what's up?

special needs & disabilities

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What's it all about?

Teens with special needs and disabilities are at risk for developing long term physical, mental, or emotional health problems. About 15% of our nation's teens have special needs, including asthma, attention deficit disorder, autism spectrum disorders, cancer, cerebral palsy, and other chronic health conditions and developmental disabilities. As these children grow into teenagers, it is important for adults to reinforce the message that teens with special needs are unique individuals and cannot be categorized simply by their special need or disability. It is critical that parents, teachers, and other adults provide ample opportunity for these teens to experience life to the fullest, including education, recreation, friendship, and work opportunities. Adults will need to work closely with teens to help create meaningful, desirable opportunities and to support them so they are fully included in their community and school. Strategies and resources are available to help teens with special needs develop meaningful friendships, recreation and work opportunities. See the resources listed on the back of this fact sheet.

Why does it matter?

Adolescence is often a difficult time. Teens with special health needs and disabilities may face even more challenges. Students with disabilities may be at increased risk for physical abuse, victimization by their peers, substance abuse and thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts. To grow into healthy adults, adolescents with special needs and disabilities, like all teens, need a caring and safe environment and help developing a positive view of their future.

What are the details?

- Nationally, more than 15% of adolescents 12 to 17 years old have a special health care need.
- In the U.S., boys are twice as likely as girls to received special education services.
- Approximately 8% of adolescents 10 to 17 years of age have some type of activity limitation.
- About 1-in-15 adolescents in Washington have a serious behavioral or emotional problem.

According to the 2002 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey:

- About 22% of 8th and 12th graders and nearly 25% of 10th graders report that they have a physical, emotional or learning disability or long-term health problem.
- More than 1-in-4 8th and 12th graders and 1-in-3 10th graders with disabilities report they had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year compared to about 1-in-10 students without disabilities.
- Students with disabilities, particularly younger students, are more likely to be the victims of bullying than students without disabilities. More than 40% of 8th graders with disabilities say they had been bullied in the past month compared to less than a third of their peers without disabilities.
- About a third of students with disabilities said they had been physically abused by an adult compared to about 10% to 15% of students without disabilities.
- Nearly 30% of 10th graders with disabilities report using tobacco in the past month compared to less than 20% of 10th graders without disabilities.

What can I do?

To ease the transition from childhood to adolescence, you can help a teen with special needs achieve greater independence. Here are some tips from the Adolescent Health Transition project.

Parents, family members and teachers:

- Continue to allow the teen to help with family chores.
- Continue teaching the teen normal self-help skills as well as skills related to the special health care need.
- Continue to encourage hobbies and leisure activities and start exploring new activities available in high school such as sports, band and choir.
- Help identify and build on the teen's strengths and talents.
- Discuss career interests and encourage the teen to take advantage of opportunities to explore different careers.
- Help the teen find work and volunteer activities.
- Assess his or her perception and basic knowledge of the special health care need and fill in the gaps of understanding.
- Discuss healthy eating and provide teens with opportunities to participate in regular physical activity.
- Help the teen begin keeping a medical history, including conditions, operations, treatments (dates, doctors, recommendations) and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) if applicable.
- If on an IEP, encourage teen to participate in IEP meetings.

Parents and family members:

- Begin helping your teen take responsibility for making and keeping his or her own medical appointments and ordering supplies.
- Begin exploring health care financing for your soon-to-be young adult.
- Discuss sexuality with your teen including the changes associated with puberty, reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections and necessary medical exams.
- Explore support groups if your teen's interested.
- Help identify and be involved with adult or older teen role models.
- With your teen, begin to identify with whom they will eventually be receiving their health care as an adult.

Health care providers:

- Assess his or her perception and basic knowledge of the special health care need and fill in the gaps of understanding.
- Discuss sexuality with the teen, including reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections, necessary medical exams and changes associated with puberty.
- Help the teen begin keeping a medical history, including conditions, operations, and treatments.
- Facilitate the transition to an adult health care provider.

hot links!

Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies and Answers for Special Kids (ASK) Line
1-800-322-2588 or 1-800-883-6388/TTY

Adolescent Health Transition Project http://depts.washington.edu/healthtr/

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities www.nichcy.org

The Center for Children with Special Health Care Needs www.cshcn.org

People First 1-800-758-1123

Washington Parents Are Vital in Education (PAVE) www.washingtonpave.com

Family Educator Partnership Project (FEPP) 1-888-754-8798; www.arcwa.org/FEPP.htm

Washington State ARC 1-888-754-8798; www.arcwa.org

Washington State Insurance Advisors 1-800-605-6299; www.insurance.wa.gov

Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) 360-438-3167; www1.dshs.wa.gov/dvr/

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey 2002 www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/

Washington State Department of Health
DOH Pub 910-131 11/2003
www.doh.wa.gov

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.

Washington State Department of Health

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Sincerely,
Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team

PRINTING SPECIFICATIONS

Title:	**What's Up? Information for Adults Who Care About Teens "Special Needs & Disabilities" Fact Sheet**
Size:	8.5 x 11
Paper stock:	80# text white gloss
Ink color:	4-color process
Special instructions:	2-sided printing with full bleeds
DOH Pub #:	910-131