

Encouraging independence in your son or daughter



Adolescent Transition

Adolescent Transition Education Package | **Fact Sheet 11b**

An information sheet for parents and carers of patients transitioning from paediatric to adult health services

As a parent or carer of a young person with a health condition or disability, helping them to make their own decisions as they learn to gain their independence can be a daunting prospect. This period of growth and change will help your son/daughter to become confident and competent in navigating their way through the adult healthcare system. It will mean they don't get thrown into the deep end at the time of leaving the paediatric hospital. It can be challenging, but it's a journey that is very worthwhile and should result in the best possible outcomes for their personal development and health management.

Decision making and risk taking

During their adolescent development, a young person with a health condition or disability will become increasingly involved and independent in their decision making related to both their health, and decisions about their life in general. 'Letting go' and feeling confident that a young person has the skills and capacity to manage their own healthcare completely, may be difficult for some parents/carers. Promoting independence in young people will lead to them gradually developing greater capacity to take care of themselves as well as increased confidence, self-esteem and self-worth.

The need to gain independence and engage in risk taking behaviours is normal adolescent behaviour. It is during this time that young people learn about life and how to make their own decisions. Making informed decisions is important as they embark on the road to adulthood and can help them avoid taking high-level risks that are potentially damaging for all young people.

Practical matters

Supporting your son or daughter in taking some practical steps towards becoming an independent adult, can make a significant difference to their perception of achieving independence.

Every young person's journey to independence will be different. Gaining independence in all parts of life including healthcare may require a different approach for each individual. Some young people may already be living away from home or attending their medical appointments on their own. Other young people may enjoy not having to make big decisions and prefer to leave certain decisions or discussions to their parents/carers. Each young person is different but it is important to keep encouraging independence.

Below are some ideas of steps you can take to accomplish this.

1. From 15 years of age, encourage your son/daughter to apply for his or her own Medicare card. This is not only an important part of gaining independence but handy for your son/daughter if they need access to medical support, and as an additional form of identification.
2. Ensure your son/daughter has some form of ID (e.g. proof of age card) that they can use, particularly if he/she is 18 years old.
3. Discuss the idea of using an alternative form of transport with your son/daughter for any their occasions when you may not be available to drive them to their appointments. You could encourage your son/daughter to apply for a learner's permit or a public transport concession card.

Check out our *ID, Health Cards & other Practical Matters* fact sheet for more information.

Healthcare

Many parents/carers have a significant role in their son/daughter's healthcare and health management over many years. This may include informing doctors about their son or daughter's current condition, responding to and asking questions in consultations, booking appointments, filling prescriptions and providing transport to appointments. These are things some parents have done for their child's entire life.

As you promote independence in your son/daughter, you could:

- Encourage your son/daughter to respond directly themselves to questions from healthcare staff and ask any questions they may have themselves, rather than you doing it for them. It may be helpful for your son/daughter to write down and bring along a list of thoughts or questions with them to their appointment.

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- Ask your son/daughter to describe their current condition and symptoms to the doctor at the beginning of the appointment and gently prompt them to recall more if you think they have left out some important details
- Encourage your son/daughter to take more responsibility for their medication by having scripts and requesting a role in filling a prescription at the pharmacy
- Encourage your son/daughter to have some time alone in each consultation building up to the point where they have most or all of the consultation time alone, with you getting an update of key issues at the end of the appointment
- Encourage your son/daughter to book their own follow up appointment after their consultation, either in person or over the phone

Ensure that both you and your son/daughter are comfortable with this process. It may take some time to adjust, so move slowly through these steps.

At home

While encouraging independence in your son or daughter's healthcare, it is also equally important to encourage increasing independence at home, at school and in relationships.

Depending on the stage your child is at, these suggestions encourage independence at home:

- Assign chores to promote responsibility
- Allow your son/daughter to go out with friends unescorted, with a clear message about letting you know where they are going and what they are doing, and when they will be home
- Teach your son/daughter to cook a meal once a week
- Teach your son/daughter to drive
- Encourage your son/daughter to take up an after school activity or sport, or get involved in a community or support group

Communication and negotiation during adolescence

Adolescence can be a challenging time for young people as they begin to engage with the world in new ways, striving to learn more about themselves, their environment and their ability to make decisions. Communicating and negotiating with your son or daughter may prove to be difficult at times. Remember to give your son or daughter space when they need it and make time to listen to what they have to say.

Communicating with your son/daughter

Communicating may be challenging and frequent disagreements may happen. Here are some tips that may help avoid conflict:

1. Start a discussion with your son/daughter at a time when you are both free to talk, such as during a car trip or at the dinner table.
2. Remain calm and rational throughout any discussion. No one will benefit from the conversation if you lose your 'cool' or get upset.
3. If your son/daughter is becoming frustrated or argumentative, pause the discussion and return to it when you've both had time to think. Use a neutral sentence such as 'I don't want to fight with you so perhaps we'll take a moment to think and return to this discussion at a later time.'
4. Give your son/daughter signals that you are listening when he/she is talking, such as nodding your head and asking questions.
5. Don't interrupt your son/daughter when they are speaking, as they will feel that you aren't listening to their point of view.
6. Try and come up with an option that suits you both.
7. Let your son/daughter know that you love and support them.

Negotiating with your son/daughter during adolescence

Finding an option that suits everyone isn't easy. Negotiation involves taking into consideration all opinions before reaching a solution. Keep in mind the communication tips from above and consider these tips for negotiating with your son/daughter:

1. After both of you have expressed your individual concerns explain to your son or daughter that finding a solution involves negotiation and that this doesn't mean he/she will get exactly what they want, but that you want to find a solution to meet both your needs.
2. With your guidance and support, allow your son/daughter the freedom to develop skills of independence.
3. If you disagree with an idea that your son or daughter suggests, clearly explain the reasons why. Then offer an alternative or ask them to propose one.
4. If your son or daughter becomes unreasonable or irrational, quietly explain that you will continue the discussion when he/she is calm.

Find more useful tips

About Kids Health
www.aboutkidshealth.ca

Raising Children Network
raisingchildren.net.au

For more info contact:

The RCH Adolescent Transition Team on **9345 4858/4980**
or find email details and more info on www.rch.org.au/transition