

## Referrals and Linkages to Youth-Friendly Health Care Services

### What are Youth-Friendly Health Care Services?

Youth-friendly health care services are those that attract young people, respond to their needs, and retain young clients for continuing care. Youth-friendly services are based on a comprehensive understanding of what young people want and need (rather than being based only on what providers believe youth need). Adolescents are often reluctant to seek health care services and it is important to find ways to offer care in a manner that adolescents perceive as welcoming, comfortable, and responsive.

The goal is to provide all young people with services they trust and which they feel are designed for them. Key components of youth-friendly health care services include:

- Providing accessible location and hours;
- Creating a warm and respectful environment;
- Maintaining confidentiality;
- Ensuring opportunities for private conversations;
- Providing age-appropriate explanations for adolescents to give informed consent for services;
- Offering comprehensive services; and
- Encouraging youth to involve parents/guardians while respecting their privacy<sup>1</sup>.

### Developing an Effective Referral System

It is important to recognize that the youth we serve in our teen pregnancy prevention programs (TPP) have many different needs that we aren't always able to address directly through the TPP program. To ensure that the youth we serve are able to access needed health care and other critical services, it is important for TPP programs to have a system in place for referring and linking youth to youth-friendly services that are available in their communities.

*Types of Services to Consider Including in your Referral System:*

- Reproductive Health (e.g., family planning, STI testing and treatment, etc.)
- Mental Health (e.g., depression, suicide, etc.)
- Substance Abuse
- Primary Care (e.g., well check, vaccines, etc.)
- Non-health care services (e.g., housing, education, job training, etc.)

### Referral vs. Referral System

#### Referral

The term "referral" is used to describe a process of assisting youth in obtaining preventive health services through a variety of activities, including, but not limited to, connecting students to youth-friendly providers and support services.

#### Referral System

A set of resources and processes to increase youth awareness of school-based and community-based health service providers, increase referral of youth to school-based and community-based health service providers, and increase the number of adolescents receiving youth-friendly health care services.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/health-care-providers/teen-friendly-health-visit.htm>

It is not enough to simply have a list of providers that program facilitators can hand out to a young person upon request. It is important that TPP programs know the organization to which they are referring youth in order to be confident that the services they receive will be youth-friendly and respectful. For the young person, how they are treated by a provider on the other end of the TPP program's referral will reflect not only on that provider, but also on the TPP program.

For those reasons, program should dedicate sufficient time and resources to establishing an effective referral system to ensure that the referrals made to youth will result in high-quality, youth-friendly services. There are several key steps involved in establishing an effective referral system, including:

- Identifying and recruiting organizations and healthcare professionals within the community/communities that provide a wide range of high quality healthcare services for youth.
- Assessing identified organizations and providers to ensure services provided are youth friendly and accessible (<http://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/teenfriendlyhealthvisit.html#elements>). It is recommended to visit potential youth-friendly providers to collect information on ease of access, location, transportation options, accessibility, and receptiveness of staff.
- Developing protocols and procedures for how referrals to health care services will be made by the grantee and partner organizations and how often the information will be updated to ensure accuracy.
- Developing and disseminating a provider referral guide for youth and their families.
- Identifying and training key staff responsible for making referrals to youth to ensure awareness of available services and familiarity with referral protocols and procedures.

For a referral system to work optimally, relationships between service providers should be formalized and explicit referral procedures agreed upon. Having a systematic process will increase not only the number of adolescents referred for needed supports and services, but also the quality. The intent of a referral system is to go through a process, as outlined above, to systematically identify high quality youth-friendly providers. This will help ensure the services received will be in the best interest of the youth. Having a referral system in place will also allow opportunities for continuous quality improvement (CQI) to ensure that organizations to which youth are referred continue to offer youth-friendly services and to minimize barriers to receiving the services needed.

## Seven Core Components of a Referral System

**Policy:** Highlight and share confidentiality and consent policies for minors, develop policy assessments, conduct gap analysis and educate key decision-makers and stakeholders.

**Referral staff:** Identify and select designated referral staff, conduct staff training, ensure organizational engagement and awareness and plan for self-referrals.

**Procedures:** Determine who should make a referral, when a referral can be made, what steps are involved in making a referral and how to make a referral.

**Referral guide:** Develop, design, produce, and publish your own guide, and determine best practices for updating and disseminating the guide.

**Communications and marketing:** Develop a plan, engage adolescents and ensure school faculty and staff awareness.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** Determine options for monitoring and evaluating, as well as questions for guiding the development of the monitoring and the evaluation system.

**Management and oversight:** Identify core tasks for the management and oversight team.

[http://www.ncsddc.org/sites/default/files/docs/referral\\_system\\_implementation\\_kit\\_020615\\_.pdf](http://www.ncsddc.org/sites/default/files/docs/referral_system_implementation_kit_020615_.pdf)

The following resources provide excellent examples of how to establish and maintain a high quality, youth-friendly referral system as part of your program. Please keep in mind that these health referral systems are applicable for use with any youth-serving organization and any type of service requiring a referral (mental health, substance abuse, housing, educational supports, etc.) in addition to sexual health services.

