



# CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE PRIVACY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

## Is it just between you and me - Confidentiality?

Many of you will have grown up attending medical appointments with your parents. As you enter adulthood you may have questions you'd like to ask your doctors without family present. As you get older, you will be taking more control over your own health, so it makes sense for you to get involved!

There is considerable evidence to support the rights of teens to access quality and confidential healthcare. Research shows that many young people need medical help but won't access the help for fear of their parents finding out. This is often in relation to sexual health care, mental health and substance use.

The information in this fact sheet explains that you are entitled to confidential health care.

The right to consent to your own medical treatment starts at 18 years of age, however, consent to some treatments may start earlier – depending on the doctor's assessment of your ability to make your own informed choices, and where you live in Australia.

Teenagers, even those still on their parent's Medicare Card, are entitled to ask their doctor for a confidential consultation. In fact, many doctors think having a private chat for part of the consultation from time to time, as you approach adulthood, is good practice for the future. A private chat also gives you the opportunity to talk about things that you may not be comfortable discussing with other people present. If you are under 18 years of age, a doctor is allowed to keep your consultation private if they decide you are capable of making your own decisions and are not in danger. For example, if someone below the age of consent was seeking contraception for use in a consensual relationship with someone of a similar age, the doctor is allowed to keep that information between the two of you.

The key exception to confidentiality and disclosure (when a health professional speaks to someone else eg your parents, another treating health professional or authorities) - is if you're at risk of harm. Remember, as a young person you might ask the doctors to tell your parents something confidential.

Examples of risk of harm include:

- risk of harm or of harming others
- serious risk of self-harm
- risk of or the victim of physical or emotional abuse
- imminent risk of harming others
- some serious mental health issues such as psychosis, may need special consideration about the risk of harm and therefore the need to inform others

This information comes from the Royal Australian College of Physicians and covers all level of care at the GP clinic, in the community and in the hospital setting.



### Further information and useful links:

- <https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/confidential-health-care-for-adolescents-and-young-people.pdf>
- <https://au.reachout.com/articles/what-is-age-and-confidentiality>
- [http://www.lawstuff.org.au/nsw\\_law/topics/medical](http://www.lawstuff.org.au/nsw_law/topics/medical)
- <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/getting-help-from-a-general-practitioner-gp/>

These links are for your parent's information if you want to talk about your right to confidential healthcare

- [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/teenage\\_health\\_care\\_rights.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/teenage_health_care_rights.html)
- [https://blogs.rch.org.au/cah/files/2012/02/Teens\\_deserve\\_privacy.pdf](https://blogs.rch.org.au/cah/files/2012/02/Teens_deserve_privacy.pdf)

All these links were sourced in July 2018 and were up to date at time of publication

### Where can I go for further help?

People with congenital heart disease face unique challenges, treatment and often repeated surgeries for their entire lives, and support is critical at every stage of the journey – from when congenital heart disease is diagnosed through childhood, the teenage years and into adulthood.

HeartKids is the only national charity dedicated to supporting Australians of all ages impacted by congenital heart disease, the leading cause of infant death in Australia and a complex chronic disease requiring lifelong treatment.

For over forty years, HeartKids has provided timely support to infants, young people and adults living with congenital heart disease all across Australia. We also fund life-saving research, provide reliable and evidence-based information and advocate for the needs of impacted families.

Our support is a commitment for life.



Medtronic Australasia has supported the development of this factsheet for educational purposes, with no influence on the clinical content.

All HeartKids Ltd information is endorsed by our Clinical Advisory Committee.  
HeartKids information does not replace professional medical advice.  
People should ask their doctor any questions about diagnosis and treatment.  
HeartKids 2018.

