NAMI
National Alliance on Mental Illness

**Early Psychosis Project**
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# What is Early and First-Episode Psychosis?

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Psychosis temporarily interferes with the brain's ability to make out reality and causes disruptions in thoughts and perceptions. Everyone's experience with psychosis is different. Psychosis often comes and goes in episodes. It is more common than most people think; it affects about 3 in 100 people during their lives.

Early psychosis, also known as first-episode psychosis (FEP), is often frightening, confusing and distressing for the person experiencing it and difficult for his or her family to understand.

During early psychosis or a first episode is the most important time to connect with the right treatment. Doing so can be life-changing and radically alter a person's future. So, while it can be difficult to tell the difference between the early warning signs of psychosis and typical teen or young adult behavior, if you are concerned, don't delay in getting help.

## Know the Signs

These warning signs may signal early psychosis:

- Hearing, seeing, tasting or believing things that others don't
- Suspiciousness or extreme uneasiness with others
- Persistent, unusual thoughts or beliefs
- Strong and inappropriate emotions or no emotions at all
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- A sudden decline in self-care
- Trouble thinking clearly or concentrating

If you or someone you know is experiencing these warning signs, contact a healthcare professional or a first-episode psychosis program if one exists in your community. Early action keeps young lives on track.

## What causes psychosis?

We are still learning about how and why psychosis develops. It's thought to be triggered by a mix of genetics (family history) and life stressors during critical stages of brain development. Sometimes psychosis can be the start of a more serious condition like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Risk factors that may contribute to the development of psychosis include stressors such as physical illness, substance use (marijuana,

hallucinogens and stimulant medications) and psychological or physical trauma. Psychosis can start at any age, but young adults are at an increased risk because of hormonal changes in the brain that occur during puberty.

## Help is available

Whatever the cause, early diagnosis and treatment provide the best hope for recovery. The most effective treatment for early psychosis is Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC). The earlier a person experiencing psychosis receives CSC, the better his or her quality of life. CSC uses a team-based approach with shared decision-making that focuses on working with individuals to reach their recovery goals. Programs that provide CSC are often called first-episode psychosis or FEP programs. These programs are available in a growing number of areas.

**Addressing psychosis early can help with recovery. Reach out to learn more and to keep young lives on track.**

## Key Components of CSC

- **Case management**—working with the individual to develop problem-solving skills, manage medication and coordinate services
- **Family support and education**—giving families information and skills to support their loved one's treatment and recovery
- **Psychotherapy**—learning to focus on resiliency, managing the condition, promoting wellness and developing coping skills
- **Medication management**—finding the best medication at the lowest possible dose
- **Supported education and employment**—providing support to continue or return to school or work
- **Peer support**—connecting the person with others who have been through similar experiences

## Find out if your community has a CSC program

Visit NAMI's website: www.nami.org/earlypsychosis

Call the NAMI HelpLine: 800-950-6264 (Monday–Friday 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. ET)

Email NAMI: info@nami.org

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