

Youth Mental Health Factsheet

Psychosis

What is Psychosis?

The word psychosis is used to describe a mental health problem where a person has lost some contact with reality.

They have trouble making sense of the real world and don't know if something is real or not. They may hear and see things that others can't or have varied and intense beliefs and ideas. Psychosis is often frightening for the person going through it and misunderstood by those around them. But it can be treated.

Most people who experience psychosis make a good recovery and go on to lead healthy, productive lives. Psychosis is a serious issue that calls for professional clinical help – it can have a big impact on a person's life and should never be ignored. It's important to get help early to increase chances for a quicker, more complete recovery. There are various types of psychosis: schizophrenia, psychotic depression, bipolar disorder with psychosis, schizoaffective psychosis, and drug induced psychosis.

Signs and symptoms of psychosis

People usually experience psychosis in episodes that can vary in length and re-occurrence. Some people have a single episode, while others may have multiple episodes with full or partial recovery between episodes.

Symptoms of psychosis include:

- **Confused Thinking:**

Thoughts can become confusing, difficulty with memory and concentration, altered sense of self and others, odd ideas and unusual perceptual experiences (reduced or increased sense of smell, sound or colour).

- **Changed Behaviour:**

May be very active or have no energy at all. They may laugh when it isn't appropriate or become upset without an obvious reason. They may stop doing things they used to and stop socialising with family and friends. They may have disturbed sleep and a reduced ability to work or study.

- **Emotional changes:**

Irritability, depression, becoming suspicious, flat or inappropriate emotional responses, anxiety, reduced emotions or motivation.

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Why early intervention is important

Young people in the early stages of psychosis often go undiagnosed for some time before receiving treatment. Psychosis often starts in late adolescence and the early signs can mirror normal reactions, behaviours and emotions that are common in teens. 65% of people with psychosis have their first episode before the age of 25.¹

What causes Psychosis

Like many mental health illnesses, psychosis is caused by a combination of factors including childhood experiences, genetics, trauma, stress and, which makes a person more vulnerable to its development. Being exposed to drug use, difficulties with relationships, school or work issues, grief or loss can also add to someone developing psychosis.

What help is available?

With treatment people can and do recover from psychosis, so it is important you see your doctor or GP to discuss treatment, as soon as possible. Medication and specific treatments, such as psychosocial treatments, and family and group programs can be very effective in helping the recovery process.

How can I help myself?

If you think you are heading towards or are having a psychotic episode, it is important to seek help. The use of alcohol, cannabis and other drugs will not help, and will only make the symptoms you are experiencing worse. It can make diagnosis and recovery harder, so please avoid it for your own health. If you have an immediate concern for your safety, or the safety of others, call 000 immediately.

Some other useful resources are:

- **SANE Helpline:** 1800 187 263
 - **Mental Health Crisis:** 1800 011 511
 - **Mental Illness Fellowship Australia:** mifa.org.au
- This not-for-profit organisation has support and self-help information for not only schizophrenia and bipolar disorder but also depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and anxiety disorders.

**“Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

Isaiah 41:10

**“For I am sure that neither death nor life,
nor angels nor rulers, nor things present
nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Romans 8:38-39

1. Morgan VA, Waterreus A, Jablensky A, Mackinnon A, McGrath JJ, Carr V, et al. People living with psychotic illness in 2010; the second Australian national survey of psychosis. Australia & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry 2012; 46: 735-52.