## Project Connect

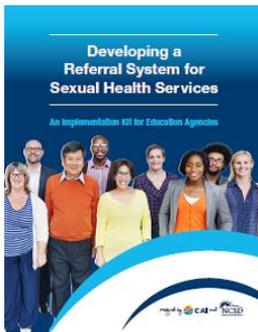


The Project Connect Health Systems Intervention (Project Connect) provides step-by-step instructions and tools to help organizations develop effective referral systems. The [Project Connect](#) website includes an implementation guide that walks an organization through:

- ✓ How to identify providers
- ✓ Questions to ask when assessing youth friendliness of provider services, including sample scripts
- ✓ Developing a referral guide, including templates that can be adapted for use
- ✓ Practical implementation tips
- ✓ Key considerations when determining who to train and what to train on
- ✓ Two detailed case studies of how Project Connect was implemented in Los Angeles and Detroit

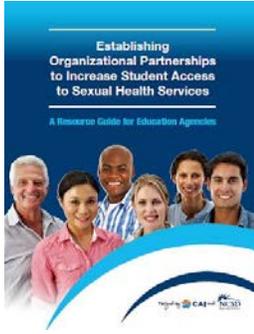
Project Connect is an evidence-based and scalable intervention, which focuses on identifying providers who are already providing high quality youth-friendly services and linking youth to those resources, making it a low-cost and manageable structural intervention. For more information on integrating Project Connect into your Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, visit the Project Connect website: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/projects/connect/>.

## Referral System Implementation Kit



*Developing a Referral System for Sexual Health Services* is a step-by-step toolkit developed by CAI and the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSID) and builds on the core aspects of Project Connect. The [implementation kit](#) is applicable to any youth-serving organization, as it provides a framework for developing and implementing a referral system to link youth to school- or community-based supportive services (e.g., sexual health, housing support, mental health, after school activities, job training, and substance abuse treatment). The implementation kit outlines in great detail the seven core components (listed in text box on page 2) of a referral system and provides lessons learned along with

specific tools for each component that you can download and use to begin implementing a high quality and sustainable referral system in your community. Examples of tools and templates in the kit include: **a sample policy assessment, staff training checklists, how to effectively make a referral, a sample marketing plan, and sample tracking forms.**



A companion resource, *Establishing Organizational Partnerships to Increase Student Access to Sexual Health Services*, is also available on the website. This resource highlights the positive impact organizational partnerships have on increasing access to sexual health services (SHS) for youth and shows how to form strategic partnerships with youth-friendly, community-based, healthcare organizations. To see the full documents and all the downloadable tools and resources please visit <http://www.ncsddc.org/resources/developing-referral-system-sexual-health-services-implementation-tool-kit>.

## Additional Resources

### **Clinic Assessment of Youth-Friendly Services Tool**

This tool is designed to help assessment teams, project managers, trainers, supervisors, and others collect detailed information on the range and quality of services provided to adolescents at a given facility or within a given program in order to make services more youth-friendly.

<http://www2.pathfinder.org/site/DocServer/mergedYFStool.pdf?docID=521>

### **A Rapid Assessment of Youth-Friendly Reproductive Health Services. *Technical Guidance Series***

This report provides guidance on conducting assessments using a *Clinic Assessment of Youth-friendly Services Tool*, and includes detailed findings from assessments that were conducted under the African Youth Alliance (AYA) projects. It also includes lessons learned from the assessment process.

<http://www.pathfinder.org/publications-tools/pdfs/Technical-Guidance-Series-Number-4-A-Rapid-Assessment-of-Youth-Friendly-Reproductive-Health-Services-1.pdf>

### **Best Practices for Youth-Friendly Clinical Services (Advocates for Youth)**

This paper provides research-based information on youth-friendly clinical services specifically for family planning clinicians and other professionals who provide health care for youth, and offers an overview of the recent medical and public health literature regarding key components of youth-friendly clinical services.

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/1347--best-practices-for-youth-friendly-clinical-services>

### **Characteristics of Youth-Friendly Clinical Services**

This tip sheet provides an overview of the key characteristics of youth-friendly clinical services as it relates to youth-friendly programming, youth-friendly providers, and youth-friendly health facilities.

[http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/sites/default/files/TipSheet\\_CharacteristicsYouth-FriendlyClinicalServices\\_0.pdf](http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/sites/default/files/TipSheet_CharacteristicsYouth-FriendlyClinicalServices_0.pdf)

### **Youth-Friendly Services: A Manual for Service Providers (Engender Health)**

*Youth-Friendly Services* is a training curriculum intended to sensitize all staff of a health care facility to the provision of youth-friendly services.

<http://www.engenderhealth.org/pubs/gender/youth-friendly-services.php>

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