

A Note to Parents about Confidentiality

Now that your child is entering adolescence, we would like to let you know about some changes that will be taking place in our office visit routines. These changes are being made to recognize your child's growing independence and enable us to provide the best medical care.

During early adolescence, young teens and preteens are learning to think and behave like the adults that they are destined to become. With their parents' support, they practice the skills they will need as they become increasingly independent. Taking responsibility for choices related to health and safety is an important developmental task of adolescence, which is why gradual changes are made in the structure of pediatric office visits at this time.

Sometime between ages 11 and 14, your son or daughter will begin to spend part of the office visit alone with the pediatrician. The first part of your visit will not change; pediatrician, parent, and child will continue to meet together and talk about anything that any of us might want to discuss. After this initial conversation, the pediatrician will spend some one-on-one time with your child to talk privately and to complete the physical examination. (Your teen or the physician may request your presence during the physical examination.)

When your pediatrician meets privately with your adolescent, conversations will be confidential. A teen might want to share something that they consider "private" with the doctor, and private does not necessarily imply something that you need to be concerned about. It is critical that young people in this age group have a chance to ask questions directly and have an open dialogue with a trusted physician without embarrassment or fear of blame. The exception to confidentiality would be if your pediatrician felt that there was a threat to your son or daughter's life or that of another person, including suicidal or homicidal thoughts. This information would be shared with you immediately.

Your adolescent's need for respect, privacy, and autonomy does not lessen their need for your continued guidance and support. Your involvement in your adolescent's development will always be extremely important. Please feel free to telephone at any time. We are always glad to hear from you.

Staying in Touch With Your Teen

Home life changes as children begin to enter adolescence. Wise parents work to keep the lines of communication open. Look for opportunities to get your teen talking. What kinds of things are on most young adolescents' minds?

- *Physical and emotional changes of puberty.* Does your adolescent understand what to expect? Do they know that it's perfectly normal to be the first or last of their peers to begin to menstruate or to find that their voice has "changed"?
- *Diet and exercise.* Does your adolescent appreciate the benefits of exercise? Have you taught him or her to take a mental inventory when they're feeling low, to ask themselves how much they've slept, how well they've eaten, how recently they've had a good workout?
- *Sex and sexuality.* Parents who talk to their children and teens about dating and sexual decision making encourage healthier attitudes and safer choices.
- *Need for privacy.* If you've noticed your teen needs more time alone, let him or her know that they're missed in the TV room! Their need for privacy is normal; don't take it personally. Just keep asking (and monitoring for opportunities to draw them out).
- *Alcohol and drugs.* Don't let this be the elephant in the room! Talk about what to do if someone asks them to try alcohol or drugs. Tell them early and often that you will pick them up at any time, no questions asked. And make sure your home is a safe place for friends to gather.
- *Tell them you love them.* Your adolescent may be stressed, but you will miss his or her passion and they'll be gone before you know it. Hug them, love them, and remember, "This too shall pass."

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