

TOPIC: Supporting Your Teen for Her First Visit to a Gynecologist

May 2017

Micro Training Course Developed by Kimberly Mouriquand, Family Support Specialist for the Alaska Center for Resource Families

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT: To earn 1.0 Hour of Training Credit, read through this self-study, fill out the "Check Your Understanding Questionnaire and Return to ACRF."

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends girls have their first visit with an obstetrician-gynecologist (OB/GYN) between the ages of 13 and 15. The first visit is typically a general physical and discussion about what a gynecologist does, what to expect for future appointments, and why future appointments may be necessary.

Things to Consider

- Be aware of your teen's trauma history. If there are circumstances in her past that may make a visit of this nature re-traumatizing, discuss with your teen and the doctor whether or not the visit is necessary at this time and what are alternative options.
- Remember confidentiality for your teen when making the appointment. Share only what is necessary for the doctor to be aware and prepared to work sensitively with your teen. Ask specifically if the doctor has been trained in trauma-informed practices and has worked with young people from rough places. If the teen makes the appointment, help her understand what questions to ask while making the appointment (*Is parking available? Do they need to arrive early?*) Offer to be present when she makes the appointment to answer any questions she may have.
- Talk with her about her family's medical history. Help her document basic medical information about her family (*Is there a history of high blood pressure, diabetes, cancers, substance dependence, smoking, etc.?*) Make sure to discuss both sides of the family. You or your teen might need to contact birth mom and dad and other family members, as well as the social worker to help her prepare. Also, help her gather her own medical history (hospitalizations, surgeries, names of and dosages of medications). If she has her period, the doctor is going to ask her the dates of her last menstrual flow.
- Encourage her to make a list of questions so that she doesn't forget while she's at the appointment. Ask her to write them down, or offer to write them down with her to keep track of them.
- Tell your teen about how the office visit will go. You may need to call the office and ask them to walk you through what the procedure is for their office. It could include arriving early to fill out paperwork, a nurse or medical assistant taking her to the room, getting her blood pressure, weight, height, and asking for a urine sample to check for pregnancy, urinary tract infections, and sexually transmitted infections.
- Ask the doctor to explain confidentiality to your teen so she knows what protected health information is and what can be shared with others.
- Ask for the doctor to meet with your teen before she is asked to disrobe for any exams to discuss her history and answer any questions. If the office doesn't operate that way, advocate for your teen or call another doctor. Most of us would not talk to strangers without our clothes on; it should be no different with a doctor.

- Talk with your teen about the importance of being honest with her doctor. It's important that she recognizes that giving false information to her doctor could prevent the doctor from helping her, so talk with her about being honest, even if it's uncomfortable.
- Talk with her about hygiene for the visit. While most first gynecological appointments do not include a pelvic exam, it is still important to stress being clean for the exam. If a pelvic exam is part of the visit, discuss whether or not the youth is due for her period during the time of the exam, as it may need to be postponed if a pap test is going to be done.
- If a pap test is going to be a part of the first visit, discuss abstaining from sex for 24 hours prior to the appointment. Semen can make interpreting pap test results difficult and normal redness that occurs after sex could be misinterpreted as an infection. Do not assume your teen knows this.
- Even if a pelvic exam is not part of the visit, ask the doctor to explain what happens during a pelvic exam.
- Talk about what happens after the appointment. If there were tests run, how will the doctor get her the results? Make sure she knows that if she forgot something to ask while there, she can call the doctor and ask the question later.
- If your teen does not want you in the room for the appointment, respect her wishes. Unless she is adamant, do not just drop her off for the appointment. Having you wait in the lobby will still provide a sense of support and you'll be there to help navigate after the appointment if needed.
- Most importantly, remind your teen she doesn't have to go through with any exams if she is uncomfortable with the doctor or the situation. She also does not have to see the doctor again if she didn't connect with her. These visits are very personal and a teen needs to feel safe and protected while at the doctor.

Especially for Dads: You may find yourself in the situation of having to support a young woman through this process. Treating your young person with respect, care, and love while understanding that they may request support from someone other than you, is the best way to navigate this situation. If your relationship allows, follow the guidance above. If the relationship is new, rocky, or it would just be best for your youth to have another person help her, make some connections for her with her permission. Does she have a close friend with a parent she's more comfortable with who would be available? Do you have a close friend or family member who your youth is comfortable with that could assist? The goal here is to make sure the youth is educated and supported through this appointment.

QUESTIONNAIRE

NOTE ABOUT REGS AND POLICIES: As licensed resource families with the State of Alaska, ensuring statutes and regulations are followed when helping youth navigate health care issues is important.

Making sure to communicate regularly with the youth's legal guardian about appointments, checkups, and prescription medications should be part of your monthly contact. It's important to know however, that in the state of Alaska, in some situations, a minor does have the ability to consent to certain health related situations without a parent or legal guardian's consent or presence. Alaska Statutes 25.20.025 provides situations where a minor can consent to general medical care, family planning and contraceptive care, as well as pregnancy related care without the consent of a parent or legal guardian. It's recommended you discuss these possibilities with your youth's social worker and/or guardian ad litem, to better understand whether your youth has the legal ability to consent to health related situations on their own.

Additional Resources:

For a good handout to use with your teen, go to *Frequently Asked Questions Especially for Teens* handout from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

<http://www.acog.org/-/media/For-Patients/faq150.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20170316T1740419927>

Health Care Coverage for Youth in Foster Care—And After Child Welfare Information Gateway

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/health-care-foster/>

Video Series and Resources for Youth: Preparing for Adulthood: Taking Charge of My Own Health Care

<http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/series.asp?se=43>