## INTRO TO FIRST EPISODE PSYCHOSIS

Most individuals that experience **psychosis** have their **first episode** between ages **16 to 30**,<sup>1</sup> with the **average age of onset** being **24**.<sup>2</sup> The average age of onset tends to be in the late teens to the early 20s for men, and in the late 20s to early 30s for women. Due to **emerging adults** being part this age group, it is important for them to get help when first experiencing **psychosis**. It commonly occurs at a **critical stage in their life** when they are embarking on education goals, a future career, and developing meaningful relationships with others.

### First Episode Psychosis

**Early psychosis**, also known as **First Episode Psychosis** (FEP), refers to the initial time that a person starts to have **psychotic** symptoms. Specifically, they may experience **hallucinations** and/or **delusions**, causing them to question reality. The term "**psychotic episode**" refers to the **duration of time** when symptoms are present and interfere with an individual's daily life.

During **FEP** it is critical to connect the **emerging adult** to the treatment they need. The quicker an **emerging adult** can access services, the likelier they are to have better outcomes and recovery.

To understand FEP, we must first define psychosis. We provide one from the <u>National Institute of</u> <u>Mental Health</u>:<sup>3</sup> Psychosis refers to a collection of symptoms that affect the mind, where there has been some loss of contact with reality. During an episode of psychosis, a person's thoughts and perceptions are disrupted and they may have difficulty recognizing what is real and what is not.

National Institute of Mental Health

# WHAT IS PSYCHOSIS?

**Psychosis** can express itself in a variety of ways, but commonly it includes one of the two experiences: **hallucinations** and **delusions**.<sup>4</sup> To the **emerging adult**, experiencing these can be very real, which causes many to feel scared and confused.

## HALLUCINATIONS

#### "Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that aren't there."

- Hearing voices
- Feeling abnormal sensations
- Believing that they are **seeing things** or **people** that are not there or are distorted

## **DELUSIONS**

"Strong beliefs that are not consistent with the person's culture, are unlikely to be true and may seem irrational to others."

- Believing that **external forces** are controlling thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Common remarks, events, or objects have personal meaning or significance
- Belief they have special powers, a special mission they have to fulfill, or that they are a higher being

Anyone can experience **psychosis**, but everyone's experience is different and unique to them. Currently in the United States,



of people experience at least one psychotic episode during their lives<sup>5</sup>



teens each year experience their **first** psychotic episode<sup>6</sup>



is the average age of psychosis onset<sup>7</sup>

## **RISK FACTORS FOR PSYCHOSIS**

There is no singular cause for **psychosis**. It can be a result any combination of the following risk factors:<sup>8</sup>

## Family History (genetics)

### **Psychological or Physical Trauma**

These include stressors during critical stages of brain development, such as: death of a person in an **emerging adult's** life, sexual assault/abuse.

### **Mental Illness**

**Psychosis** can also be a symptom of a serious mental health condition such as schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizoaffective disorder.

## **Physical Illness**

Traumatic brain injuries, brain tumors, strokes, HIV, and brain diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and dementia can result in psychosis.

### **Sleep Deprivation**

First symptoms of psychosis can occur within 24 to 48 hours of not sleeping.9

### **Substance Use**

Marijuana, hallucinogens, and stimulant medications.

### Being a Young Adult

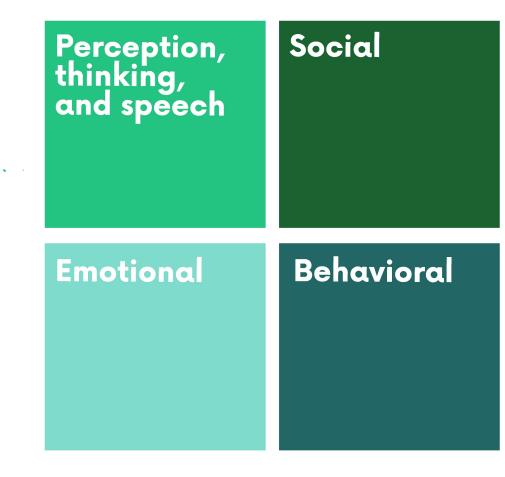
Although **psychosis** can begin at any age due to the hormonal changes in the brain during this specific period of their life they are at an increased risk.

## **Giving Birth**

Individuals who give birth are at a higher risk for developing postpartum **psychosis** – symptoms of psychosis usually start quickly within the first 2 weeks after giving birth (most often within hours or days of giving birth).<sup>10</sup>

## EARLY SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Signs and symptoms of **psychosis** can vary in intensity and duration. A psychotic episode can last hours, days, weeks, months, and even years. Many times **families** and **friends** are the **first to notice** and recognize early signs of **psychosis**. Below are the **four overarching domains** that **psychosis signs** & **symptoms** fit within to look for changes in, with specific signs & symptoms<sup>11</sup> under each domain on the next page.



These signs can occur in children as young as **eight**. There are **screening tools** that can detect individuals that have a higher risk, such as this one here:

## Psychosis & Schizophrenia Test<sup>12</sup>

https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/psychosis/

## EARLY SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



# STARTING THE CONVERSATION

If you are a professional that notices, or hears from a parent or other trusted adult they have noticed, an **emerging adult** showing signs and/or symptoms of **psychosis**, here are some tips and conversation starters<sup>13</sup> to ease into the topic:

#### Tip

#### Educate yourself on psychosis

Go into a conversation with an open-mind without any expectations or outcomes of the conversation

Choose a **location** that is **quiet** and provides no distractions

**Do not argue** with the emerging adult, and be an active listener

Assure them that they are **not alone** 

Provide hope

### **Conversation Starters**

You don't seem like yourself.

I care about you and am here to talk if you want.

We can get though anything together, no matter how scary.

You won't always feel this way, it is temporary.