

Understanding Confidentiality

Your teen is changing, and raising a teen can be tough. Teens need involved parents and adults, however, they also need privacy. Without privacy, teens may avoid getting the care they need for some health services. As a parent, it can be difficult to understand your role in privacy and confidentiality.

Your Changing Teen

- Wants more responsibility and independence
- Needs more privacy
- Thinks a lot about their own personal concerns
- Feels no one understands them
- Explores new behaviors and activities – some healthy and some risky

The Parent

- Supports their teen
- Listens without judgment
- Guides them
- Sets limits
- Becomes involved and aware of what is going on in their lives
- Expresses love
- Acknowledges strengths
- Gives them their time

The Health Provider

- Asks about strengths
- Builds rapport and trust
- Acts as their health advisor
- Advocates for healthy choices
- Helps with any risky behaviors
- Provides confidential health services and brief office interventions
- Listens to concerns

Parents need to provide consent for most medical care for their teens. However, under Vermont law, teens can get private care without parental consent for some visits. These include:

- Reproductive health services
- Substance abuse treatment
- Mental health treatment

Why can my teen go to the doctor for these issues without me knowing about it?

Each state has laws for children under 18 to get some kinds of health care without parental consent. Parents play an important role in helping teens stay healthy, and most teens want their parents' advice. There are some issues that your teen may feel embarrassed, ashamed, or scared to talk about with you, and if services are not private, they may avoid going to the doctor. Most healthcare providers understand the importance of parents in the lives of teens and will encourage and assist teens in sharing difficult information with parents.

What if my teen is in danger?

In most situations that pose a substantial threat to the child's life or well-being, such as abuse, or if the teen is at risk of harming themselves or others, health providers work with the teen and/or family to ensure that appropriate referrals or resources are made available. Providers also aide the teen in communicating concerns to parents or guardians.

How do I let my teen know that they can talk to me about these issues?

Let them know you are always there to help and listen, even when you might not agree with their decisions or choices. Staying calm and helping your teen learn how to make healthy decisions will allow them the space to be independent and the assurance that you will be there to support them, even with difficult issues.