



Psychosis and Schizophrenia Resource Guide

Overview: Psychosisⁱ

An episode of psychosis is when a person has a break from reality and often involves seeing, hearing and believing things that aren't real. Approximately 3 in 100 people will experience an episode of psychosis during their lives.

Young adults are placed at an increased risk to experience an episode of psychosis because of hormonal changes in the brain that occur during puberty, but a psychotic episode can occur at any age.

Psychosis is not an illness, but a symptom. A psychotic episode can be the result of a mental or physical illness, substance use, trauma or extreme stress.

Recognizing Psychosis in Childrenⁱⁱ

You may notice your child is acting oddly. They may be moody or get angry often. Their grades at school may go way down and they also may start spending more and more time alone. Family and friends may think they are just "going through a phase" or wonder if they're using street drugs. If you think something is wrong, it's always a good idea to have your child checked out by a doctor, just in case.

Signs of Psychosis in Childrenⁱⁱ

Later on, a young person with psychosis might begin to:

- hear or see things that are not there
- have strange beliefs they cannot be talked out of
- become very suspicious or paranoid
- act very differently than they did before
- stop reacting to other people
- speak in a way that does not make sense
- seem to not be feeling anything
- seem to have lost motivation to do things
- seem to have lost interest in things that they used to enjoy
- seem confused

These are signs the brain is having problems. It's important to see a doctor right away. Psychosis can harm the brain, so it needs to be caught as soon as possible.

Overall Symptoms of Psychosisⁱ

Symptoms of a psychotic episode can include incoherent speech and disorganized behavior, such as unpredictable anger, but psychosis typically involves one of two major experiences:



Hallucinations are seeing, hearing or physically feeling things that aren't actually there. For example:

- Voices telling you to commit acts of violence or self-harm.
- Feeling like something is crawling under your skin.
- Seeing someone take the shape of something he is not, such as a demon.

Delusions are strong beliefs that are unlikely to be true and may seem irrational to others. For example:

- Believing external forces are controlling your thoughts, feelings and behavior.
- Believing that trivial remarks, events or objects have personal meaning or significance.
- Thinking you have special powers, are on a special mission or even that you are God.

Schizophrenia

Overview: Schizophreniaⁱⁱⁱ

Schizophrenia is a chronic psychiatric disorder characterized by distorted thinking, hallucinations, and/or delusions-these are called "positive" symptoms. So-called "negative" symptoms including social isolation and flat affect, or a lack of emotional expression.

Children with schizophrenia often experience paranoid delusions-seeing hostile intent where there isn't any. They may believe other people can control their thoughts or read their minds, or believe that there are special messages for them in things like television shows or coincidences.

While onset of schizophrenia is usually in late adolescence or early adulthood, early symptoms of the disorder can manifest in younger kids.

Symptomsⁱⁱⁱ

- Expressing ideas that don't make sense, appear internally distracted, or perceive hostility in others where none is apparent
- Hearing voices, as if someone is talking to her, or telling her what to do
- Believing that strangers know about her or are talking about her, or that the television is relaying special messages to her
- Having delusions, or beliefs held contrary to all evidence; hallucinations, or distortions in the perception of reality
- Having disorganized or incoherent speech
- Everyday tasks such as eating, bathing, and attending school may become difficult
- Withdrawing from social interaction or appearing to have little emotional range



Treatmentⁱⁱⁱ

Antipsychotic medication is key to treating schizophrenia.

Therapeutic treatments often involve individual therapy and social skills training. These sessions teach kids the coping mechanisms and communication skills that will help them function in school and socialize with peers. Cognitive behavioral therapy is also commonly recommended to help children manage their symptoms; it's been shown to reduce both severity and the risk of relapse.

It is very important for parents to respond consistently to a child with schizophrenia and limit emotional outbursts in the home.

ⁱ National Alliance on Mental Illness (2015). Psychosis. <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Psychosis>

ⁱⁱ Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre (2015). Psychosis: How do I know? <http://keltymentalhealth.ca/mental-health/disorders/psychosis#view-tabs-2>

ⁱⁱⁱ Child Mind Institute (2015). Quick Facts on Schizophrenia. <http://www.childmind.org/en/quick-facts-schizophrenia/>