



Tips For Protecting Teen Confidentiality

It is frequently the small stuff that can compromise a teen patient's confidence in his/her provider. The following is a list of tips-some obvious, some not – for preserving patient privacy and minimizing embarrassment in a clinical setting.

1. Do not discuss patient information in elevators, hallways, or waiting rooms. If an adolescent patient overhears a conversation of this nature, s/he may assume that you or your staff will also discuss his or her case in an open environment.
2. Do not collect an adolescent patient's medical history or reason for visit in an open area. It will be difficult for a teenager to discuss his or her personal issues honestly if he/she thinks other people can overhear.
3. When an adolescent patient gives you a contact phone number, make sure that you can leave messages. If you cannot, ask for an alternative number at which you can leave messages if necessary.
4. Likewise, do not send mail (such as appointment reminders and bills) home unless you have discussed whether or not the patient feels comfortable receiving mail from you at his or her home. If s/he does not wish to receive mail at home, try to work out an arrangement whereby mail is picked up at the clinic. TIP: Some clinics have check boxes indicating a teen's preference regarding mail and phone calls. Other clinics clarify what kind of message might be ok to leave at a teen's contact number. (e.g. "Tina" called).
5. When discussing anything sensitive, such as sexual history, weight, or substance use, make sure all doors are closed. A patient in the waiting room may overhear a discussion and thus be more reluctant to share information when he or she sees the health care provider.
6. Think about how your clinic administers paperwork to patients. Are you asking clients to fill out forms in a place where other patients might be able to read their answers? Make sure that there is enough room in which to complete forms with some degree of privacy.
7. Make sure that any clinic literature your clinic or practice distributes is small enough to fit into purse or wallet. Asking a teenager to leave with bright, large brochures on a sensitive subject, such as STIs or health relationships, will cause more embarrassment than anything else. These types of materials should be offered to teens in private.



8. Create an office policy about confidential issues pertaining to youth and their families. Visit tulsacampaign.org/toolkit-provider for a template you can modify to suit your practice.
9. Create a practice in your clinic to allow adolescents and parents to talk separately with health care providers about their concerns. Visit tulsacampaign.org/toolkit-provider for a roadmap to a teen-friendly office visit.
10. Make sure the atmosphere in your office (e.g., posters, furniture, magazines, etc.) create a safe and comfortable environment for teens to discuss private concerns regarding their health.