

Behavior Issues and Coping Strategies

Teenagers are experiencing a lot of hormonal changes. They often have behavior issues that frustrate parents and caregivers. Some of these issues also happen in teens in general, while others are related to aspects of the 22q11.2 deletion or duplication. Understanding and managing the possible sources may help reduce the frequency of the unpleasant behaviors. On this info sheet, we lay out the factors that are known to be related to behavioral problems. We then recommend management and coping strategies.

Behaviors that are Common in Teens (With or Without 22q Differences)

1. Figuring out who they are and what they believe

- Spending more time alone;
- Feeling misunderstood;
- Trying different clothing, makeup, activities etc.;
- Trying alcohol and drugs.

2. Exploring close relationships

- Being very close with friends;
- Doing whatever the friends do;
- Having a love interest;
- Having sex.

3. Getting used to a changing body

- Focusing a lot on looks (self and others);
- Taking a long time to prepare to go out;
- Being shy or self-aware.

4. Wanting to be more independent

- Breaking rules and pushing boundaries;
- Wanting to do things without parents' help;
- Rejecting parents' concerns and affection;
- Not wanting to share details about their lives;
- Becoming moody and tend to argue.

Problematic Behaviors

Behaviors are problematic when they:

- Have **severe or long-term consequences** such as legal trouble, failing school, or broken family relationships;
- Cause **physical or emotional harm** to the teen or other people.

Examples of problem behaviors include:

- Often using drugs or alcohol;
- Skipping classes or work;
- Refusing to go home;
- Hanging out with peers who are a bad influence;
- Having unprotected sex or many sex partners;
- Eating too much or too little in order to achieve certain body sizes;
- Temper outbursts that turn violent;
- Self-harm.

Aspects of 22q11.2 Differences that may Contribute to Behavioral Issues

Mental health issues

- [Anxiety disorders](#) (especially phobia);
- [Attention deficit hyperactive disorder \(ADHD\)](#);
- [Autism spectrum disorder \(ASD\)](#);

Additional health issues

- [Obstructive sleep apnea](#) or other sleep issues;
- [Movement disorders](#), e.g. jerking;
- [Epilepsy](#) (seizure disorder);
- [Thyroid](#) issues / Low calcium levels;
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness);
- Trouble with hearing and [eyesight](#);
- [Asthma](#).

Problems with thinking and learning

- Difficulty solving problems, remembering things etc.
- Other hidden disabilities.

Communication / Social-related difficulties

- Can't express themselves due to disorders related to language, [speech sound](#), [speech motor](#), or [voice](#);
- Can't get feelings, jokes, and hidden meanings;
- Show emotions in childlike ways;
- Don't realize they need help;
- Impulsivity – can't stop themselves.

Behavior Issues and Coping Strategies (continued)

Managing and Coping with Behavior Issues

1. Manage health conditions that may affect emotions and behaviors

- These include conditions related to both physical and mental health (see bottom section of the previous page);
- People with 22q differences may not notice or complain about their health problems. It is best to do all the recommended checks listed in the **Updated Clinical Practice Recommendations For Managing [Children | Adults] With 22q11.2 Deletion Syndrome**. Also available in checklist form for [Children](#) | [adults](#).

2. Create an environment with less stress

- People with 22q differences do better when:
 - They have a routine that suits them;
 - Things don't change around too much;
 - They aren't too tired (Try [improving sleep habits](#));
 - They aren't overwhelmed (Try giving only 1-2 choices at a time).

3. Work within the teen's limits

- People with 22q differences often have hidden disabilities. Regular checks (links in #1) include tests to see **what the person can really do**. Understanding the teen's limits and working within them can reduce stress and make things better for everyone.

4. Communicate in ways that the teen understand

- Give **one simple instruction at a time**.
 - Repeat instructions patiently if needed;
 - Avoid using abstract concepts, analogies, or probabilities;
- Use simple diagrams/visuals;
- Use simple sign language for those who need it.

5. Be a nonjudgemental listener

- Teens (both with and without 22q differences) tend to have ideas that are different from those of their parents. **Avoid debating who is right and who is wrong**. The teens may simply have a different perspective. Listen to them even if you don't agree.

6. Display expectations clearly at home and be consistent

- Schedule [personal hygiene times](#);
- Set up restrictions for internet browsing;
- Set up a time that they need to come home after an outing.

7. Make it easier for the teens to do things on their own. Examples:

- Use a [basket to keep everything together for a hygiene task](#);
- Put things at heights where shorter teens can reach easily;
- Post up reminder notes or simple graphics.

8. Stay positive. Don't shame.

Behavior & Mental Health

Some people with 22q have **temper tantrums**. Worsening tantrums may be a warning sign of **mental health problems that need to be treated**.

Self-care for Parents

Taking care of teens can be exhausting. Be sure to look after yourself:

- Set aside time for yourself to relax
- Do things you enjoy;
- Talk about your concerns with friends. However, don't only dwell on the negatives. Be sure to talk about positives too.
- Meet with other families with 22q11.2 differences (e.g. [22q at the Zoo](#))
- If you experience mood issues or anxiety, be sure to seek medical help for yourself.

References / Resources

- [Teen Behaviour: What's Typical and What Are Signs of a Problem?](#) – Myhealth.Alberta.ca
- [Coping with your teenager](#) – National Health Services, UK
- Updated clinical practice recommendations for managing [\[children | adults\]](#) with 22q11.2 deletion syndrome – 2023