

Sample Recommendations on Ensuring Privacy

(adapted and revised from IPPF/WHR Tools)

Key concerns regarding Privacy	Challenges	Recommendations
<p>Do the clinics have enough private space?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there enough space for health care providers to consult with adolescents individually? Is there enough space to collect information in a private room rather than the reception area? 	<p>Many health centres do not have enough private consultation rooms to meet with adolescents individually. Some health centres have private rooms for doctors, but not for counselling adolescents or for collecting information.</p>	<p>To overcome these challenges, health care providers can increase the amount of private space available by using space more efficiently (e.g. cleaning out a back room), dividing rooms in two, or actually expanding the health centre. If this is not possible, they should consider ways to adjust patient flow, for example, by reassigning responsibility for collecting intake information from a receptionist to a different provider.</p>
<p>Can patients be seen or heard from outside consultation rooms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the walls and doors of consultation rooms solid enough to prevent adolescents from being seen or overheard from outside the consultation room, such as hallways, adjoining rooms or reception areas? Are curtains used to separate any consultation areas? 	<p>In resource-poor settings, many consultation areas can be seen or heard from hallways or adjoining areas because doors or walls are thin or nonexistent. In some cases, health centres use curtains to separate consultation areas. Ideally, health care providers would be able to strengthen the walls and doors of consultation rooms to ensure privacy.</p>	<p>When this is not possible, however, health care providers, can take a number of steps:</p> <p>a) they can work with staff to determine whether it is possible to speak more softly so that they cannot be overheard; b) they can ask colleagues to vacate adjoining rooms or hallways in selected cases; and</p> <p>c) they can develop policies to ensure that discussions about sensitive information are restricted to those areas of the health centre that are in fact private. (DOH Policy on ensuring privacy is written at the Standards on Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS).</p>
<p>Do staff members protect adolescents' right to privacy in practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do receptionists or any personnel at the receiving area ask adolescents to state the reason for their visit in front of other patients in the reception area? Do staff members collect intake information in the waiting room? Do staff members routinely interrupt or walk in on consultations or counselling sessions? 	<p>In many health care settings, health workers routinely fail to ensure adolescents' privacy.</p> <p>For example, it is common for receptionists to ask adolescents to state the reason for their visit in front of other patients in the reception area—even though adolescents may consider that information to be highly personal.</p>	<p>Similarly, in some centres, health workers collect intake information (such as name, address, medical history) in public areas such as the waiting room, or they walk in on consultations without knocking. When these problems exist, health care providers should work with staff to reduce these practices. For example, staff should severely limit what they ask adolescents to say in reception areas; they can try collecting information in writing if adolescents know how to read and write. Otherwise, staff should wait until they can meet with them in private before asking them to share personal information out loud. (Sample strategies on how to ensure privacy can be seen at the ADEPT e-learning).</p>
<p>Have staffs been trained to understand the importance of clients' privacy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have all staff, including receptionists, been trained to understand the extent to which a breach of privacy and confidentiality can put adolescents' health and safety at risk? 	<p>In many settings, health centres or even hospitals, respect for privacy and confidentiality has simply not been a part of the professional culture within health services, either because of space limitations or because it has not been a priority of the organization.</p>	<p>Managers can address this by ensuring that all staff members are trained to understand the potential risks of lack of privacy and confidentiality. (DOH Adolescent Job Aid Training and ADEPT e-learning offers discussion on the importance of privacy and confidentiality).</p>

<p>Do adolescents have the opportunity to see health workers without parents, family, partners, or friends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do providers know creative strategies for getting a moment alone with adolescents to ask whether she/he would like to discuss anything without her/his parents, family members or friend present? • Are providers aware that the person who accompanies the adolescents may be or may reveal information to other people or to perpetrator of violence for example? • Do providers ask adolescents about sex, sexuality, or violence in the presence of partners, parents, family members or friends? • Do health workers know how to distract a family member or friend long enough to ask an adolescents about abuse when they suspect that the adolescents has been a victim of violence or any related sexual and reproductive health concerns? 	<p>Many adolescents want their parents, family members or friends to be present when they meet with a health worker, and health centres need to respect their wishes. However, health care providers also need to understand that in some cases, the parents or family member accompanying the adolescents may be an abuser, may have the potential for violence, or may reveal confidential information to a violent member of the household.</p>	<p>Health care providers need to work with staff to develop policies about when to allow family and friends to accompany adolescents at different stages of the consultation.</p> <p>These policies should balance the need to protect adolescents' privacy with the need to respect adolescents' preference for having a family member or friend present during the consultation.</p> <p>Protecting adolescents' privacy may require that providers understand the potential risks, use their judgment about what information to discuss in front of family members, and find creative strategies to obtain consent and to distract family members who may actively try to prevent adolescents from consulting a health worker in private. Provide leaflets or reading materials to the accompanying adults and explain to them that health care providers should meet the adolescents privately.</p>
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4.3 Strengthening Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an essential component of quality care and patient rights in any health-care setting. It increases the willingness of an adolescent to seek care and utilize health services available. Most teenagers appreciate it when they can talk with someone outside of the presence of any parent. The teenager prefers to have some time alone with the provider to discuss certain issues. Even if the complaint may be as simple as cough and colds, there may be some underlying concern that the teenager is not ready to divulge in the presence of his parents.¹¹

Many problems of adolescents are rooted in behaviours that may not be revealed unless the health provider opens his lines of communication with the teenager. However, confidentiality is particularly important when adolescents experience early pregnancy, violence or within any HIV related concerns, because breaches of confidentiality can have life-threatening consequences for adolescents living or facing in situations of early pregnancy, violence and HIV.

Sample Recommendations in Strengthening Confidentiality (adapted and revised from IPPF/WHR Tools)

Key concerns regarding confidentiality	Challenges	Recommendations
<p>Are medical records stored in a secure place?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are clients' medical records kept in a secure place that can be locked and is closely supervised? • Do the health centres have written policies about who is allowed to access client records? • Has the health centre raised staff awareness about the importance of guarding the confidentiality of medical records? 	<p>In any setting, breaches of confidentiality can occur if medical records are kept out in the open, in an unsecured place, or in reach of anyone who comes into the clinic. Moreover, in many health centres, patients may see whichever doctor is available that day, rather than having their own personal physician.</p>	<p>In such settings, many different health workers have access to medical records. Each health centre should develop policies about who can access medical records and under what conditions. Managers or coordinators should train staff to understand the risks of breaching confidentiality.</p>