

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUTH ABOUT A HEALTH CARE PROXY



TALKING TO A YOUNG PERSON ABOUT DESIGNATING A HEALTH CARE PROXY CAN BE A CHALLENGING CONVERSATION.

NO ONE LIKES TO THINK ABOUT EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG.

WE'VE PUT TOGETHER SOME TALKING POINTS TO ASSIST WITH THE CONVERSATION AND HELP GUIDE YOUNG ADULTS DURING THIS CRUCIAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.



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USE CLEAR, SIMPLE LANGUAGE

Health care decisions can be complex. Explain the role of a health proxy in simple terms. A health care proxy is someone the youth trusts to make medical decisions for them if they are unable to communicate their wishes. Break down complex ideas into simpler concepts, like ...

"Do you want doctors to try everything to keep you alive if something happens to you?"

FOCUS ON TRUST AND RESPONSIBILITY

Emphasize that naming a health care proxy is about choosing someone the youth trusts to make medical decisions on their behalf. This person should be someone who understands the youth's values and preferences.

"Who would you trust to make medical decisions for you if you're not able to?"

INVOLVE THE YOUTH IN THE PROCESS

The youth should be the central participant in the conversation. Ask them who they would feel comfortable naming as a health care proxy. Remind them they're not limited to family members; mentors or other trusted adults may be a good choice.



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NORMALIZE THE CONVERSATION

It's natural to feel uncomfortable discussing emergency healthcare. Reassure the youth that this conversation is just about planning for their safety and well-being, and it doesn't mean anything is wrong with them. Acknowledge any fears or anxieties the youth may have about their health, future, or making these decisions.

Focus on being prepared.

REVISIT THE TOPIC

The decision does not need to be made immediately and should be an ongoing conversation. Continue the discussion periodically, especially if the circumstances change. Let the youth know it's okay to take time to think it over and they can change their mind. There is no need for a rushed decision.

Respect their wishes while providing guidance and support.

DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING THEIR OWN CHOICES

For youth-in-care, independence and control over their own lives are significant. The health care proxy decision is one of their rights and responsibilities in taking charge of their health care. The youth might want to make this decision on their own.

ENCOURAGE OPEN DIALOGUE

Provide an open environment where the youth feels comfortable asking questions about what a health care proxy is and what it entails. Be patient and open to answering their concerns. Using examples can help clarify the concept.



Pro Tip: Explain a situation where a health care proxy might be needed — like if the youth were unconscious and needed someone to decide about medical treatment.

INVOLVE LEGAL OR MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

If there are questions about the legalities of naming a health care proxy, consider involving a legal or medical professional to provide additional information and guidance.



Pro Tip: For youth who qualify for Developmental Disabilities Services and a capacity assessment has been completed, talk with the Case Manager to determine if a health care proxy is appropriate.