

Getting Help Early

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

Don't Delay

The initial episode of psychosis can be a particularly confusing and traumatic experience. The change in the person's behaviour causes concern and distress because no-one really understands what is happening.

This lack of awareness often leads to delays seeking help. As a result, these treatable illnesses are left unrecognised and untreated.

Even when help is sought, further delays may occur before the right diagnosis is made because recognition of these disorders can be difficult.

Why is it Important to Get Help Early?

Often there is a long delay before treatment begins for the first episode of psychosis. The longer the illness is left untreated the greater the disruption to a person's family, friends, study and work.

The way they feel about themselves can be affected, particularly if treatment is prolonged. Other problems may occur or intensify, such as unemployment, depression, substance abuse, breaking the law and causing injury to themselves may occur or intensify. In addition, delays in treatment may lead to slower and less complete recovery.

Disruption need not occur. If psychosis is detected early, many problems can be prevented.

What are the Early Signs?

Usually there are some changes in a person before the obvious symptoms of psychosis develop. These changes are called early signs and this phase just before the psychosis is called the prodrome. The early signs are vague and hardly noticeable. The important thing to look for is if these changes get worse or simply do not go away.

Early signs vary from person to person. In the prodromal phase, there may be changes in the way some people describe their feelings, thoughts and perceptions. However, they have not started experiencing clear psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions or confused thinking.

Early Signs

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 are speeded up or slowed down
- things are somehow different
- things around them seem changed
- Often family and friends are the first to notice the changes

Family and friends may notice when

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- a person becomes more withdrawn or isolated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

Families often sense that something is not quite right even though they don't know exactly what the problem is.

These behaviours might be a brief reaction to stressful events like hassles at school or work or trouble with relationships. On the other hand they may be early warning signs of a developing psychosis. It is important that these behaviours are checked out

The First Step

When these prodromal or psychotic symptoms appear it is important that the young person gets help. A good place to start is with a local doctor community health centre or community mental health service. School counsellors might also be available.

Remember these changes in behaviour may not be early signs but it is a good idea to get them checked out. If a psychotic disorder is developing the sooner the young person gets help the better.

The earlier psychosis is recognised and treatment commences, the better the outlook.

Further Information

Other information sheets are:

- ***What is Psychosis? - Information Sheet No 1***
- ***Recovering From Psychosis - Information Sheet No 2***
- ***How Can I Help Someone With Psychosis? - Information Sheet No 4***

and are available from:

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