

## What is psychosis?

### Prominent feature of psychosis: loss of contact with reality

#### Different diagnoses with psychotic features:

- Schizophrenia
- Schizoaffective disorder
- Bipolar disorder 1
- Delusional disorder
- Depressive disorder with psychotic features
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

#### Positive symptoms of psychosis:

- Hallucinations
- Delusions or unusual thoughts
- Paranoia
- Disorganized speech or behavior

#### Negative symptoms of psychosis:

- Decreased motivation
- Lack of pleasure
- Decreased interest in social interactions
- Decreased speech or behavior

**Positive Symptoms Defined:** It is not uncommon for individuals to experience psychotic-like experiences such as unusual thoughts or fleeting hallucinations outside of psychosis. These would be seen as an addition to typical human experience, hence the term positive. However, when these experiences occur with increased frequency, result in significant distress, and impact functioning they may be experienced as problematic and require treatment.

**Negative Symptoms Defined:** By contrast, negative symptoms result in a lessening of a typical experience.

## Why is it important to identify psychosis?

#### Providing early identification:

- Helps individuals access appropriate treatment
  - Decreases the duration of untreated psychosis from initial onset of symptoms
  - Results in better long-term outcomes
- \* It takes an average of 72 weeks in the United States for someone to access treatment for psychosis from the onset of initial symptoms

#### Helping individuals access resources:

- Increases in the intensity of psychotic symptoms may be associated with increased self harm and suicide.
- Provides a timely response to the onset of psychotic symptoms which is important in helping individuals access crisis services so that they can receive treatment to reduce this risk

#### Reducing the risk of violence:

- Individuals with psychosis are more likely to be victims of violence than they are perpetrators
- **However**, there are some instances where violent crimes have been committed in the context of a psychotic episode
- Identifying psychosis and supporting the individual to access treatment is again important

## What should I ask?

It is not possible to conduct a full screening for psychosis or assessment on a brief 988 interaction. However, there are key questions that you can ask to explore the possibility of the presence of psychotic symptoms. These include:

- **Do you ever hear the voice of someone talking that other people can't hear?**
- **Have you ever felt that someone was playing with your mind?**
- **Do familiar people or surrounding sometimes seem unreal to you?**
- **Do you feel like other people are watching you or talking about you even if others tell you that isn't the case?**

Be aware of how the cultural background of the individual might influence their beliefs and experiences. For example, some cultures believe in the afterlife and will engage in behaviors to honor their ancestors. If an individual is describing this belief and it is consistent with their cultural background it is not considered psychosis. Follow-up questions to assess for this can include:

- **Have others expressed concerns about the things you are telling me?**
- **Do people who are important in your life share these experiences?**

## How can I help?

### Stay calm

It's important to be able to stay calm when asking about psychosis. It is likely that the individual is distressed and frightened by their experiences. Interacting with someone who is calm and genuinely interested in their experiences can be reassuring.

### Ask questions

Sometimes people think that if they question an individual with psychosis they will somehow make the beliefs worse. However, it is important to ask questions in order to get a full picture of the experience of the individual. When asking questions aim for transparency and encourage feedback "I am going to ask you a few questions so I can best figure out how to help you but I want you to let me know if the questions are confusing you or making you feel uncomfortable".

### Don't collude

It is important not to collude with the individual. This means not joining the individual in their unusual belief. This can be avoided by validating the emotion rather than the situation that the individual is describing.

### Validate the emotions

When asking questions, the aim is to demonstrate genuine curiosity. You are not trying to tell the person that their experience is not valid. Instead acknowledge the individual's emotional experience and empathize with this. "It seems that you are really scared right now. I can see how what you have told me could lead anyone to feeling frightened. I'd like to find a way to help you feel less scared. Would that be okay?"

### Offer hope and highlight resilience

It has taken a lot of effort and bravery for the individual to contact 988. Highlight this and praise the individual for their resilience. Provide available resources and provide positive (and accurate) messages about the importance of early treatment as the first step towards helping the individual to feel better. Emphasize that contacting 988 is an important first step on this path.

## What are Available Resources?

### Mental health providers or local mental health facility or hospital

If you suspect psychosis is present further questions should determine if the individual is currently engaged in mental health treatment. Individuals who are currently or previously in treatment could be referred to their mental healthcare provider, or local mental health facility or hospital for further follow up. For individuals who are not currently in treatment, or who have not received treatment for psychosis, providing resources and information about local early psychosis care is helpful. :

### Early psychosis clinics

Typically early psychosis occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood and there are currently over 350 early psychosis clinics throughout the United States for youth and young adults experiencing a recent onset of psychosis. These clinics can be located through both The Psychosis-Risk and Early Psychosis Program Network's (PEPPNET) National Early Psychosis Directory Map and through Early Assessment and Support Alliance (EASA), which provides this same early psychosis directory in list format.

PEPPNET Interactive Directory of Early Psychosis Clinics:  
<https://med.stanford.edu/peppnet/interactivedirectory.html>

Early Assessment and Support Alliance (EASA) Early Psychosis Directory in list format:  
<https://easacommunity.org/national-directory.php>