



As children become teenagers, they have a greater need for independence and privacy. Although they may have questions about their bodies and the changes that they are going through, they may be embarrassed to talk about those changes.

This is why the doctor or nurse practitioner may suggest an appointment with your teen alone. Teens (and most adults) have an easier time sharing information with their medical professional in private. One way parents can support teens is by helping them learn to take responsibility for their health. Your support helps the medical professional establish an open relationship with your teen.

During a well-check appointment, the doctor or nurse practitioner will ask about topics that impact health and safety—such as body changes, the pressure from friends

to drink alcohol or take drugs, or concerns about violence. This conversation is usually confidential and stays between the medical professional and the teen. However, the doctor or nurse practitioner is always there to talk with you, the parent, about your concerns. You will also be told if your teen is being abused, in danger of being hurt, or if he or she is hurting someone else.

A word about parental permission

In most cases, teens need to get a parent's permission before seeing a doctor or nurse practitioner. For example, if a teen has a sore throat or needs a physical exam to play sports, a parent will need to give permission before the teen can be seen at Kaiser Permanente. However, according to the laws in the state of California, when children are at least 12 years old, they can see a doctor or nurse practitioner without a parent's permission for these confidential concerns:

- pregnancy
- birth control
- sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- alcohol or drug use
- personal, school, or family issues

This law was passed so that teens would have a safe place to get care for these serious health problems.

Even though teens do not need to ask for permission to discuss these confidential issues, medical professionals try to let them know that it's a good idea to talk with a parent or another adult about their medical care. These are all very serious issues, and a parent is usually the best person to help.

Your role as the parent of a teenager

As your child becomes a teenager, your relationship may change. This is a time when children are learning how to be independent and responsible for their actions. Try to accept the natural changes in your relationship with your teen.

Your role as the parent of a teen is to help him or her learn how to make wise decisions. Don't be surprised if your teen wants to do things in a certain, unique way. Making decisions and learning from those choices are part of growing up.

If you find yourself arguing with your teen a lot, learn to "pick your battles." Think about which decisions you can leave to your teen. Be firm with your opinions and your guidance, but don't forget to stop and listen to what your teen has to say. Even if you don't agree with all of the choices made, let your teen know that you are always there to help.

If your teen asks for help

If your teen comes to you with a problem that is upsetting or embarrassing to you, try following these steps in dealing with the issue:

- Stay calm. Count to 10 or take a quick break from the conversation if you need to. Teens need you to help develop a plan of action, not to give a lecture. Save the moral lesson until after you have addressed the immediate issues. Remember, the goal is to make sure your teen always feels comfortable coming to you with problems.
- Let your teen know that you understand that it's not easy coming to a parent for help or guidance. Tell your teen that you will work together to solve the problem.
- Discuss potential solutions with your teen. Instead of stating exactly what to do, let your teen figure it out with your help. This will help your teen learn how to solve problems independently.

If you and your teen can't take care of the problem on your own, ask an expert. Call your Kaiser Permanente doctor or nurse practitioner for advice and information.

For parents of older teens

As your teen becomes a young adult and is close to graduating from high school, we want to help you and your teen with this transition. All of our medical centers have doctors, nurses, and counselors who focus on providing great care for young adults ages 18-25. We're here to help you and your teen make health care decisions now and in the future. Start talking with your pediatrician about helping your teen choose a doctor in Adult medicine, OB/GYN, or one of our Young Adult Clinics. We want you and your teen to take advantage of all the services Kaiser Permanente has just for young adults. For more information go to:

kp.org/youngadulthealth

More resources

Web sites

- Kaiser Permanente kp.org
- TeensHealth kidshealth.org/teen
- ParentSoup parentsoup.com
- The National Parenting Center tnpc.com

Books

- *The American Academy of Pediatrics, Caring for Your Adolescent, Ages 12-21*, Donald E. Greydanus, MD, FAAP.
- *Surviving Your Adolescents*, Thomas W. Phelan Ph.D.
- *Parenting Teens With Love and Logic*, Foster Cline, MD, and Jim Fay.
- *Teenage Body Book*, Charles Wibblesman, MD, and Kathy McCoy, PhD.
- *Life Happens*, Charles Wibblesman, MD, and Kathy McCoy, PhD.
- *Growing and Changing*, Charles Wibblesman, MD and Kathy McCoy, PhD.
- *How Sex Works*, Elizabeth Fenwick and Richard Walker.

Visit your local Health Education Department or Center for additional information and materials.