

Engaging Adolescents in the Care Management Process

Why is it Important to Engage Adolescents in the Care Management Process?

A Real-Life NC InCK Example:

A mother sought the assistance of a Family Navigator for help handling her 16-year-old son's hesitancy to attend therapy, as well as his academic and behavioral challenges at school. She asked the Family Navigator to speak with her son, a request which led the Family Navigator to first establish a rapport with the son, learning of his passion for football. This information helped the group to shift their focus toward something he was passionate about - returning to the football team - which also motivated him to begin attending therapy. The mother and Family Navigator coordinated with the son's school and football coach to create a plan he agreed to: if he passed four out of his five classes, he could rejoin the football team. The son successfully achieved this goal and rejoined the football team. This collaborative approach between the family and the Family Navigator empowered the son, reduced the mother's stress, and helped to strengthen their relationship.

Section 1: Communicating with Parents/Guardians about Involving Adolescents in Care Management

Talking to the parent/guardian about why it is important to involve adolescents in care management:

- Involving adolescents in conversations about their health is developmentally appropriate and can help prepare them to be independent adults who can more confidently navigate the health care system.
- Adolescents are more likely to follow through on plans that include their perspective compared to plans given to them by their parents or providers.

How to begin conversations with adolescents and their parent/guardian:

- Ask the parent/guardian if you can speak to the adolescent about what goals they would like to work on. Offer the parent options that may make them feel more comfortable, such as including the parent/guardian in the initial conversation with the adolescent, or approaching goals after a rapport is established with the parent/guardian.
- Explain confidentiality (see below) to both the parent/guardian and the adolescent upfront.
- When speaking to the adolescent, explain your role using easy-to-understand language. Confirm the member's preferred name, pronouns, and other details to support effective communication. Let them know that you value their perspective and want to know what is important to them so that they can be the driver of their health care goals and social needs.

Section 2: Consent and Confidentiality Laws When Working with Adolescents

Providing adolescents with confidential care results in better social and health outcomes. When adolescents are assured of confidentiality, they are more likely to seek health care and are more open with their provider. In general, North Carolina laws allow adolescents to consent independently to some health services related to

sexual and/ or reproductive health, pregnancy, mental health, and substance use. There are important exceptions, however. For example, teens cannot consent to an abortion, (*for more detailed information, reference the **Adolescent Health and NC Law** document below*). When adolescents provide consent independently, they typically have the right to control information related to that care (health records, etc.)

It will be important to confirm your entity's guidelines in regard to safeguarding the Protected Health Information (PHI) of minors before making commitments about confidentiality to adolescents and parents.

Regardless of confidentiality provisions, if there are acute concerns for member safety, providers must abide by mandated reporting requirements.

How to approach consent and confidentiality with adolescents and their parent/guardian:

- Explain confidentiality to the adolescent and their parent/guardian in the very beginning, so that there is a mutual understanding about what information can and cannot be shared.
- Inform parents/guardians that privacy protections can help adolescents feel comfortable being more open with providers, seeking health care services more often, and developing health care autonomy.
- Many teens will want to know if you will tell their parents what you've talked about. It can be helpful to explicitly outline confidentiality guidelines in simple terms, such as saying, "The information you share will not be shared without your permission unless you, or someone else, are at risk of, or currently being, hurt."

Resources:

[Information for Teens: What You Need to Know About Privacy](#) when seeking health care

[Training slides on consent and confidentiality from UNC School of Government](#)

Section 3: Involving Adolescents in Goal Development

After addressing roles and expectations, actively engage adolescents in the care-management process in a way that interests them. Use open-ended questions that center on the adolescent's perspective and focus on strengths and interests before addressing problem areas. Beginning by discussing interests and hobbies can help to build rapport and gain a better understanding of the adolescent's goals and aspirations. Explain that the adolescent can work on *ANY* goal of importance to them, not just health care goals. When asking goal-related questions, considering one's approach is crucial. For example, if a Family Navigator quickly goes through the questions like a checklist and does not attempt to allow the conversation to flow naturally, then it may not feel genuine and the adolescent may restrict their responses.

Suggestions on how to phrase questions to find out which goals are important to each adolescent:

- What are some things that are important in your life right now? (ex: people, interests, activities, etc.)
- What is something about your life that worries you?
- If you could change one thing about your life, what would that be?
- If we could work on one thing together to improve in your life, what would that be?
- What questions do you have about your health/ health care?
- What is something positive you have done in the past to help improve your life/health? How did you do it? Why did you do it? Can we take what you learned from that and do something else positive now?

For any goal, assess not only their desire to achieve the goal, but also their confidence and readiness in achieving it. Often teens desire specific positive outcomes, but feel helpless in terms of how to achieve them. Assure them that you are there to help in that process.

