

Communicating with Doctors and Other Health Care Providers

Talking to doctors and other health care providers can be difficult, overwhelming and, at times scary. What advice would you give someone going to the doctor? Here are some tips to help you communicate with health care providers. These tips were suggested by adolescents in the “Making Healthy Connections” program.

- **Make sure to ask for a long enough appointment.** Sometimes appointments are very rushed. If you know that you will have a lot to talk about with your doctor, ask for an extended appointment so you don't run out of time.
- **Tell your doctor everything you can about yourself, what you do, and how you feel.** The more information the doctor has, the more helpful he/she can be.
- **Bring a list of questions and concerns.** It's easy to forget things when you're sitting there, in the doctor's office. A written list of questions, concerns, or other things you want to make sure to tell the doctor will help you remember everything that's been on your mind.
- **Say what you think** -- and be honest.
- Tell the doctor to be honest and tell you everything. **You're entitled to know all** about your condition, your treatment, and any options that might be available to you.
- **Be assertive.** Be nice, but persistent.
- **Ask questions.** Remember - there's no such thing as a stupid question. If you don't understand the answer to a question, ask the doctor to explain it again until you do understand it.
- **Write down what the doctor says.** That will help you remember later on.
- **Bring someone with you, if you'd like.** Sometimes it helps to have someone else there for support, to hear what the doctor has to say, or to ask questions that you might not think of.
- Ask your parents to wait outside the exam room so you **have some time alone to talk to the doctor, if you'd like.** Sometimes that helps the doctor focus on you and what you have to say. Your parents can come back in after you've had a chance to talk to the doctor yourself. Then they can ask their questions.
- **If you need help, ask for it.**
- When visiting a new doctor, **ask the doctor about his/her background and experience.**
- Even if you've seen your doctor for a long time, **it's ok to ask about the doctor's background** and what his/her experience has been.
- Call back if you have any questions after the appointment. Sometimes questions come up after you get home, or you forget something the doctor said. **It's ok to call and follow up with more questions.**

Learn about your insurance coverage.

What services are covered and what procedures do you have to follow to get those services.

Reproduced with permission. From "Transition Planning for Adolescents with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities: A Guide for Health Care Providers," edited by Stephanie Porter, Linda Freeman, and Lynne Reeves Griffin (2000). Produced by the Institute for Community Inclusion at Children's Hospital, Boston, as part of the Massachusetts Initiative for Youth with Disabilities, a project of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Supported in part by a grant from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, HRSA, DHHS.

