

## Youth Psychosis Fact Sheet

### What Is Psychosis?

Psychosis occurs when a person loses contact with reality. The word “psychosis” scares some people, but it actually describes an experience that many people have. Three out of every 100 people experience psychosis at some time in their lives, and most of them recover.

### What Are the Symptoms of Psychosis?

Psychosis can affect the way a person thinks, feels, and acts. Some common symptoms of psychosis are:

- **Hallucinations** can affect any of the five senses. People experiencing psychosis might see, hear, taste, smell, or feel things that are not there, and they have difficulty believing that their senses are tricking them.
- **Delusions** are false beliefs that people hold strongly, despite all evidence that their beliefs are not true. For example, a person experiencing a delusion might believe she is being watched or followed.
- **Confused thinking** occurs when a person’s thoughts don’t make sense. His or her thoughts can be jumbled together, or they can be too fast or too slow. A person with confused thinking can have a hard time concentrating or remembering anything.
- **Changes in feelings** can include quick changes in mood. A person might also feel cut off from the rest of the world, or feel strange in some other way.
- **Behavior changes** often result in a person not bathing, dressing, or otherwise caring for him- or herself as usual. Other behavior changes might involve behaviors that don’t make sense, such as laughing while someone else is talking about something sad.

### What Causes Psychosis?

Psychosis could have a number of different causes, and many researchers are working to understand why psychosis occurs. Some popular ideas are:

- **Biological:** Some people are more likely to develop psychosis because of their biology or their heredity. Many cases of psychosis have been linked to problems with neurotransmitters, the chemical messengers that transmit impulses throughout a person’s brain and central nervous system. In addition, the relatives of people who experience psychosis are more likely to experience psychosis themselves.
- **Other factors:** A person’s first episode of psychosis can be triggered by stressful events or by drug use (especially use of marijuana, speed, or LSD).

### What Are the Phases of Psychosis?

Psychosis occurs in three predictable phases, but the length of each phase varies from person to person. These phases are:

1. The **prodromal phase** is the early warning phase of psychosis, when a person experiences some mild symptoms and vague signs that something is not quite right.
2. During the **acute phase**, a person clearly experiences one or more of the symptoms of psychosis.
3. A person reaching the **recovery phase**, he begins to feel like him- or herself again.

Different people experience the recovery phase differently. With effective treatment, many people who reach the recovery phase may never experience psychosis again.

### **How Is Psychosis Treated?**

Most people recover from psychosis, and many do so with the help of treatment. This treatment usually includes several parts:

- Learning treatment options and working with professionals to determine which options are right for you.
- Working with a mental health professional to practice ways to cope when things feel bad.
- Working with a doctor to determine how medications can help.
- Working with professionals who specialize in helping individuals learn to manage everything from relationships to jobs and school.

### **Recovery From Psychosis**

Three out of every 100 people experience psychosis at some time in their lives, and most of them recover. Recovery from psychosis results in some important life changes, and there are several things people can do to help themselves .

#### **What Is It Like to Recover From Psychosis?**

Different people have different stories to tell about their recovery from psychosis. For example, some recover very quickly, while others feel better after several months. With treatment, support, and hard work, people in recovery from psychosis can look forward to their lives improving in some important ways:

- **Symptom reduction:** People recovering from psychosis have fewer symptoms of psychosis, and the symptoms they do experience are less intense. That means these individuals are less likely to hallucinate (i.e., see, hear, taste, smell, or feel things that are not there), and they are less likely to have delusions (i.e., beliefs in things that are not true). These individuals also begin to think, feel, and act more like they did before they had psychosis.
- **Improved relationships:** People experiencing psychosis usually cannot relate to friends, family, and other significant people in their lives as they did before psychosis. Once the psychosis begins to subside, though, they can begin to rebuild those relationships.
- **More connections with outside world:** Perhaps because they have fewer symptoms to deal with – and more support from other people—people recovering from psychosis often can focus more time and energy on important personal goals like completing school, getting a good job, enjoying friends and family, and other things that make life fun and meaningful.

#### **What Helps People Recover From Psychosis?**

The most important thing that helps people recover from psychosis is *getting active*. It may sound strange, but passively sitting around waiting for medicine and the professionals to cure you is usually *not* the way recovery happens! Most people who recover *get active* by:

- **Participating in treatment:** Active treatment participants partner with their treatment providers to learn all they can about their treatment options, such as medications and therapy. They keep their appointments with these providers, and give the providers honest feedback about how treatment is working or not working for them.

- **Focus on personal goals:** Personal goals in work, school, or other areas of life can be strong motivators for people recovering from psychosis. If they are not immediately ready to resume all their previous activities, people recovering from psychosis can set smaller, more realistic goals that will help them make progress.
- **Finding support:** Friends, family, and other important people can provide important encouragement as people recover from psychosis. In addition, support groups for people who are recovering from psychosis can be important. In a support group you can find hope, friends, pride and proven strategies for getting well.
- **Taking care of yourself:** Recovering from psychosis is hard work, so people recovering from psychosis must make sure they take good care of themselves. This means they need good diets, plenty of exercise and sleep, and regular medical check-ups.
- **Taking an honest look at drug and alcohol use:** For some people, drug and alcohol use can trigger psychosis or make it worse. It can really help to take an honest look at one's drug or alcohol use and ask, "has it contributed to my psychosis?"
- **Keeping your time structured:** Many people find that being bored is stressful. Just hanging around doing nothing is typically not helpful. Get busy and structure your day with activities such as school, work, volunteering, friends and exercise. Try to find the right balance between time alone and time with people.

### **What Is the Role of the Family in Recovery From Psychosis?**

Family members can be extremely important in the recovery process. The person may have difficulty in the early period with many things which used to be easy for them. When a person is recovering from their psychotic episode you can provide love, stability, understanding and reassurance, as well as help with practical issues. There are many ways that family members can help a person in recovery from psychosis. Family members can:

- Help the person with psychosis get to treatment appointments to work with their treatment team.
- Stay in regular contact with the treatment team.
- Advocate for the person with psychosis to get the support he/she needs.
- Learn about psychosis so you know what is happening.
- Assist with remembering and initiating appointments and activities.
- Observe and report symptoms the person with psychosis may not be aware of.
- Include the person with psychosis in family and social activities.
- Maintain a safe, positive, supportive atmosphere at home.
- Help with finances.
- Take care of yourself and get your questions answered.
- Understand the goals that your loved one has for recovery.
- Be patient.
- Attend family support groups in your area to learn how other families cope and support the recovery of loved ones.