

Confidentiality in Adolescent Health Care

Adolescents tend to utilize their primary care doctors less often than needed, usually in fear of disclosure of personal, private information to their parents. Adolescents have a range of problems and concerns that need to be discussed, including, but not limited to substance abuse, sexual activity, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, depression, anxiety, and suicide.

In order to improve outreach to our adolescent population, our office (in accordance to the AAP guidelines), utilizes the following policy with regards to confidentiality with our adolescent population:

1. Our providers have an ethical obligation to provide the best possible care and counseling to respond to the needs of our adolescent patients.
2. This obligation includes every reasonable effort to encourage the adolescent to involve parents, whose support can, in many circumstances, increase the potential for dealing with the adolescent's problems on a continuing basis.
3. At the time providers establish an independent relationship with adolescents as patients, the providers should make this new relationship clear to parents and adolescents with regard to the following elements:
 - The adolescent will have an opportunity for examination and counseling apart from parents, and the same confidentiality will be preserved between the adolescent patient and the provider as between the parent/adult and the provider.
 - The adolescent must understand under what circumstances (intent to harm self or others), the provider will defer this confidentiality.
 - Parents should be encouraged to work out means to facilitate communication regarding appointments, payment, or other matters consistent with the understanding reached about confidentiality and parental support in this transitional period when the adolescent is moving toward self-responsibility for health care.
4. Providers, parents, and adolescents need to be aware of the nature and effect of laws and regulations in their jurisdictions that introduce further constraints on these relationships. Ultimately, the health risks to the adolescent are so impelling that legal barriers

and deference to parental involvement should not stand in the way of needed health care.

Adapted from AAP statement by Dr. Amanda Dropic 2010