

Schizophrenia

FACT SHEET



Did you know that Schizophrenia Disorder

Affects language, emotions, and thoughts? Schizophrenia can cause a person to lose touch with reality. These people imagine objects and events to be different from what they really are. This disorder affects reasoning and emotions. Many people with schizophrenia have difficulty keeping a job, caring for themselves and socializing with others.

Could be caused by

- A family history of the disorder
- An imbalance of certain chemicals in the brain
- Environmental stress that can appear early in life (during pregnancy or early childhood) or later in life. Environmental stressors could be poverty, loneliness or abuse
- Sociocultural stressors. Sociocultural stressors could be interpersonal problems, or poor social skills

Quick tips for helping people with these symptoms of Mental Illness

- Always acknowledge what the person is saying. Do not discount their emotions. On the other hand, do not enter into a “therapy session.” Keep the boundaries firm and the purpose of the conversation clear for persons who are anxious, paranoid, and have difficulty speaking.
- Help focus the person on the topic of the counseling session. (If it is possible), try to gently bring the topic of conversation back to the purpose of the counseling session if a person is distracted and talking about another topic.
- Find a quiet room to talk with the person who may be confused or easily distracted, has difficulty speaking, and has impaired attention and memory.
- Try to understand the feelings of others and be patient. Speak slowly and repeat information for persons who are easily distracted and not concentrating. Speak in a calm and positive tone to decrease anxiety.
- Convey interest and concern towards the person. Reassure the person that you are there to help and you care. You could say, “You are not alone in this. I am here for you.”
- When explaining complex topics, speak in short, simple and logical sentences. For example, use concise and concrete words and introduce one topic at a time if the person is easily distracted, repeating sentences or words, and has impaired attention or memory.
- Write down important facts in logical order and repeat if necessary to the person. Give the person a list of the important facts that were discussed and the decisions that were made.
- To conclude the session, summarize what you discussed with the person during the session. Ask if there are questions. If there are no questions, gently but firmly tell the person the session is ended. You can also stand up as a signal to the beneficiary that the session is ended.

Symptoms

- Paranoid feelings or thoughts, such as thinking others are tapping his or her telephone
- Impaired short and long term memory, attention and organization
- Illogical, indecisive, impaired judgment
- Incoherent words and sentences
- Lack of planning skill and insight
- Difficulty speaking and expressing emotion
- Hearing voices or seeing objects that you cannot hear or see. These are called hallucinations
- Talking about personal beliefs that are false such as telling you that they are President of the United States. These are called delusions
- Apathy, loss of interest in living and withdrawal from others
- Impaired occupational and social functioning



Additional tips for helping people with symptoms of Mental Illness

If the person is starting to exhibit unusual behavior (such as persistent, disruptive and fearful behavior such as hallucinations and delusions) speak softly and in simple sentences. Hallucinations are when a person hears voices you cannot hear or sees objects that you cannot see. Delusions are when a person talks about personal beliefs that are incorrect such as telling you that they are President of the United States. Reassure the person that together you can work through the issues.

Do not pretend to agree with delusional thinking or that you can see or hear his/her hallucination. Do not tell the person he or she is wrong. If the person does not stop the unusual behavior or threatens to take his/her life or hurt him/herself or others do the following:

- ◇ Use your own judgment regarding your personal safety.
- ◇ Stop the session using established protocol your office has developed. You can call your supervisor immediately without alarming the person.
- ◇ Give some distance between the person and you.
- ◇ Do not leave the person alone until someone has arrived in the room.
- ◇ Do not criticize or threaten the person.



Web Sources:

- The National Institute of Mental Health - www.nimh.nih.gov
- Schizophrenia website - www.schizophrenia.com
- The National Alliance on Mental Illness - www.nami.org
- The Mental Health Research Association - www.narsad.org
- See Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General - <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/features/surgeongeneralreport/home.asp>

Publications:

- Medical News Today - www.medicalnewstoday.com
- eMedicineHealth - www.emedicinehealth.com
- Medline Plus - <http://medlineplus.gov>
- A Resource Guide for Families Dealing with Mental Illness - www.nami.org
- Schizophrenia (National Institute of Mental Health) - <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/schizophrenia/schizophrenia-booklet-2009.pdf>