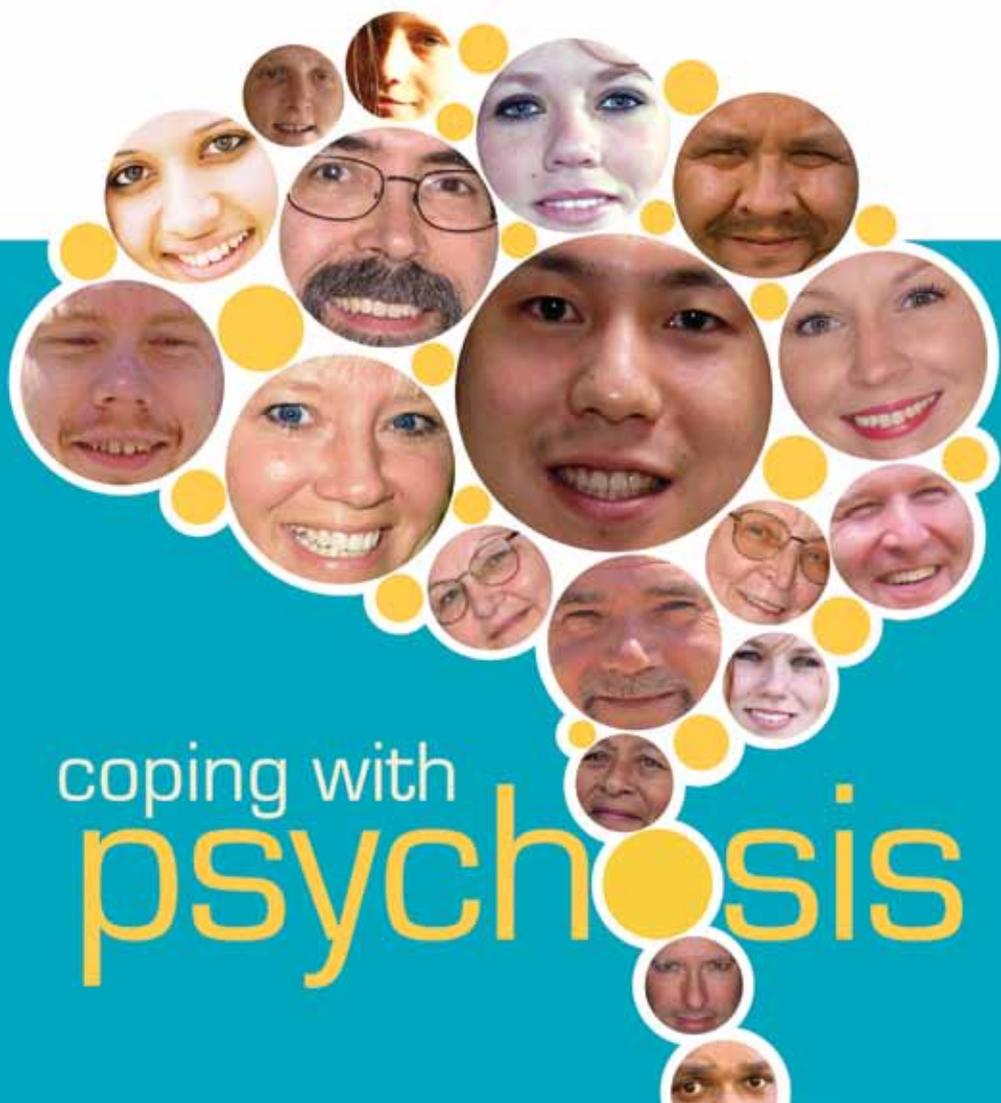




Western Health  
and Social Care Trust



coping with  
**psychosis**

## coping with psychosis

Every person is unique and most of us experience some difficulties with our mental health at different times in our lives. These difficulties can range from mild feelings of unease, to more distressing experiences such as unusual thoughts/beliefs or hearing voices... This is sometimes referred to as psychosis. When someone in the family has symptoms of psychosis, it may be confusing and distressing for the family and friends. In this time of stress it can be helpful to learn what to expect and what to do.

Psychosis affects an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviours and varies greatly from person to person. It is more common than people think, about 3% of all people will experience psychosis at some point in their life.

For a person dealing with these experiences, it is sometimes hard to tell what is real, from what is not real. The individual may feel

overwhelmed by things going on around them and may feel confused, distressed, afraid and lack in self-confidence.

The illness may have caused them to lose control of their thoughts and feel overwhelmed by the world around them. They may have ideas that someone is persecuting them or talking about them, or they may also hear voices or feel depressed.



