



WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?

Often friends and family are the first to notice symptoms of someone in the early stages of a mental illness. Getting help early is the first step to stopping the progression of mental illness.

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Mental illness refers to chemical changes in the brain that interfere with the person's experience of their world: disrupting their thinking, feeling, moods and ability to relate to others. Psychosis is the most serious form of mental illness and may be prevented if detected early in the pre-illness phase. The PIER Program provides early treatment for those who are at risk for psychosis.

WHAT IS THE PRE-ILLNESS PHASE?

The pre-illness phase is a stage before psychosis. This critical phase can be a period of days, weeks or years. Symptoms of psychosis may be quite obvious or hardly noticeable. Imagine how you feel before you get the flu. Often you just don't feel "right". You may sneeze once, feel more tired than usual or have a headache. In the same way, a person may have early symptoms of mental illness, and is "at risk" of getting sick but is not ill yet.

WHAT IS PSYCHOSIS?

Psychotic illnesses include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression. A person who has a psychotic illness may have delusions, hallucinations, confused thinking and abnormal behavior. These symptoms profoundly affect a person's life. Getting help early can prevent a lifetime of pain and debilitation.

WHAT CAUSES PSYCHOSIS?

Psychosis can happen to anyone, but it is most likely to happen to people for the first time between the ages of 12 and 25. It is due to chemical imbalances in the brain, leading to a disruption of brain functioning. Some possible factors are:

- PHYSICAL ILLNESS (autoimmune, head injury, infection before birth)
- GENETIC (predisposition in genes)
- ENVIRONMENTAL (emotional trauma, social or family stress, early toxic exposure)

Psychosis is not caused by mistakes in parenting.

HOW COMMON IS PSYCHOSIS?

With about 3 percent of the population at risk for psychosis, Greater Portland could expect about 75 young people to develop a psychotic disorder each year, making the onset of psychosis more common than many severe, chronic diseases in youth. With early treatment, most people will make a full recovery.

