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Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

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Understanding and Coping with Psychosis

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(Texas Child Health Through Telemedicine)



What is Psychosis?

- Psychosis is characterized as disruptions to a person's thoughts and perceptions that make it difficult for them to recognize what is real and what is not. These disruptions are often experienced as seeing, hearing and believing things that are not real or having strange, persistent thoughts, behaviors and emotions. While everyone's experience is different, most children say psychosis is frightening and confusing.



Symptoms of Psychosis

- Hallucinations (visual or auditory)
- Delusions (false beliefs)
- Paranoia (fixations)
- Disorganized behavior (diminished emotional expressions, catatonia, incoherence, etc.)



Causes of Psychosis

- **Mental illness:** Psychosis can be caused by a mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or chronic severe depression.
- **Genetics:** People with a family history of psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia have a slightly increased chance of developing psychosis. There is no single gene that causes psychosis, but a number of different genes may increase the likelihood of developing it.
- **Recreational drugs:** Psychosis can be triggered by the use of drugs, including cannabis, amphetamines (ice and speed), LSD (acid), magic mushrooms, ketamine, ecstasy and cocaine.



Causes of Psychosis

- **Medical conditions:** HIV and AIDS, stroke, brain tumor, epilepsy, and Lyme disease.
- **Medications:** pain medications, cold/flu medications.
- **Sleep deprivation**
- **Oxygen deprivation**
- **Food/fluids deprivation**



Comprehensive Treatment

- **Case management:** helping the child or adolescent develop problem-solving skills, manage medication and coordinate services.
- **Family support and education:** giving families information and skills to support a child'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:** supporting a child or adolescent to continue or return to school or even work
- **Peer support:** connecting the child with others who have been through similar experiences.



Essential Treatment

- Treatment for psychosis often involves a combination of psychotherapy and medication. Several types of therapy can help individuals learn to manage their condition, while medication targets symptoms and helps to reduce their impact. How well treatment works depends on the cause(s) of the psychosis, its severity and its duration.
- Medications that help stabilize psychosis are classified as antipsychotic medications and include risperidone (Risperdal), quetiapine (Seroquel), olanzapine (Zyprexa), ziprasidone (Zeldox), paliperidone (Invega), aripiprazole (Abilify) and clozapine (Clozaril).



Essential Treatment

- In recent years a specialized form of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) has been shown to substantially help manage symptoms of psychosis. Early treatment with a combination of CBT, medication, and family and vocational support has been shown to cut the risk of future psychotic episodes by 50%. This combined treatment enables children to take lower doses of medication, with fewer side effects — or, in some cases, to be medication-free.
- CBT adapted for psychosis helps a child experiencing psychosis change the way they think about and responds to these experiences. The goal is to make them less distressing and less impairing in day-to-day life.



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Questions