Colorado’s Youth Mental Health Act (HB 19-1120)

What Colorado’s teen consent law means for parents and young people

What changed

In May 2019, Colorado lowered the age at which a young person can consent to their own outpatient mental health care from 15 to 12. The law was passed to make it easier for kids and teens to get help, with the goal of reducing youth suicide.

What it means

- Anyone 12 or older can seek and receive outpatient therapy with or without a parent’s or guardian’s knowledge or consent.
- To see a 12- to 17-year-old without a parent’s consent, the therapist must believe the young person is seeking therapy knowingly and voluntarily, and that therapy is clinically needed for their wellbeing.
- The therapist must talk with the young person about the value of involving or notifying their parents, and encourage it whenever doing so wouldn’t be harmful.
- If the therapist believes the young person can’t manage their own care, or is at imminent risk of harming themselves or others, the therapist may notify a parent or guardian without the young person’s consent. Whenever possible, this is discussed with the young person first.

What it means for your family

- Clients 12 and older sign their own consent forms as the responsible party. Parents who are involved in their child’s care are encouraged to sign as well, to show they understand how therapy works and the practice’s policies.
- What a client 12 or older shares in therapy is confidential. Their therapist can talk with others about it only with the client’s permission, preferably in writing.
- This may mean parents know less about the details of sessions than they’d like. That privacy is what allows a young person to trust their therapist and get the most out of therapy.

How I work with families: I share general information about how therapy is going, not the specifics. I’ll always let you know if I believe your child is in danger, and I welcome questions about what I would or wouldn’t share.

This summary is for general information and isn’t legal advice. Questions? Contact Sierra Glennon-Levin, LCSW · sierra@sierrawellbeing.com · (720) 263-2468 · Sierra Wellbeing PLLC
In crisis? Call or text 988, or call 911.