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Teen Health Services and One-On-One Time with A Healthcare Provider

— An Infobrief for Parents —

The teen years are an important time of growth and development. Teens need regular medical care to ensure they receive recommended health services that help keep them safe and healthy. Having a healthcare provider (e.g., a doctor or nurse practitioner) they trust and can talk to is important, particularly when it comes to topics such as mental and sexual health, substance use, and safety from bullying. Parents can help create that trusting relationship by allowing their teen one-on-one time with their healthcare provider.

Why is one-on-one time with a healthcare provider important?

As adolescents develop and take greater responsibility for their lives, it makes sense for them to be more engaged in their own health care. Current guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend that providers begin having one-on-one time, commonly referred to as “time alone”, with young people as early as age 11.¹

Providers who spend one-on-one time with teens early on help establish this practice as a routine part of care, and provide teens with regular opportunities to raise any concerns in an open manner.² Ensuring teens have a chance to discuss sensitive issues, such as relationship concerns or depression, can increase their satisfaction with medical care and receipt of preventive health services.^{3,4} A recent report from AAP encourages providers to have one-on-one time with teens in order to provide accurate and comprehensive sex education, including personalized information on risks and prevention strategies.⁵

Do teens get one-on-one time with healthcare providers?

Research suggests that not enough teens get one-on-one with their providers. One study found that only 38% of teens 15-17 years old had one-on-one time with a provider during a clinic visit in the prior year.⁶ Another study found that out of 144 medical visits attended by a parent, just 68% involved time alone between the provider and teen.³



What parents can do:

Prepare yourself

Talk with the healthcare provider about when to begin giving your teen more autonomy with their health care, and when you can expect the provider to ask for time to discuss your teen's health privately. Initially, the provider may ask you to step out of the room for a short period of time, with the time lengthening as your teen gets older and more comfortable with taking responsibility.

Prepare your teen

Check in with your teen prior to beginning this process. Ask if he or she will be comfortable talking to the provider alone. As they get older, give your teen a heads up that you will be stepping out of the room and encourage them to think about what they would like to discuss with their provider during that time. As your teen gets older, you may want to ask them whether they want you to come into the exam room at all.

Work with your teen's provider

Working together as a team, you and the provider can ensure that your teen has the opportunity to discuss openly with both of you issues that may be concerning.

Talk with your teen

Have regular conversations with your teen about health-related topics, including healthy relationships, mental health, and the prevention of HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy. These discussions will help to reinforce and build your teen's confidence to talk openly with a provider whether or not you are in the room.

Be supportive

When your teen's provider asks you to step out of the room, you can signal that you appreciate them taking the time to speak with your teen alone. Being supportive can reassure your teen and empower them to take more responsibility for his or her own health care. It also makes it easier for the provider to continue to seek out time alone with your teen at future visits.

Take action

If your teen's provider does not ask you to step out of the room, you can suggest that you do so. Let the provider know you think it is important that your teen and the provider have time alone to talk about their health and well-being.

Look for opportunities

There is usually more time at annual check-ups to allow your teen and providers to have time alone. However, you can look for opportunities to offer to step out of the room during urgent care visits, as well.

Seek out resources

Some resources include CDC's factsheet "[Talking to Your Teen about Sex: Going Beyond the Talk](#)" and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine's app [THRIVE](#), which can help you begin a dialogue with your teen on important health topics.

References

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