



UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOSIS

Psychosis is a component of some mental illnesses that impacts a person’s brain and can make it difficult for them to understand what is and is not real. People who experience psychosis **ARE NOT** untreatable, violent by nature, or experiencing psychosis by choice.

Psychosis can affect:

THE BODY	BEHAVIOR	THOUGHTS
A person can hear things that others don’t; see things others don’t; and feel things on their body that are not there.	A person can isolate from others, neglect their hygiene, or act or speak in ways that may feel confusing or bizarre to others.	A person can feel afraid of others, believe false or strange ideas, be confused about what is real, and have trouble thinking clearly.
		

How can you help a person experiencing psychosis?

Psychosis can be frightening and overwhelming for a person to experience. Staying calm, speaking to feelings and not facts, and minimizing noise can help a person feel safe. **When you engage...**

DO

- Be gentle and calm.
- Explain what’s going on. (“I have to wear a mask to prevent the spread of the infection.”)
- Offer comfort. (“You’re safe here.”)
- Give them control and choices. (“You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to.”)
- Focus on what is troubling them. (“What would make it easier right now?”)
- Empathize. (“It must be so scary to have UPS trucks monitoring you!”)
- Focus on feelings, not facts. (“It must be so distressing to feel watched.”)
- Ask about things they seem to enjoy. (“What are you reading there?”)
- Look for an on-site mental health professional if you think they could use extra support
- Call for help if they are making unsafe decisions that might put themselves or others in danger

DON’T

- Force conversation. Raise your voice.
- Blame the person for their illness.
- Crowd their personal space.
- Deny their reality. (“Who are you talking to? There’s no one there.”)
- Be confrontational. (“That doesn’t make any sense.”)
- Take what they say personally. (“Hey, my brother drives a UPS truck and he’s not a spy!”)
- Tell them they are psychotic or crazy.
- Ignore or dismiss their questions and interests.
- Encourage their strange beliefs. (“You bet the government watches us!”)
- Forget to treat them like you would want to be treated

REMEMBER: When someone is experiencing delusions or hallucinations, those ideas and sounds seem real to them. **DON’T** challenge their reality. Name and validate their feelings instead.

For more information, visit pmhp.ucla.edu/guides