Psychosis

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.

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.

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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

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 if you think a problem might exist and to find out how to get help for yourself or others.

Get help early.
Learn more at www.dshs.wa.gov/GetHelpEarly

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.

www.dshs.wa.gov/GetHelpEarly
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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.

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.