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When Your Brother or Sister Has Psychosis: Information for Young People

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Summary: Psychosis is a condition that can change how people think and act. It can be difficult and even scary at times. The good news, is that there are many things that the health professionals (like doctors) can do in order to help your sibling get better. There are also many things that you can do to help as well.

Introduction

"*When my sister got sick she was acting really bizarre and the police had to take her to emergency. It was really scary. My friends didn't understand at first that it was just because her brain was sick, but they do now.*"

Why is my brother or sister acting this way?

Psychosis is an illness of the brain. It is caused in part by genetic (inherited) brain problems plus stress or street drugs like marijuana and crystal meth. When the brain gets ill, it is hard for the person to know what is wrong. They may make up and believe other explanations for why they feel so weird, and they may act strangely. It will be really hard for them to tell the difference between what is real and not real. Psychosis can be treated, and the earlier it is treated, the easier their recovery is likely to be.

Will I get it too?

The risk for psychosis is about three in every hundred people. If you have a sister or brother with psychosis your risk of getting it is one in ten. You have way more chance of NOT getting psychosis than of getting it. However, if sometime in the future you think you might be getting ill you can go to your family doctor for a checkup. It is also a really, really good idea to avoid using street drugs like marijuana and crystal meth, which put stress on the parts of the brain that are involved in psychosis. If there is an early psychosis service in your area, the people there can also talk to you and answer any questions you have. They might be able to put you in touch with some other siblings of people with psychosis to talk to, as well.

Was it something I did?

Psychosis is a medical illness. Sometimes when something hard happens in your life or to your family, people deal with it by blaming themselves. You don't need to. There's nothing you could have done to cause your brother or sister's illness.

How can I help?

You can help by being around to talk, by being positive, by giving sincere compliments and by gently encouraging your brother or sister to do things they're good at. Doing one-on-one things with your brother or sister will be better than doing things in crowds. They're likely to be giving themselves a hard time about their illness. You can help by being encouraging and reminding them it's illness and they will get better.

How long will it take for them to get better?

Nowadays, psychosis is normally treated with low doses of antipsychotic medication along with education and support for the person and their family. Once they start treatment, it can take a few months to up to a year for the person to get better. Sometimes they'll have some leftover symptoms that hang on longer. While they're recovering, they're likely to have a lot less energy to do things, be a lot quieter, need a lot more alone time, and prefer not to be in large crowds or noisy places.

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