

Getting help early for psychosis

+ YOUNG PEOPLE



The first time someone experiences an episode of psychosis can be confusing and distressing. Behavioural and emotional changes associated with psychosis can be concerning because of a lack of understanding about what's happening. This lack of understanding often leads to a delay in seeking help, which means this treatable condition is sometimes left unrecognised and untreated.

Getting help early involves recognising psychosis at the earliest possible time and finding appropriate specialist treatment.

Why is it important to get help early?

Sometimes people with symptoms of psychosis are reluctant to seek treatment, perhaps because they believe there's nothing wrong, or hope the symptoms will go away without treatment. They may be concerned about the actual treatment, or worried about what people may think. The longer a person waits to seek treatment, the more difficult recovery can become.

The symptoms of psychosis can adversely affect the way individuals feel about themselves, particularly if they postpone treatment for a long time. Not treating the symptoms of psychosis can also intensify or create other problems like unemployment, depression, or substance use.

Seeking help and treatment early will assist a good recovery. Detecting the early warning signs of psychosis and seeking treatment quickly can help prevent additional problems, and the effects of psychosis can be minimised.

What are 'early warning signs'?

Usually there are changes in a person before the obvious symptoms of psychosis develop. These changes are called 'early warning signs'. Early warning signs can be vague and hardly noticeable. The important thing to notice is if these changes intensify, or simply don't go away.

Experiencing behavioural and emotional changes can be just a brief reaction to stressful events, like hassles at school, or work, or relationship problems. On the other hand, the changes may be early warning signs of a developing mental health difficulty. Checking up on these signs with a health professional can help determine if a young person needs treatment.

Early warning signs vary from person to person. Families often sense that something is 'not quite right' with a young person even though they don't know exactly what the problem is. There may be changes in the way some people describe their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, but they haven't started experiencing clear symptoms of psychosis, such as hallucinations (e.g., hearing or seeing something that others don't), delusions (false beliefs), or confused thinking.

Even if these symptoms aren't a sign of psychosis, they are likely a sign that the young person is struggling or not coping and could do with some extra support.

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Here are some examples of other common early warning signs a young person might display.

A person may become:

- suspicious
- depressed
- anxious
- tense
- irritable
- angry.

A person may experience:

- mood swings
- sleep disturbances
- appetite changes
- loss of energy or motivation
- difficulty in concentrating or remembering things.

A person may feel:

- their thoughts have sped up or slowed down
- things are somehow different
- things around them seem changed.

Family and friends may notice when:

- a person's behaviour changes
- a person's studies or work deteriorates
- a person becomes more withdrawn or isolated
- a person is no longer interested in socialising
- a person becomes less active.

What is the first step to seeking help?

Seek help when the early warning signs appear. A good place to start is with a local GP, a school counsellor, a community health centre, or a community mental health service, such as headspace.

Changes in behaviour aren't always early warning signs of psychosis. Even if these symptoms aren't a sign of psychosis, they are likely a sign that the young person is struggling or not coping and could do with some extra support. Getting behavioural and emotional changes checked out by a health professional will often lead to a beneficial course of action. And if someone is developing symptoms of psychosis, the sooner they get help, the sooner they can work toward recovery.

Further information

For further information regarding mental health, or for information in other languages, visit:

www.orygen.org.au
www.headspace.org.au
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
www.sane.org
www.healthdirect.gov.au
www.oyh.org.au

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