



Psychosis: A Guide for Young People

The best way to describe **Psychosis** (or a psychotic episode) is like **losing contact with reality**. Your mind plays tricks on you & you experience **unusual thoughts, perceptions** (especially seeing & hearing) & **feelings** (emotions). This might also make us behave differently than we do when you're not experiencing symptoms.

Psychosis is **common**, with **3 in every 100 people** experiencing it at some time in their lives.

Psychosis is an Experience that:

- Anyone can have
- Can appear at any age but is more common in young people
- Is found in all cultures & across history
- Can be a single experience or can be something that comes & goes throughout life
- Is something lots of people manage to live with or recover from & the earlier they get support the more likely they'll get on top of it sooner

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Your **doctor** or **mental health worker** can find out if you have **psychosis** by **talking** to you & your family/whānau. They will want to know what changes you & your family/whānau have noticed & how long enough these changes have been going on. These changes could include:

Changes in Thinking

- Difficulty concentrating, following conversations & remembering things.
- Everyday thoughts may become confused or muddled & not join up properly. Other people may say that you are not making any sense.
- Your thinking speeding up or slowing down.
- Feeling you can't control your thoughts or that they are not your own.
- Believing your thoughts are being taken away or said aloud.

Changes in Feelings

- Mood changes are common – getting depressed, sad or irritable or extremely happy or “high”.
- Some people describe dampened down emotions (numbed out) – they feel less connected with others & don't respond as much.

Changes in Beliefs

- You may be having unusual (even weird or bizarre) beliefs that seem very real (or even quite ordinary) to you. These are called delusions. You may, or may not, be aware that other people do not believe the same things. Some common delusions are that:
 - someone/something is trying to harm you
 - you are someone else
 - you have some special gift, power or mission
 - you are receiving special messages (e.g. from TV, radio or newspapers)

Changes in Perceptions

Psychosis may change the way your five senses work so that things are sensed differently. These might be:

- Hearing – hearing noises or voices in a distorted way or when there is nobody there – (this can be quite common in psychosis).
- Visual – seeing things in a distorted way or things that aren't really there.
- Touch – feeling things that aren't there e.g. something crawling on your skin.
- Smell – smelling smells that others can't smell.
- Taste – food tasting different & others not noticing this.

Changes in Behaviour

Even if you are only experiencing a few of the things listed above, you may have noticed changes in your behaviour or it may be that your family & friends are more aware of it & have perhaps been complaining or talking with you about it. Changes in behaviour might include:

- Not doing as well as you used to (or as well as you expected to) at school or at work.
- Behaving in an unusual way when you are bothered by your thoughts or senses.
- Not caring for yourself, not showering, washing clothes or eating well.

What causes Psychosis?

No one knows exactly what causes psychosis. It is believed that some people inherit **genes** that make them vulnerable to developing psychosis **under severe stress** or when they use **drugs** (such as marijuana, heroin, amphetamines such as P & LSD), or take some **prescribed medications**. Psychosis can occur as a **single episode** or as **part of an illness** such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or severe depression. It can also occur after a **head injury** or **physical brain problem**.

So you think you might have Psychosis? – Now What?

Get help as Early as Possible. Find someone you trust to talk to – this might be a family member, a trusted friend, school counsellor or G.P. Treatment for psychosis is available through **Child & Adolescent Mental Health Teams**. Some cities have specialty **Early Intervention First Episode Psychosis Services**. If you're experiencing psychosis following drug use, don't let this put you off getting help. Services support people all the time who are experiencing mental health issues as a result of drug use, they won't involve the police & they are obliged to keep information shared with them confidential unless they are really worried about you.

Sometimes **diagnosing psychosis** can take **several appointments with the psychiatrist**, especially during the early stages, because psychosis can look like a number of other issues. **A Mental Health Assessment** (see Fact Sheet on Assessment) as well as a **Medical Examination** to rule out known medical causes will help clarify whether psychosis is what's going on for you.

Treatment for psychosis usually involves medication & other forms of support to help overcome psychosis.

These may include:

- Teaching skills to best manage symptoms.
- Learning to manage the stress that may have contributed to the experience.
- Working on minimising the chances of psychosis recurring.
- Providing support to overcome any problems that have arisen as a result of psychosis (e.g. problems at school or with friends, feeling anxious or depressed).
- People experiencing psychosis might not see, or want to see it as a difficulty.