of health care without their parents’ consent. Fortunately, MOST teens DO talk to their parents, and they want their parents’ advice. You play an important role in helping them stay healthy! But even if the relationship between you and your teen is strong, there are some issues that your teen may want to get care for on his or her own. Teens may be embarrassed, ashamed, or scared to talk to parents about some issues. They may not go to the health care provider unless they know the information would be kept private.

What will happen if my teen is in danger?

There are some limits to confidentiality. If a health care provider learns that a teen under 18 years is being abused, or is thinking about hurting him/her self or others, the proper authorities must be contacted for help.

Will my teen keep secrets from me since they can get confidential services?

Wanting privacy is a healthy and normal part of growing up. Even though teens are able to get some medical care without parent permission, health care providers encourage them to talk to their parents or another trusted adult.

How can I let my teen know I want to talk to them about these kinds of issues?

As the parent of a teen, part of your job is helping them learn how to make healthy decisions. They are becoming more independent, and making their own choices is an important part of growing up. Make sure you let them know you are always there to help, even if you do not agree with all their decisions. Listen, and when possible, stay calm if they come to you with a problem that is upsetting, so they will continue to talk to you.