Section 4: Involving Adolescents in Care-Team Meetings

Family Navigators have the option to invite adolescents to participate in care-team meetings. Family Navigators can use the tips below to help adolescents feel like active participants in their care team, rather than viewing it as a team of adults meeting to talk about them without their input. Adolescent participation can enhance care-team relationships and boost all participants' motivation to work toward goal achievement. Communicating with teens directly, explaining information freely and clearly, and parental encouragement may be effective strategies for encouraging adolescent participation and decision-making ([Journal of Adolescent Health](#)).

Suggestions on how to incorporate adolescents in care-team meetings:

- Involve the adolescent in agenda-setting prior to the meeting and discuss who will be present at the meeting.
- If possible, speak to the adolescent about what information they are comfortable sharing and what they prefer to keep confidential.
- Inform parent/guardian and care team members of the agenda prior to the meeting and encourage them to allow the adolescent to speak openly without judgment. Set ground rules for communication.
- Actively engage the adolescent during the care-team meeting by prompting them to speak.
- Allow the adolescent to express their needs; their priorities may be different from the rest of the group's.
- If there are sensitive topics that need to be discussed, consider inviting the adolescent to only a portion of the meeting.

Resources:

Click here for tips on hosting a virtual care team meeting: [Guide to Virtual Team Meetings](#)

[NC InCK Guide to Integrated Care Teams](#)

Section 5: Developing Rapport and Collaboration to Sustain Engagement

Establishing trust and rapport is key to sustaining engagement with any age group, but it is especially important for young people. The NC InCK model aims to engage families for at least one year, so the focus on relationship-building is vital.

Suggestions on how to sustain engagement:

- Listen for what is important to the adolescent. This establishes that they are driving the process.
- Highlight things, people, or events they've identified as important to them. This shows them that you have listened, and that you care. Use what you learn in these conversations as a foundation for goal-setting and sustained engagement.
- Tailor the approach to the age and development level of the adolescent. For example, what may be appropriate for a 13-year-old versus a 17-year-old may be vastly different.
- Promote the adolescent's leadership role in the goal-setting and goal-tracking process by encouraging them to assess progress

- Speak with the parent/guardian and adolescent about privacy boundaries (ex: how often the Family Navigator meets with the adolescent 1:1)

Section 6: Managing Conflict and Facilitating Compromise Between Adolescents and Parents/Guardians

- **Focus on common goals:** Encourage the adolescent and parent/guardian to view each other as allies with the common goal of keeping the teen safe and seeing them succeed. Find ways to link the adolescent's goals with the parent/guardian's goals whenever possible. For example, if the adolescent wants to earn more freedom and the parent/guardian wants their teen to improve certain behaviors, negotiate privileges the adolescent can earn when specific behavioral expectations are met.
- **Speak thoughtfully:** Encourage the use of "I" statements when expressing feelings and making requests.
- **Brainstorm solutions:** Encourage the adolescent and parent/guardian to list possible solutions to the conflict together.
- **Decide together:** Encourage the adolescent and parent/guardian to decide on a solution together when both parties are calm enough to make rational decisions. Don't try this when anyone is angry.

Resources:

[De-escalating conflict between parents and teens](#)

[Breaking the Cycle: 8 Strategies for Dealing with Conflict with your Young Teen](#)

[Talking with Teens](#)

Section 7: Proactive Skill-building Resources

- Proactive health care goals for adolescents: [A Family Toolkit: Pediatric-to-Adult Health Care Transition](#)
- Life skills: [Life Skills Checklist](#)
- Downloadable guides on building financial literacy: [Keys to Your Financial Future](#), [Practical Money Skills](#)
- Educational and vocational skill-building resources: [GetMyFuture](#), [Legacy Youth Leadership](#)

Example Proactive Skill-building Goals for Shared Action Plan (SAP):

GOAL	WHO	IS DOING WHAT
Member will work on becoming more independent with managing their own health care.	Member Parent/Guardian Family Navigator PCP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The member will practice making their own health care appointments and asking their Primary Care Provider (PCP) questions. ▪ The parent/guardian will model how to schedule appointments and prepare member with what information to provide. ▪ The Family Navigator will provide the family with the Pediatric-to-Adult Health Care Transition Toolkit and consult with the PCP about the goal. ▪ The PCP will advocate for one-on-one time with the member during visits and encourage the member to ask questions.
Member would like to work toward obtaining employment	Member Parent/Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Family Navigator will provide resources from GetMyFuture (interest assessment, resume building, job search, etc.). ▪ The member will complete the interest assessment to identify areas of interest for employment.

	Family Navigator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Family Navigator will follow up with the member on the outcome of the interest assessment and refer the member to the NCWorks NextGen Program. The Family Navigator will then follow up two weeks after this referral to ensure the member has accessed the program successfully. ▪ The parent/guardian will help with role-playing interview skills.
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For more information and resources on addressing Adolescent and Young-Adult Health, click here for the full NC InCK guide: [Adolescent and Young Adult \(AYA\) Health Guide](#)