

# Psychosis & Schizophrenia

Chris Heydon  
Mark Simmonds  
Warwickshire TaMHS

(Developed with information provided by the Royal  
College of Psychiatrists, 2010 )

# Definitions

- 'Psychosis' is when your thoughts are so disturbed that you lose touch with reality.
- Schizophrenia is a serious illness affecting thoughts, feelings and behaviour. It is a type of psychosis.

# Psychosis

# Psychosis

- Young people often worry that they may be 'going mad' when they are feeling stressed, confused or very upset.
- In fact, worries like this are rarely a sign of mental illness.
- 'Psychosis' is when your thoughts are so disturbed that you lose touch with reality.
- This type of problem can be severe and distressing.

# Psychosis

## **How common is it?**

- Psychosis affects people of all ages, but is rare before you reach the older teenage years.

# What causes psychosis?

- When a psychotic episode occurs, it can be a signal of another underlying illness.
- A person can have a psychotic episode after a stressful event like losing a close friend or relative.

# What causes psychosis?

- It can also be the result of a physical illness (like a severe infection), the use of illegal drugs (like cannabis) or a severe mental illness (like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder).
- Sometimes it is difficult to know what caused the illness.

# Symptoms of psychosis

- People usually experience very unusual and sometimes unpleasant thoughts and experiences.
- They may appear suddenly making the person feel really frightened.
- They can also creep in so gradually that only people like close family and friends notice someone is behaving strangely.



# Symptoms of psychosis

- **Unusual beliefs called 'delusions'.**  
These are very strong beliefs which are obviously untrue to others, but not to you. For example, when you are ill you may think that there is a plot to harm you or that you are being spied on by the TV or being taken over by aliens. Sometimes you may feel you have special powers.

# Symptoms of psychosis

- **Thought disorder.** This is when you cannot think straight. Ideas may seem jumbled, but it is more than being muddled or confused. Other people will find it very difficult to follow what the person says.

# Symptoms of psychosis

## Hallucinations

- These are when the person can see, hear, smell or feel something that isn't really there.
- The most common hallucination that people have is hearing voices.
- Hallucinations are very real to the person having them.
- This can be very frightening and can make them believe that they are being watched or picked on.

# Hallucinations

- Having these strange thoughts and experiences can affect people at school, home or when with friends.
- They may find it difficult to concentrate and enjoy their usual activities.
- They can even affect sleep and appetite.

# Where to get help?

- It is important that the person seeks help early.
- The earlier someone is treated for psychosis, the quicker they can get back to a normal life.

# Where to get help?

- Talk to the family, school nurse or GP. They may get you specialist help from a [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service](#) (CAMHS) team or an Early Intervention Team or Service (EIS) - a specialist team for young people with psychosis.
- With psychosis, people often don't realise that they are unwell, which means the people around them might notice it first.
- If someone becomes very unwell, they could need some time in hospital until their condition stabilises.

# What is the treatment for psychosis?

- Medications called 'antipsychotics' are an important part of treatment. They may need to be taken for a long time in order to stay well.
- If the psychosis is related to drug use or an underlying physical illness, the person may need specific help and treatment to manage this.

# What is the treatment for psychosis?

- Other forms of treatment are also important. The person and their family will need help to understand more about the illness, how to manage it, and how to help prevent it coming back. The person may need support to rebuild their confidence to continue with school or college.
- Talking treatments can be helpful as well, but need to be in addition to medication.



# What will happen in the future?

- Most young people with early help and treatment recover from their psychotic episode. If the illness is due to an underlying physical illness or the use of drugs, the person might avoid having another episode by taking the right treatment and avoiding using drugs.
- It is often difficult to know what the long-term effects of a psychotic episode will be, and a definite diagnosis may not be possible straight away.

# If you want to know more you could try the following:

- [YoungMinds](#): information to young people about mental health and emotional well-being.
- [Talk to Frank](#): for drug-induced psychosis
- [Rethink](#) offers help to people with severe mental illness (not only schizophrenia) and their carers.  
30 Tabernacle Street, London EC2A 4DD.  
National advice line 020 8974 6814; e-mail [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

- **Changing Minds: A Multimedia CD-ROM about Mental Health** is intended for 13–17 year olds; it talks about addiction, stress, eating disorders, depression, and schizophrenia and self-harm. Further details from the Royal College of Psychiatrists: tel. 020 7235 2351, ext.146.

