

Clinical Toolkit

Clinical Tips: Confidentiality

Some important work practices around confidentiality with young people include:

Consent to obtain or release information

Young people should be asked at the earliest appropriate opportunity about whether they give consent for family or friends to provide and obtain information about their treatment.

Discussion should cover the types of information they are happy or not happy to have shared. Even partial consent is useful and may be appropriate depending on the young person's age. Consent may be provided to obtain, or release information or both. It is worthwhile discussing levels of consent and discussing in straightforward terms or examples, types of information you might disclose and what information you would not disclose. Remind young people that they always have the right to withdraw their consent if they change their mind.

Information giving

If family or friends contact about a young person, information should not be given without getting consent in advance. It is appropriate to paraphrase the information you wish to discuss and confirm consent for that information to be released.

Recording

Make clear notes in the young person's file about the types of information they have and have not consented to sharing with family and friends. This is important in terms of ensuring the young person's wishes are followed and maintaining their trust.

Transparency

Encourage family and friends to talk with the young person openly about the information they'd like to know and the contact they're having with the treating team. It's preferable that young people and their family and friends are able to communicate about these things,

even if it's difficult or if they have differences of opinion. Be clear from the outset with young people about the limits of confidentiality and the situations where information may need to be provided to others. Do not forget to include that in addition to breaching confidentiality due to safety concerns, it may be breached if a young person is involved in a legal case and a court requests access to their medical files.

Even when a young person has stated their wish that information should not be disclosed to their family or friend, there are still ways of engaging and supporting their family and friends. The following responses may be helpful when talking to family and friends:

- What sort of things would be helpful for you to know? I can speak about this but not that.
- I can't talk to you at this time, but there are support services and groups that you might find helpful. Parents can access free and confidential advice and support online or over the phone through [ehheadspace](#); and a range of information for family and friends on the [headspace website](#)
- I can't talk about your relative specifically, but we can talk about mental health issues generally. For example, we could talk about why people might have strange ideas or behaviours.
- We can't talk about confidential stuff but we can talk about some strategies for how to manage difficult situations or behaviours.
- Have you read things about mental illness that you don't understand? Perhaps I could help to explain anything that is confusing or unclear.