

Social Life and Personal Safety

Social Life

Many teens with 22q differences would like to have friends. They hope to be accepted by other teens but may need a bit of help to do so. Here are 3 main strategies that may be helpful.

Let the Teen Look Like a Teen

- Some teens with 22q11.2DS are shorter and/or look younger than their peers.
- Although children-sized clothing may fit them, these clothes may make them look juvenile. Adult clothes or makeup may make them look too grown up.
- Wearing clothes and sporting looks that are right for the teens' age may help them get accepted by their peers more easily.
- The clothes also need to be comfortable and practical.
- If possible, let the teens have a say in their haircut, makeup, and clothing.
- It is best to buy clothes in a financially responsible way (e.g. earn money and/or set up a budget).



Find Friends with Shared Interests

- Encourage the teen to join group activities that he/she will enjoy, such as sports, music, or art.
- When possible, join in person, not online.
- Being part of a group or a team allows teens to find friends who share similar interests.
- Group activities help teens learn to work with others. They can also provide opportunities for the teens to build relationships outside of the family.



Learn What's OK (and Not OK) in Public

- Teens with 22q differences may need help figuring out what is OK to say and do in the public.
- It is important for parents to teach (and remind) their teens.
- Teens who show acceptable behavior are more likely to fit in with their peers. They are also less likely to get in trouble at school or with the authorities.
- Touching private parts is normal and common among teens.
 - The touching becomes a problem if it is excessive or if it is in public (see box on the right);
 - Remind them that it's OK to let doctors and nurses check their private areas.

How to Help Teens Stop Touching Their Private Parts in Public

- Avoid wearing tight clothes
- Have clear definitions and examples:
 - Private body parts = Parts covered by underwear
 - Private vs. public places – Use the graphics in these appendices to teach what's OK to do in each place
 - [Healthy Bodies Appendix \(Girls\)](#): p. 9–20
 - [Health Bodies Appendix \(Boys\)](#): p. 8–19
- Be clear when teaching. For example, "Don't put your hands in your pants."
- Distract from self-touching with tasks that occupy hands.
- Don't shame or punish.

Social Life and Personal Safety (continued)

Personal Safety

Many people with 22q are not able to detect sarcasm or others' true motives. Some of them may not make good choices, but they cannot stop themselves. Some may also not notice problems or ask for help. Therefore, people with 22q are more likely to get into danger both in person and online. They may lose their money, be forced to have sex, get bullied or abused, and get into danger. Here are some safety tips.

Discuss Boundaries and Consent Before the Teen Goes Out

- Which is OK for the teen to do with friends, and with strangers?
 - Hold hands? Hugs? Kiss? Watch certain movies? Be alone together?
 - Exchange phone numbers? Address? Credit card numbers?
- Giving **consent** means saying yes to let something happen.
 - You can only touch another person or have sex if he/she says “yes”.
 - **Only a sober, happy, informed, unpressured “yes” means “yes”!**
 - If you don't want to be touched, say “no” firmly.
 - If someone says “no”, don't touch him/her.
 - Practise consent at home. Teens should learn to say “no” and accept a “no”. Parents should not force teens to hug or kiss a relative.



Plan the Outing

- Plan to meet at a public place and with multiple people;
- Make sure everyone's cell phones are charged;
- Teens: Tell your parents where you are going, who you are going with, and when you'll be home.
- Parents: Let the teen know they should call you if they feel unsafe or need you to pick them up quickly.



Stay Safe During the Outing

- Avoid drinking alcohol and using drugs.
- Watch your own drink and don't accept drinks from others.
- **If you feel unsafe**, call your parents to drive you home.

Watch out for unexplained mood, social withdrawal, and decreased appetite. These may be signs of bullying and abusive relationships.

References / Resources

- [Safer Partying Toolkit](#) – Toronto Public Health, Canada
- [Consent for kids](#) | [Tea Consent](#) – Blue Seat Studio, USA
- [Affirmative Consent](#) – The State University of New York
- [What is consent – Animation](#) – Newcastle University Student Health and Wellbeing Services, UK
- [The Healthy Bodies Toolkit for Girls](#) | [The Healthy Bodies Toolkit for Boys](#) – Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, USA
- Updated clinical practice recommendations for managing [\[children | adults\]](#) with 22q11.2 deletion syndrome – 2023
- Graphics from [Magnific.com](#)

Videos on Consent

Parents: Please watch these videos (<3 minutes each) on your own before re-watching suitable ones with your teen.

- [Consent for kids](#): This video talks about giving hugs and holding hands and less about sex. The content is more suitable for someone who is new to the concept of consent.
- [Tea Consent](#): (Contains coarse language). This video discusses sexual violence in a coded way. While the video does not address power differences and may lack cultural awareness, it is a great illustration of [affirmative consent](#) and the capacity to give consent for sex.
- [What is consent – Animation](#): It addresses many aspects of sexual consent. It is suitable for teens who are more mature and higher functioning.

Important: Also see our info sheet on [Online Safety](#).

