



Your health: 'Someone in my family has psychosis' Information for young people (high school age)



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This brochure comes from Northern Sydney Health, Area Mental Health, Early Intervention Project. It discusses psychosis, which is a type of mental illness.

What is psychosis?

When someone is experiencing psychosis or a psychotic episode they lose contact with reality. Changes occur in the way the brain interprets information and they may find it difficult to distinguish what is real and what is not.

When a person is experiencing psychosis, others may notice changes in the person's behaviour, the way they think and the way they seem to be feeling. These changes are called symptoms.

Someone must be experiencing some of the following symptoms to be classed as having a psychosis:

- Confused thoughts
- False beliefs (delusions)
- Hallucinations (eg. hearing voices)
- Changed feelings
- Changed behaviour

Some people say that it feels like their thoughts are out of control and they are "spinning out".

Psychosis may include a distorted or false view of reality. The person may accuse you of things you have not done or things you know are not true. It's generally best not to confront them or argue with delusional ideas.

What causes psychosis?

There is no evidence that there is one specific cause of psychosis. So why do some people

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develop psychosis and others don't?

We use the term 'vulnerable' to explain this. To be vulnerable means to be highly sensitive to something or to not be fully protected from something.

It seems that some people are more vulnerable to developing a psychosis than others.

This simply means that some people are more at risk than others, and this may be due to a number of reasons.

- Stress can place us at greater risk of developing psychosis. Sometimes events happen in our lives which cause us great stress.
- Using street drugs can change the way in which our brain and bodies work.
- Our biological or genetic make up and family history may play a part.

Usually it is the combination of a number of these factors which cause someone to become vulnerable enough to develop a psychotic episode.

Just because someone is under a lot of stress or using street drugs, it doesn't mean they will develop psychosis. These factors increase the risk.

What about me?

Having someone in your family who is experiencing a psychosis or any other mental illness can be pretty confusing and a scary time. Many people begin to worry that because someone in the family is affected, that they will be next. Mental illness is not contagious, and having a relative with psychosis is only one risk factor on the list. For example, if you have one parent, a brother or sister experiencing a psychotic illness, there is only a 1 in 10 chance that you will develop a psychosis.

How is psychosis treated?

Depending on the individual:

- A short stay in hospital, if needed
- Medication
- Counselling and support

Feelings I may have

It is common for people to ask:

- Why and how did this happen?
- Will he/she become well again?
- Will this happen to me?

No matter who you are related to, the likelihood of you not developing psychosis far out-weighs the risk of developing the psychosis.

**Here's a list of feelings that are common.
Tick the ones that you have felt:**

Embarrassed	Guilty	Anxious
Sad	Angry	Shocked
Confused	Stressed out	Frustrated
Resentful	Worried	Scared

All these feelings are normal responses to stressful experiences, especially when you are dealing with something that is hard to understand.

It may take a while for your family member to recover from the psychotic episode, so try to be patient.

Try to talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling.

What can I do to look after myself?

- Learn as much about your family member's experience as you can.
- Talk openly and honestly with your family about your feelings.
- Offer the amount of help that you feel comfortable with.
- Stay involved in your regular activities, sports, and hobbies plus keep in contact with your friends.
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle. Keep yourself strong and healthy – exercise, eat healthy food, and avoid street drugs.
- Ask for help if you are feeling worried or overwhelmed.

Where to contact for help:

- School counsellor
- GP
- Local adolescent counselling service

Note

This brochure comes from Northern Sydney Health, Area Mental Health, Early



Intervention Project. The information in this brochure is taken from the booklet "Brothers and Sisters" developed at YPPI (Young People Prevention and early Intervention), Central Coast Area Health. Thanks also to staff from the adolescent service and youth consultants at RNSH for their contribution.

Links

We have more information on **Adult Mental Health** and the **Early Psychosis Intervention Service**. Other information brochures are also available: 'Someone on my family has psychosis (for young people in primary school)'...

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