



RECOGNISING SIGNS OF PSYCHOSIS

Recognising that someone has psychosis isn't always easy. People with psychosis often don't tell anyone about their delusions or hallucinations. If that's the case, you might notice other signs that things aren't quite right. Usually these are changes in how someone usually thinks, acts or relates to others.

Some changes you might notice include:

- Changes in usual sleep patterns, like sleeping too much, very little or throughout the day
- Difficulties concentrating, focusing or remembering things
- Changes in mood, like becoming very down or irritable or anxious
- Struggling to manage usual routines, like school or work
- Not being able to complete usual tasks, like preparing food or looking after their personal hygiene
- Withdrawing from friends, family and social activities

If you notice any of these changes it's important not to ignore them. They might be a sign that someone has psychosis but they could also be a sign that someone is experiencing another kind of mental health difficulty like depression, anxiety or substance misuse.

As you can see, some of the signs of psychosis are similar to signs of other mental health problems. For that reason, it's important to be aware of signs that are

specific to psychosis. Things to look out for that are more likely to be a sign of psychosis include someone:

- Becoming very suspicious or paranoid about people
- Having unusual ideas or strange beliefs about things
- Developing fixed ideas about conspiracy theories or people plotting to harm them
- Believing they have special powers or a special purpose in the world
- Thinking that things on the TV, internet or in newspapers have special messages for them
- Being very distracted, as though responding to something or someone, even if there is no one around
- Talking to themselves, as though they are responding to someone, even if no one is there
- Telling you that they can hear, smell, see or feel things that no one else can

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NOTICE SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES OR PSYCHOSIS

Some of the signs listed above are things that all of us experience from time to time. For example, it's not unusual to have times when you don't sleep as well as you usually do and feel really tired. It's also not unusual to sometimes feel a little paranoid or to think you hear someone calling your name only to realise that no one is there. So, how

do you know when these experiences are a sign that there may be something more serious going on? To help you recognise when these kinds of signs might point to more serious mental health difficulties or psychosis, ask yourself the following questions:

What exactly are the signs?

- Do any of the signs give a clear indication that the person is not ok? For example, have they told you that they are hearing voices? Or are they expressing unusual ideas about themselves or the world around them that they are convinced are true? Do they believe they are someone they are not? If you notice any of these kinds of signs, they point to the possibility that the person may be experiencing psychosis.
- Have you noticed just one sign or many? For example, is the person simply struggling to sleep? Or, have they also become more withdrawn and depressed and have dropped out of College? If the person is showing a number of the signs above, that could also mean that their mental health is not ok.

Are the signs unusual for the person?

- Does what's happening seem out of character or unusual for the person? For example, is the person's low mood very much out of keeping with their normal upbeat self? Or is their withdrawal from their hobbies and interests something new and out of the ordinary for them? Signs that point to changes in what's typical for someone may help you to recognise that their mental health may be at risk.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the signs of psychosis and how to get help, you can check out the rest of the Factsheets in this series at www.rcsi.ie/perl. PERL: The Psychiatric Epidemiology Research across the Lifespan Group, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

How long have the experiences been going on?

- Have you noticed these signs happening over time? For example, has the person's sleep pattern been disturbed for 2 nights or for 2 weeks? The longer the signs have been present, the more concerning they are. If the signs are more recent, it's still important to keep an eye on them to see if they continue over time.

Are the experiences having a negative impact on the person's life?

- Is the person struggling to function or to get on with their day to day life? If so, this may be a sign that they are having mental health difficulties.

If you are worried about someone, it's really important to talk to them about your concerns and encourage them to get a pro-

fessional assessment. A qualified health or mental health professional has been trained to assess people's mental health and their assessment will give you and the person involved a much clearer picture about what is going on for them.