

# 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 clinician about their concerns. Without privacy, they may avoid seeking care for certain services that they can receive from their clinicians. 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 a combination of federal, state, and case laws, teens can get private care without parental consent for some:

- › 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 screening and treatment
- › Emergency treatment for alcohol and drug use, including withdrawal (for ages 12 and older)

**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 parental 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 concerns that your teen may want to get care for on their own.

Teens may be embarrassed, ashamed, or scared to talk to parents about some issues. They may not go to the clinician unless they know the information will be kept private.

**What will happen if my teen is in danger?**

There are some limits to confidentiality. If a clinician learns that a teen under 18 years is being abused or is thinking about hurting themselves or others, the proper authorities must be contacted for help.

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

It’s understandable to wonder about this—especially when teens start using confidential health services. Even when teens are able to access certain medical services confidentially, clinicians routinely encourage teens to talk with a parent or another trusted adult whenever they feel safe doing so.

**How can I let my teen know I want to talk to them about sensitive topics?**

As a parent of a teen, part of your role is helping them learn how to make healthy decisions as they grow more independent. Let them know that you are always available to listen and support them, even when you may not agree with every decision they make. When they come to you with a problem—especially one that is upsetting—try to stay calm and listen first. A steady, nonjudgmental response helps keep communication open, so they feel safe continuing to talk with you in the future.