

Psychosis

What is psychosis?

Young people with psychosis describe experiences such as hearing or seeing things that other people do not. They can also have unusual beliefs that other people do not share. This can make a young person with psychosis feel scared or alone with things happening that they do not understand. It can make it very hard for young people to carry on with their everyday life such as talking to people, seeing friends, going to college or finding and keeping a job. Often, young people with psychosis do not realise that others are not having the same experiences as they are, so may appear to think or act strangely.

About 3 out of every 100 young people experience a psychotic episode. This may last anywhere from a few weeks to several months. With help, most young people with psychosis are able to get back to doing what they want with their life.

What might a young person with psychosis experience?

Hallucinations – Hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting or feeling things that are not there. This might be hearing a voice talking to them or about them, seeing people standing near them in a threatening manner, or a crawling sensation on their skin.

Delusions - An unusual set of beliefs that others do not share. These might include feeling that others are watching or monitoring them, believing they have special powers or that others are out to harm them.

Confused thinking - It can be hard for a young person with psychosis to keep track of their thoughts. Their thoughts may seem to speed up, slow down, become mixed up or create links between ideas in their mind. This can also make it hard for them to focus on things such as talking to friends and family.

Changing feelings - Their feelings may change quickly for no real reason. They might swing between feeling happy, sad, irritable and angry or not feel much emotion at all.

Behaviour – With all these unusual experiences happening, they are likely to behave differently. They may change when and how much they sleep and eat and may respond to the hallucinations or delusional ideas. Some young people with psychosis find that they have a lot of energy, whilst others find they have very little.

All these things can make a young person with psychosis feel threatened or scared and struggle to trust others.

Why might someone develop psychosis?

Anyone could develop psychotic symptoms. However, some people appear to be at greater risk and stress can make it more likely to happen. Psychotic symptoms can develop for many reasons. These include:

- High levels of stress, anxiety or depression,
- Using illegal drugs such as cannabis or speed,
- A developing schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.
- Some things that may happen in childhood and some physical illnesses .

Getting help early

If you are concerned about someone who might be experiencing psychotic symptoms then it is important to seek help. With support, most young people with psychosis are able to get back to doing the things that they want to with their life. Sometimes, both families and young people with psychosis worry that others will not understand what is happening to them or will not be able to help. The Early Intervention Service is set up for this reason; to help young people with psychosis and their families. Putting off getting help can lead to the young person with psychosis feeling alone and down. This can be avoided by getting help early.

