

MOH mental health guidelines for young persons: feedback by 8 December

Description

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The Ministry of Health (MOH) has opened a public consultation on **mental health guidelines for young persons**, and anyone can send in views until 6pm on 8 December 2026. The draft deals with a question many Singapore families have quietly wondered about: can a teenager see a counsellor or therapist without a parent signing off?

Right now, the answer varies. Singapore treats a person as an adult at 21, but there is no minimum age at which a young person can consent to mental health services alone. MOH says practices on parental consent differ from one setting to another.

Why MOH is asking now

MOH cites two numbers from local studies. About one in three young persons aged 10 to 18 reported symptoms such as depression and anxiety, based on the 2023 Singapore Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) study. Yet 70% of those with symptoms did not seek professional support, according to the 2024 National Youth Mental Health Study.

The ministry also says the need for parental consent is one reason some under-21s hesitate to ask for help. Age matters too. Roughly one-third of people with mental health conditions see them start before 14, rising to nearly half by 18.

What the mental health guidelines for young persons propose

The consultation paper splits support into three tiers and sets consent rules for each. Here is how it reads in plain terms:

- Basic care, such as emotional support, helplines and text services, can be given even without parental consent.
- Mental health screening, and assessments that do not lead to a diagnosis, would need parental consent for those below 13.

- Psychological therapies, school counselling and complementary therapies such as art or music therapy: parental consent should be sought first.
- If a parent cannot be reached or refuses, a professional may still go ahead when three conditions are all met: it is in the young personâ??s best interest, the young person is at least 13, and the professional judges them mature enough to understand the risks and benefits.
- Psychiatric diagnosis and medication fall under the Singapore Medical Councilâ??s ethical guidelines instead.

The age of 13 comes with an asterisk. Care professionals are told to use their judgement case by case, even where the recommended age range does not apply.

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Determining if Mental Health Services Should be Provided in the Absence of Parental Consent

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Tiered Consent Requirements

14. In general, care professionals should seek and obtain consent from paren legal guardians before rendering services to young persons below 21 years

15. However, insisting on parental consent may not always be practical or i young person's best interests. Parents may be unavailable or young per may only feel comfortable seeking help if they know their privacy wi respected, especially for sensitive matters like mental health. Thus, guidelines provide guidance to help care professionals determine if mental h services should be provided in the absence of parental consent. professionals are encouraged to exercise professional judgement and con the unique circumstances of each individual case, even where the recomme age range may not apply.

16. We propose tiering consent requirements according to the nature and inte of services across the three categories of mental health support.

17. **Basic Care**: We propose that these can be provided even in the absen parental consent as they are intended to be timely in attending to young per distressing emotions and identifying their mental health needs.

    a. For mental health screening and mental health assessment which doe result in a diagnosis, we recommend for parental consent to be obtaine young persons below 13 years old*.

18. **Psycho-Therapeutic Services**: Parental consent should be sought. W parental consent cannot be obtained, the care professional may render t services to the young person provided that all of the following conditions are

    a. The care professional has assessed that it is in the young person's interest to receive the intervention, even if parental consent is not obta

    b. The young person is at least 13 years old*;

    c. The professional has assessed that the young person has sufficient ma to make an informed decision, with an understanding of the risks

Source: Ministry of Health

Parents stay in the picture

The draft does not push parents aside. It separates three things: consent (permission before a service starts), notification (telling parents about the care) and involvement (joining sessions or helping at home). Even where consent was not obtained, professionals are asked to work towards bringing parents in, though it may take time to convince a teen to tell them first.

Confidentiality has limits. What a young person shares should stay private, but if their safety is at risk, the professional may need to tell parents or the relevant authorities.

How to give feedback

Submit your views through the online form at go.gov.sg/youth-mental-health-access. The consultation opened at 10am on 11 November 2026 and closes at 6pm on 8 December 2026. The full consultation paper is linked from MOHâ??s announcement, so you can read the examples and questions before you reply.

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This is a draft only, and MOH has said it does not yet represent final policy. Students, parents, teachers, counsellors and clinicians are all fair game to respond.

Involvement of Parents in the Young Person's Care Journey

28. Obtaining parental consent should be distinguished from involving parents i young person's care journey.

    a. ***Parental consent*** involves the explicit permission obtained from a p or legal guardian of a young person before he/she can receive mental h services. This is typically sought and obtained before the servic rendered.

    b. ***Parental notification*** is the act of informing or updating parents about child's care. It does not amount to obtaining their consent.

    c. ***Parental involvement*** refers to the active participation of parents in child's care journey. This may include attending therapy sessions along their child, as well as providing support outside therapy sessions.

29. Even in situations where parental consent is not obtained, care professio should work towards involving parents in the young person's care journey. includes having the parents cooperate and render complementary suppo home. This may take time, especially in convincing the young person to first their parents about their issues and gradually allowing their parents to su them in their recovery journey.

30. When informing or updating parents about the predicament and care progre the young person, care professionals should exercise discretion on how information to share. Care professionals can help parents understand the of information and updates they can expect to receive.

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Source: Ministry of Health

If you or your child need support now

You do not have to wait for any guideline to reach out. The national mindline is 1771, and the HealthHub MindSG page has self-care tools for adults and young people. For a wider look at how community services are being organised, see our piece on the HealthierMind SG network.

We also covered the NPHS 2025 results on distress and help-seeking and how much sleep adults need , which is a quiet but useful place to start on wellbeing.

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