



Health Professionals
Committed to the
Reproductive Needs of
Children and Adolescents

Confidentiality in Adolescent Health Care

What is confidentiality?

Confidentiality refers to private information shared during a health care visit between the patient and her physician or another healthcare provider.

My child is a minor so why can't I have access to all her medical history?

Confidentiality laws are in place to protect an adolescent's privacy regarding sensitive matters. These laws allow providers to build trust with their adolescent patients. Laws protecting an adolescent's private information are different in each state and country.

What if I don't approve of my child's behavior? Don't I have the right to know about it?

Your daughter's health care providers will encourage her to communicate openly with her parents or guardians but cannot force her to disclose personal information. Sometimes patients may ask for the healthcare providers' assistance with starting a conversation with her parents about sensitive topics.

Are there exceptions to confidentiality laws?

Yes; in cases of abuse or physical danger to the patient, confidentiality may be broken. Reasons a provider may need to break confidentiality include suicidal thoughts, plans to harm others, or threats to the adolescent's safety. Any suspicion of child abuse or neglect will be reported to the appropriate authorities as required by law.

What information is considered confidential?

Confidential information can include the following topics (although not limited to this list):

- Sexual activity
- Sexuality and sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Contraception
- Testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections
- Pregnancy and options counseling
- Body image
- Alcohol, tobacco, and drug use

When and how does a confidential discussion take place with my child?

Confidential interviews may occur in various ways in different healthcare settings. Often, a provider will request to speak with your daughter alone for a few minutes while you wait in the waiting room. This conversation may take place at the initial visit with your provider, or at subsequent visits. This is a valuable time for your daughter to talk openly with her provider about issues that may be embarrassing or private. This is also an opportunity for the provider to encourage adolescents to communicate openly with her parents or guardians and provide suggestions about how to improve that communication. Providers may also talk about how to handle peer pressure and risky behaviors, even if the patient has not had these experiences yet. Confidentiality allows your daughter to begin to take charge of her own health care, which is an important part of normal adolescent development.