# Schizophrenia

# What is schizophrenia?

- It is a serious illness affecting thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
- It is a type of psychosis.
- Some people wrongly refer to schizophrenia as having a 'split personality' like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

# How common is it?

- It rarely occurs before puberty and usually begins in the late teenage years.
- About 1 in 100 people will suffer from schizophrenia over their lifetime.

# Symptoms of schizophrenia

- When a person suffers from schizophrenia they may have difficulties described as 'positive' or 'negative' symptoms.
- Some difficulties may seem to start suddenly, whereas others may creep in more gradually.
- A person may have some or most of the following symptoms.

# Positive symptoms

- This does not mean they are 'good' symptoms.
- They mean unusual thoughts or experiences.
- They may feel really distressing.
- They will feel totally real to the person and it may seem to them that other people don't understand or aren't taking them seriously.



# Positive symptoms

## Unusual beliefs or delusions:

- These are beliefs which are untrue to others, but not to the person.
- They may feel frightening or seem bizarre. For example, when the person is ill, they might strongly believe that there is a plot to harm them, they are being spied on through the TV or being taken over by aliens.

# Positive symptoms

- Muddled thinking or *thought disorder* is when it is difficult to think straight.
- Sometimes it may feel that others do not understand what the person is trying to say. Their ideas may feel jumbled up, but it is more than being muddled or confused.

# Positive symptoms

- Unusual experiences called *hallucinations* are when the person sees, hears, smells or feels something that isn't really there, although they are convinced that it is.
- 'Hearing voices' is one of the most common hallucinations. This can be very frightening. It can make the person believe that they are being 'watched' or 'picked on'.
- Friends or family may say that the person are acting 'strangely'. They may say that they hear the person talking or laughing to themselves.

# Negative symptoms

**This does not mean they are ‘bad’ symptoms, just that they are about ‘not doing’ something.**

- The person may feel tired and unmotivated and not want to do normal things like:
  - go to school
  - do sports
  - see friends
  - get washed and dressed
  - hobbies they used to enjoy.

# Other symptoms

- The person may become frustrated and angry, especially towards their own friends or family.
- Some people try to smoke or drink alcohol to feel better, but this tends to make things worse.
- The symptoms can be so distressing that the person feels like harming themselves.

# What causes schizophrenia?

- This is still not fully understood. There are a number of reasons that can make a person more likely to develop schizophrenia or a similar psychotic illness.
- There may be chemical imbalances in the brain.
- Having a parent or close relative suffering from schizophrenia can increase the chance of developing similar illness.

# What causes schizophrenia?

- Stress or extreme life events (like someone close dying).
- Using drugs like cannabis, LSD, ecstasy and speed (amphetamine).

# Where to get help

- The person may not notice there is a problem and therefore find it difficult to accept that there is something wrong.
- GP's or school nurses, as well as TaMHS workers can give good advice. They will be able to get the person specialist help, if it is needed.
- A psychiatrist from a child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) can assess the symptoms properly and decide on any treatment required.



# What is the treatment for schizophrenia?

- **Medications called antipsychotics** are an important part of treatment and often need to be taken for a long time in order to stay well. As with medication of any kind, there may be side-effects; the doctor will be able to advise on what they are and what can be done to help.
- If the person is taking drugs like cannabis, it is very important that they stop.

# What is the treatment for schizophrenia?

- Other forms of treatment are also important. Both the person and their family will need help to understand the condition, to cope successfully, and to prevent the illness recurring.
- Support is often needed to rebuild confidence to continue with school, college.

# What is the treatment for schizophrenia?

- The person may be referred to a specialist 'Early Intervention Service' (EIS) if available locally. These services are specialists in helping young people with psychosis.
- The person may at some point need treatment in hospital or in a specialist in-patient service.
- Talking treatments can be helpful, but are usually offered in addition to medication

# What will happen in the future?

- Schizophrenia is a chronic illness which means even if the person gets better, it might come back later on.
- This can happen if they stop taking their medication too soon.
- CAMHS or EIS teams can also help identify ways to help prevent the illness coming back (like following a healthy lifestyle, coping with stress).

# What will happen in the future?

- Most young people will recover from their illness with the right help and treatment.
- Earlier treatment leads to better recovery and increases the chances of finishing school or college, getting a job and getting on with life.

# Sources of further information

- **Mind**: national mental health charity for England and Wales
- **Sane and Saneline**: SANEline is a national out-of-hours telephone helpline offering emotional support and information for people affected by mental health problems. Tel: 0845 767 8000.
- **Young Minds**: website offers information to young people about mental health and emotional well-being.

**Any Questions?**