

# Psychosis and young people

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**Psychosis** is when a young person finds it difficult to tell what is real from what is not real. It is characterized by a loss of some contact with reality.

## Benefits of early intervention

Some potential benefits of early intervention include:

- Reduced disruptions in work and school
- Retention of social skills and support
- Decreased need for hospitalization
- More rapid recovery and better outcomes
- Reduced family disruption and distress
- Better engagement in treatment and lower risk of relapse

## Psychosis can be treated.

Learning all you can about psychosis types, causes, early intervention and treatments will help determine what works for you.

Visit [www.warecoveryhelpline.org](http://www.warecoveryhelpline.org) if you think a problem might exist and to find out how to get help for yourself or others.

*Washington*  
**Recovery Help Line**  
24-Hour Help for Substance Abuse, Problem Gambling & Mental Health  
**1.866.789.1511**  
(206.461.3219 tlv)

## Get help early.

Learn more at [www.dshs.wa.gov/GetHelpEarly](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/GetHelpEarly)



## What is psychosis

Psychosis keeps our brain from working well in different ways for different people, such as:

- Seeing or hearing things others don't.
- New bizarre thoughts or behaviors which are inconsistent with culture or peer group.
- New difficulty in reading, conversing, following directions or motor coordination.
- New and significant fearfulness for no apparent reason.
- Social withdrawal.

## When psychosis happens

- It is a period of time when symptoms are intense and interfere with a young person's life.
- It can be a frightening experience.
- It may last only a short period of time or it may continue sporadically for weeks, months or even years, unless the young person receives medical care.
- There may be a desire to deny or be secretive about what is happening because of the fear of being different.

## Who gets psychosis

- A first episode of psychosis usually occurs in adolescence or early adult life.
- Anyone can develop psychosis. It occurs across cultures and levels of status.
- Risk of developing psychosis is greater if another family member has had psychosis.

## Psychosis is NOT

- Caused by bad parenting or poverty.
- The result of any personal failure of the individual.
- The same as violent or "psychopathic" behavior.
- A split personality.

## Did you know?

- Symptoms of anxiety and depression are common for people experiencing symptoms of psychosis.
- 3% of young people will develop psychosis in their lifetime.
- Psychosis usually occurs for the first time between the ages of 15 and 30.
- Men often develop psychosis 5 to 10 years younger than women.
- There are different causes of psychosis.

The information provided in this fact sheet was extracted from the booklet *Recognizing and Helping Young People at Risk for Psychosis*, developed by the Portland Identification and Early Referral (PIER) program and utilized in conjunction with the EDIPPP initiative.



## What to look for

Following are common characteristics of psychosis:

### Changes in thinking:

- *Everyday thoughts may be confused/jumbled or don't join up properly.*
- *Sentences may be unclear or don't make sense.*
- *Thoughts are sped up or come very slowly.*
- *Difficulties planning, reasoning, making decisions, completing tasks, following a conversation, remembering details.*
- *Having odd ideas.*

### Changes in feelings and perception:

- *Feeling strange and cut off from the world.*
- *Feelings of distrust or suspicion about others and their actions.*
- *Noticing things others don't notice; things look or sound different from what others experience.*
- *The tone in a person's speech may change from how they usually talk.*
- *Facial and body actions may change from how they usually are.*

### Hallucinations:

- *Hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling or feeling things that are not there but seem very real to the person experiencing them.*
- *Hearing voices: the voices could be threatening or telling them to harm themselves.*

### Delusions:

- *False beliefs such as being followed or monitored, or having special abilities or "powers."*
- *Thinking they are being controlled by other people or forces, or that their thoughts are being broadcast so others can hear them.*
- *These beliefs are often held firmly, and attempts at reasoning or debating can lead to anger or mistrust.*



## What's the **most important** thing to know about psychosis?

All young people who may be experiencing psychosis need to be assessed by a doctor or mental health professional as soon as possible.

### Symptoms that are definite indications for immediate attention:

- Suicidal or homicidal thoughts
- Dramatic changes in sleep or appetite
- Hearing voices commanding you to do certain things
- Believing without reason that others are plotting against you
- Extreme unreasonable resentments or grudges
- Severely disorganized communication

**Anyone can develop psychosis. Psychosis is common and treatable. Temporary psychotic symptoms can be caused by sleep deprivation, drug use, and other factors. Psychosis can also be caused by medical illnesses, severe stress or trauma, drug reactions, and genetic predisposition. If symptoms of psychosis are observed the individual should receive a medical evaluation to rule out these causes.**

## Phases of psychosis

### Early Phase

- The early signs that psychosis may be developing – the feeling that “something is not right.”
- Is the period during which the individual is experiencing changes in feelings, thought, perceptions and behavior, although they have not yet started experiencing clear psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions or changes in thinking, feelings and perception.
- Some early signs and symptoms include: difficulty with concentration, odd ideas, changes in sleep patterns and appetite, and feelings of depression, anxiety, tension and irritability.
- Family and friends may notice behavior changes such as losing interest in studies, work and socializing, and becoming more withdrawn or isolated.
- May be attributed to “a phase” or drug use by friends, family, school counselors, teachers or employers.

### Acute Phase

- The young person loses touch with reality.
- Symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions appear that ordinarily should not be there.
- The young person's thoughts, feelings and perceptions are all seriously affected.

### Recovery Phase

- Psychosis is treatable and recovery is expected.
- The pattern of recovery varies from person to person.

Psychotic illnesses seldom appear out of the blue. Most commonly, they develop gradually over months or years. Usually a first episode of psychosis occurs in adolescence or early adulthood, which is a critical time for long-term psychological, emotional, social, and vocational development. The onset of psychosis is typically a distressing and disruptive experience for both the affected individual and their family. Because symptoms often worsen and become entrenched over time, treatment is generally most effective and benign in the earliest stages of illness.

**Don't wait,  
Learn more,  
Get help early.**