## vulnerability and stress

All of us are vulnerable to certain levels of stress although some people are more vulnerable than others and find it more difficult to cope. For your relative, this may be the result of things happening to them which are stressful, causing them to hear voices or develop strong beliefs that to them seem to explain what is happening.

people are vulnerable in some way. They may have a family history of similar problems or a particularly sensitive personality.

It is possible that there are changes in the brain that make people vulnerable, but it remains unclear as to what these might be. Isolation, sleep disturbance and use of some drugs are also possible factors.

Stress doesn't usually do this to people but we think it occurs where or when



## what to expect

The impact of this experience can be very difficult for your relative. Their body and brain need rest to be able to cope, just as we need rest to get over the flu. Recovery may take a little time. It is common for individuals who have had this experience to:

- Sleep longer hours every night (or even during the day) for many months.
- Feel the need to be quiet and alone more often than other people.
- Be less active and feel that they cannot or do not want to do much at times.

These behaviours are natural ways of slowing down in order to help the body and brain recover. It is best to let the person recover at his or her own

pace instead of expecting them to get back to their previous level of functioning immediately. For many people, it may take several months or a year to recover. Putting too much pressure on the person to get up or go out and do things can slow down recovery.

**It may not be helpful for the person to lie down all day, have everything done for them or never do any household chores.**



## as your relative recovers

It is a good idea to gently encourage them to help with simple chores, chat with the family, or ask if they would like to go out on some social outing they used to like. If the person says no at this stage you should leave him or her alone, saying **“Okay, but you are welcome to come when you want to”**.

It is not a good idea to do everything for your relative, or to do so much that you feel worn out. For example, some family members may feel they have to tidy up after their relative or do all their cooking for them.

It is important to encourage your relative to take responsibility for such tasks, but perhaps offer to help if necessary. You may need to supervise them while they are trying to make a meal, as their memory and thinking abilities may be slowed. **It is important to let your relative know they will recover and you will support them in this process.**

It may be beneficial for your recovering relative to have a quiet place to go. This can be quite helpful for the person to cope with symptoms they are experiencing. It is NOT a personal rejection of you or the family if the person withdraws to his or her bedroom quite frequently. It is only if your relative stays there all the time that you need to be concerned. If the withdrawal is excessive, it can mean that some symptoms may be reoccurring.



For the same reason you may find your relative being emotionally distant, not very affectionate, or expressing very little feeling. This may be part of their experience and is NOT a personal reflection of anyone. In the same way as the need for quiet withdrawal, this emotional distance is simply the need to cut down on all the confusing stimulation.

Often the person may like to just sit in company and watch or listen to people. It is OK to accept these behaviours and not be worried by your relative saying nothing when in the company of others.

Your relative may sometimes talk in a strange way which you might find hard to follow. The talk may seem unconnected or irrelevant to the conversation at times. Your relative may make unexpected remarks that do not make sense. This 'odd' conversation may happen because of difficulties in

thinking clearly or because the person is hearing voices that seem very real to them, that others do not hear.

It is important to remember that the person with psychosis often acts and speaks quite normally. Symptoms often get better and may re-appear only under stress. It is important to learn about your relative's symptoms and the course the illness typically takes. It may be that your relative has been prescribed some medication to alleviate some of the more distressing symptoms and it is important that you have an understanding of this. Do not forget, your relative has many successful coping skills. It may be difficult for them to recall these skills when they are trying to recover.



## looking after yourself

During this time it is important to look after your own health as you cannot help your relative if you become ill.

- Monitor your own stress levels and set limits.
- Make use of all the supports that are available to you and your relative.
- Ask for help from other family members and friends.
- Try to keep some free time for things that you enjoy.
- Keep in contact with your GP and any other professionals involved e.g. your relative's key worker.

**Remember: Psychosis  
is treatable. Recovery  
is expected.**



## **Recovery Teams**

- Limavady 028 7772 2123
- Shantallow 028 7135 0063
- Strabane 028 7138 2963
- Waterside 028 7131 4200
- Enniskillen CMHT 028 6632 6604
- Omagh CMHT 028 8225 3082 / 028 8225 3083

## **If you care for someone with psychosis further support is available from:**

- Carers NI 028 9043 9843  
[www.carersuk.org/northernireland](http://www.carersuk.org/northernireland)
- Cause NW 0751 5065 296
- WHSCT Carers Co-ordinator 028 6634 4000  
[www.westerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net)
- Lifeline 24 Hours 0808 808 8000  
[www.lifelinehelpline.info](http://www.lifelinehelpline.info)

**For further information on psychosis visit**  
**[www.psychosissucks.ca](http://www.psychosissucks.ca)**  
**[www.mentalhealth.co.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.co.uk)**