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## **Adolescent Confidentiality Policy<sup>1</sup>**

As children and adolescents mature, both physiologically and socially, they begin developing their own identity. They gradually increase control over and responsibility for their own lives as they transition towards healthy adulthood. Teenagers acquire independence and autonomy at varying rates and at different ages.

In addition, adolescents have special health considerations, some of which arise from their behaviors and the behaviors of their peer group. We know that teenagers often avoid talking about sensitive issues (with parents, teachers, and even peers) because they worry about **confidentiality**.

To provide our teenage patients with excellent care, we tell them, and their parents, that conversations we have with them in private *remain private* and confidential. To that end, and beginning at age 13, it is *generally up to the teenager* whether they want to have a parent present for the entire visit when they see us. As they become older, *we expect to see parents, but for only part of the visit*.

To support our working relationship with our patients, we work hard to offer nonjudgmental support and advice. When concerns arise during private conversations with teenagers that we feel should be shared with parents, we work to help teens find ways to discuss such issues openly and honestly. When it is pertinent, we tell them that *privacy* and *secrets* differ (explaining for example, that one is healthy and the other is not). At times, and only with their permission, we will help facilitate the process of sharing sensitive information with parents.

In rare instances, when a patient poses a severe risk to him or herself, or another person, or we believe that a teenager's safety is being compromised, we will break confidentiality, and we explain this to our patient.

Please advise us of any specific concerns you have regarding this policy, the emotional health of your adolescent, or any behaviors that you believe pose a risk to your child's well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy arises from a large literature on adolescent health care, and what we believe is ethically correct. It is also in accordance with Massachusetts law.