

Understanding Psychosis

A person experiencing psychosis is often **confused** and **frightened**. He is **doing his best** to make sense of and manage his own thoughts and perceptions. He may be **trying to protect himself**.

Consider:

- Psychosis involves a **brain-based** difficulty telling what is real from what is not real.
- *Core symptoms* are:
 - **Hallucinations:** false perceptions, seeing or hearing things others do not.
 - **Delusions:** false, often odd or irrational, beliefs
 - **Confused Thinking or Speech:** thoughts get tangled or jump around illogically
- It involves a **difficulty filtering** out important from background information. As a result, a person may be sensitive to bright lights, noise, conflict, complexity, changes in routine, or street drugs. She may feel **easily overwhelmed**, confuse the sound of the heating system for mumbled voices, be highly distractible, irritable, or just want to stay in bed.
- The person's psychosis is **only one part of her experience**. She is a whole person with a unique history, set of preferences, personality traits, capabilities, hopes and dreams.

Strategies

- Look for quiet opportunities when the person is less overwhelmed to approach him.
- Keep communication simple. Speak in short sentences. Ask one question at a time.
- Ask about the person's interests as well as his experience of symptoms or problems.
- Listen to his values, goals, worries, and frustrations.
- Ask him to tell you what his experience is: what is it like to get up, go out of the house, be at school, or with friends, sitting in front of his homework, or answering questions.
- Watch for what is stressful or overwhelming, calming or manageable.
- Look together at websites, movies, or informational pamphlets about psychosis.

More information:

* Other symptoms of psychosis often include:

Cognitive difficulties: trouble paying attention, learning new material, thinking quickly.

Low motivation: trouble taking initiative, getting started, overcoming challenges

Withdrawal: less interest in, enjoyment of, or energy for social connection

Reduced emotion and speech: less facial expression or gesturing, talking much less

* These difficulties are often more challenging than the core symptoms, particularly for family members. They are often harder to recognize as symptoms that are not under the person's control.

RESOURCES:

- **READ** first hand accounts (see website for suggestions)
- **WATCH** movies or webcasts (see website for suggestions)