

Mental Health and Behavior Changes – When should parents seek help?

Kathy Clark, R.N., M.S.N., Medical Coordinator PWSA (USA)

The possibility of psychiatric illness increases as typical teens approach adulthood, and this is also true for individuals with PWS. Behavior patterns in PWS are quite unique to the syndrome. It may be hard for parents to sort out what is a mental health “problem” from what is “just PWS.” Undiagnosed medical problems can also cause behavior changes. Not every new behavior signals a psychiatric diagnosis, but all new problematic behaviors should be evaluated by a physician.



PWS Intervention Pyramid

Making the environment solid is the first step when behaviors escalate. Extensive information about this intervention pyramid is available on our website.

Even with structured behavior plans and a well-managed environment, some individuals may benefit from short-term or long-term medications. There is not a specific medication to treat problem behaviors or psychiatric illness for persons with PWS. Having a psychiatric diagnosis is important in choosing the right medication.

PWSA (USA) has resources for psychiatrists which includes the advice to start with the lowest dose and raise doses or add additional medications with caution.

Psychiatrists can call PWSA (USA) and request printed information or a consultation with an expert member of our Clinical Advisory Board.

These symptoms should prompt an urgent (within days) psychiatric evaluation:

- Change in personal hygiene and self-care - not bathing or getting dressed
- Unable to sleep at night, or significant increase in sleeping during the day
- Weight loss or complaints about being unable to eat or swallow (medical evaluation first)
- Hearing voices, seeing things that are not there, or expressing odd beliefs
- Sitting quietly in a chair for hours or refusing to get out of bed
- **Concerns about possible abuse are urgent and should be given immediate attention. Traumatized people may act out and be unable to describe their experiences.**