

Confidentiality information for parents

Will I know what happens in a session?

There are two levels of confidentiality that can concern people. The first is whether or not the young person has been to a service or had some kind of treatment, and the other is about what is actually said during those session.

It is important to know that young people have the right to see their health providers alone and have a right to say things that are not automatically shared with parents or others. Doctors can see young people alone at any age. Doctors make a judgement about whether the young person has the capacity to make decisions about their own health, and then they take things from there. This applies throughout the health service.

How will I be involved as a parent?

In practice, child and adolescent mental health services try to involve parents up to around the age of 16, and then much less from then on. The same is the case in education; schools will usually want to let parents know if their young person is receiving some kind of intervention on the premises. But practice varies. Therapists usually try to encourage young people to talk to family, or they may speak to you on the young people's behalf. This is something you can ask for, but they are not bound to share any confidences unless they feel that the young person is a risk, either to themselves or to others.

The importance of confidentiality

There are good reasons for this high level of privacy, and it is critical that young people feel safe and respected if they need help, otherwise they may not engage with health services when they need to.

It can be reassuring to know that your young person has someone they can confide in and that you will hear if your young person is considered at risk. It can also be frustrating not to know what is being talked about, and to feel you have no rights although you have so much knowledge about the young person. But it is really important for young people to have this kind of privacy, and it may be a key part of recovery.

When a young person turns 18

From 18 years on, when young people officially become adults in the eyes of the law, parents are unlikely to be involved in the process unless young people have special educational needs.