

What is Psychosis?

You may feel you don't fully understand what psychosis is. Alternatively, you may have been overwhelmed by information and can't work out what is important. This information sheet and the Module 1 of the REACT online toolkit aims to make things a bit clearer.

Psychosis is a mental health problem in which people appear to lose touch with reality. The most common ways this happens are:

- Believing things that are generally accepted to be untrue by other people. These are often called delusions
- Not being able to think straight and so sounding very muddled and confused, often called thought disorder
- Experiencing things that aren't really happening e.g. hearing or seeing things that other people can't, often called hallucinations

Psychosis is an umbrella term that covers lots of different conditions in which these experiences can occur. Your relative may have been given one of the following diagnoses.

Visit the REACT NHS website, (www.reactnhs.uk), for definitions and to find out more about of the following diagnostic labels:

- ◆ **Schizophrenia**
- ◆ **Schizo-affective disorder**
- ◆ **Drug induced psychosis**
- ◆ **Delusional disorder**
- ◆ **Psychotic episode**
- ◆ **Postpartum psychosis**
- ◆ **Bipolar disorder**

Positive & Negative Symptoms

You may hear people refer to 'positive symptoms' and 'negative symptoms'. This can be confusing, especially as it can be hard to see how any of these experiences can be positive. Over the page are definitions to help you understand what is meant by positive and negative symptoms

'Positive symptoms' describe experiences that are not usually present i.e. they are additional to what the person is usually like. The most common ones include:

- ◆ Hearing voices or noises that others can't hear,(auditory hallucinations)
- ◆ Seeing things that others can't see (visual hallucinations)
- ◆ Having strongly held unusual or bizarre beliefs that most other people would not share (delusions)
- ◆ Not thinking straight and therefore difficult to follow when talking (thought disorder)

'Negative symptoms' describe a lack of or loss of experiences that are usually there, i.e. they take something away from what the person is usually like. The most common ones include:

- ◆ Loss of motivation or energy
- ◆ Loss of pleasure in everyday activities
- ◆ Withdrawal from relationships and activities
- ◆ Negative symptoms are sometimes more difficult to understand and they can build up gradually. This makes them difficult to distinguish from:
 - ◆ Sedation effects from medication
 - ◆ Depression

To find out more about the cognitive problems that people can experience go to the REACT online toolkit

www.reactnhs.uk