

Module 3: Managing Positive Symptoms

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Information Zone

Positive symptoms are 'positive' because they are an addition to a person's normal experience. Not because they are a good thing.

The main positive symptoms in psychosis are:

- Delusions (Beliefs obviously not true to other people)
- Hallucinations (Including hearing things, such as 'voices')
- Disorganised thinking (Literally trouble ordering thoughts, thoughts seem sped up, slowed down or muddled)
- Incoherence of speech (including new and mixed up words)

Delusions

Delusions are mistaken, implausible or in some cases, clearly bizarre or outlandish beliefs that develop in psychosis. Delusions range from exaggerated or 'over valued' beliefs that are common amongst the general population to those which can seem bizarre or implausible.

These are examples of exaggerated or overvalued beliefs that someone might experience:

- I have a special relationship with God.
- People are talking about me behind my back at work.

Examples of bizarre or implausible beliefs:

- God communicates to me through the words to rap videos on MTV.
- People at work have tampered with the air conditioning over my desk so that it sprays me with a gas that makes me dizzy.
- My husband is an alien who has taken human form and is planning to murder me so that another alien can take my identity.

It's important to recognise that delusions are usually **an attempt to understand an event or**



Your Early Intervention team can make sure you
get access to the REACT online toolkit



www.reactnhs.uk

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The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the HTA, NIHR, NHS or the Department of Health.

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experience that is unclear or confusing. Therefore, they may have some basis in reality. To the person experiencing them, delusions feel entirely reasonable and no different to any other belief. Like anyone else, they might resent, or fight back against, anyone who challenges or ridicules their ideas.

Hallucinations

A hallucination is a perception that does not have a corresponding source in reality. The person might... See / Hear / Touch / Smell / Taste / Feel something that isn't there. The most common in psychosis is 'hearing voices'.

Hearing voices is quite a common experience, in the general population and for the most part, not a sign of psychosis. For some people, hearing voices is a positive experience, and they may even find the voices comforting or enjoyable. This is most likely when the voice is perceived to be coming from a friendly or supportive figure.

In psychosis, however, hallucinations tend to have qualities that make them hard to bear including:

- Frequent and difficult to control
- Refer to upsetting, personal or abusive themes
- Usually seem to come from outside the person and feel very real
- Make the person feel depressed, anxious, controlled

Why do hallucinations happen?

Hallucinations in psychosis seem to be caused by a breakdown in the ability to distinguish internally generated experiences from perceptions received from the outside world. So for example an internally generated thought, is heard as an external voice. To the person experiencing them, they are a real perception, not their imagination. Because voices seem completely real to the person it's normal for them to seek an explanation. This can often result in them developing delusional explanations, such as conspiracies, spirits or technological devices.

Visit the REACT NHS website, (www.reactnhs.uk), to find out more about different types delusions and how they develop.

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