

## Schizophrenia

This factsheet provides some information on schizophrenia and the services available to help people. Some of the information is taken from National Mind booklet, 'Understanding Schizophrenia'.

### What is schizophrenia?

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The psychiatric use of the term schizophrenia describes someone with an impaired perception of reality, perhaps with delusions (fixed beliefs which are unrealistic for the local culture), or hallucinations (e.g. hearing voices), perhaps incoherent or incomprehensible speech, and possibly highly disorganised or inappropriate behaviour.

A person's behaviour may change drastically, and they may become anxious, confused and suspicious of others, especially when others don't agree with their perceptions. They may become extremely distrustful of loved ones, which is distressing for both concerned. They may also become angry when help is offered to them, as they may believe they don't need it, perhaps not realising that their mental state has altered. They may think that others are lying to them, or don't know the truth.

Traditionally the word 'schizophrenia' has indicated severe disturbance, and perhaps violent behaviour. However, people with this diagnosis are no more likely to be violent than the general population. There is also considerable research that demonstrates that many people who hear voices never seek help and never experience any other disturbance. It should also be borne in mind that not all of these experiences indicate that an individual is actually fulfilling the diagnosis of schizophrenia. It is important to understand what the experiences mean to the individual as, for instance, hearing voices has a different meaning in different cultures. There are also religious and spiritual experiences where voice hearing is usual.

### Cultural Backgrounds

Perhaps more than other psychiatric labels, schizophrenia is culturally constructed and culturally specific. It is not uncommon for problems to arise when mental health professionals work with people from a non- Western background. Each can be suspicious of the other's culture or simply do not understand it. Therefore the behaviour or thinking of an individual may be misunderstood, and either be given inappropriate treatment or no treatment at all, even though it may be needed.

It is helpful then if another person from the same cultural background can accompany the individual and explain the cultural background and how the behaviour is either disturbed or normal within that culture. People from African-Caribbean backgrounds have frequently been misdiagnosed with schizophrenia, because their behaviour was incomprehensible to Western psychiatrists.

## Common symptoms of Schizophrenia

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Schizophrenia may develop suddenly or it may develop gradually over time. It consists of a diverse range of symptoms, and sometimes an individual will experience different symptoms at different times. An individual may experience schizophrenia only once, or have it throughout his/her life.

### Hallucinations

Some people hear voices (or other sounds), which may appear to come from external sources, like the television. Voices may be friendly, familiar or critical, and the latter are much more difficult to deal with. They might order the individual to do or say certain things, which can be very distressing, even telling someone to harm him or herself. People who hear benign voices are less likely to come to the attention of the mental health services.

### Delusions

Delusions are beliefs or experiences that others don't share, and can be seen as 'false beliefs'. For instance, someone may have a delusion of being controlled by external forces, or that senior members of government are plotting to harm them. The types of delusions depend on someone's cultural background. For instance, in the West, delusions may be centred on technology, (e.g. people believe a chip has been inserted in them), whereas in other parts of the world, the delusions are often focused on spiritual beliefs.

### Unusual thinking

People who experience schizophrenia may be unable to think clearly as their mind may be overwhelmed with jumbled ideas which don't make sense to others. They may be unable to follow a thought or their mind may suddenly go blank for no reason. The manner in which they talk may therefore seem strange to other people.

### Changes in emotion

Emotions may be intensified but more commonly they become blunted and people may feel less responsive. They may become more withdrawn and it may be difficult to make contact with them. It may be that at times they react in inappropriate ways, such as laughing at something sad or distressful.

### Behavioural changes

Some people may experience a lack of energy and motivation, find it hard to concentrate and begin to neglect their personal hygiene and appearance. Some people may withdraw from social contact altogether and spend considerable periods of time alone, doing very little or sleeping. The person may be purposely trying to isolate themselves in order to reduce stimulation from the outside world, which may overwhelm them.

## Causes of schizophrenia

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The causes of schizophrenia are not known. However, it appears that a number of contributory factors can put an individual at risk: a genetic component; disturbances in brain chemistry or brain development; psychosocial factors such as a disturbed childhood, or sexual abuse; drug misuse, especially cannabis use in adolescence; stressful life events.

## Where can I get help?

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Your GP will refer you to psychiatric services for an initial assessment, as well as treatment and care. If your symptoms are very distressing, you may be admitted to hospital for a period. Once your treatment is established, a worker in the Community Mental Health team will either support you or your GP can take responsibility for your ongoing care. Early diagnosis and treatment greatly increase the likelihood of recovery. You may be given medication, which can improve symptoms or dampen them down. There

may be side effects, which your psychiatrist should warn you about, and perhaps give you other medication to lessen these.

## Local Statutory Services (Referral by your GP)

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### **Harrow Assessment and Brief Treatment Team:**

The team works with people with mental health problems who are newly referred to the service.

839 Honeypot Lane, Stanmore HA7 1AT

Tel: 020 8951 3770 (9am-5pm)

Website: <http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/harrow-assessment-and-brief-treatment-team/>

### **Harrow Community Recovery Team:**

The team aims to deliver excellent integrated, recovery-focused and evidence-based health and social care.

Atkins House, 19 Marshall Close, Harrow HA1 4DH

Tel: 020 8422 9443 (9am-5pm)

Website: [www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/harrow-assessment-and-brief-treatment-team/](http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/harrow-assessment-and-brief-treatment-team/)

### **Harrow Home Treatment Team**

Provides short-term interventions and help for people, in their own environment, who experience a crisis situation in relation to their mental health.

Mental Health Unit, Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow HA1 3UJ

Tel: 020 8869 2690 For referrals from professionals only.

Website: <http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/harrow-home-treatment-team/#na>

People wanting to self-refer to the Crisis Resolution Service should go to Accident & Emergency (A&E) at Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow HA1 3UJ

## Local Voluntary Organisations

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### **Harrow Carers**

Support for carers of people who have serious mental health issues.

376-378 Pinner Road, Pinner, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 6DZ

Tel: 020 8868 5224

Opening Times: Mon-Fri 9-5pm

Email: [admin@harrowcarers.org](mailto:admin@harrowcarers.org)

Website: [www.harrowcarers.org](http://www.harrowcarers.org)

### **Rethink Support Group**

The group is open to carers, people experiencing mental illness and their families and friends. The group provides mutual support and access to information via its meetings, monthly newsletter, available by email and post, and aims to improve local mental health policies and services by promoting members views on local committees.

Contact: Ann Freeman & Jennifer Zeffman

Tel: 020 8427 7737 (Ann)

Email: [harrowsupportgroup@rethink.org](mailto:harrowsupportgroup@rethink.org)

Website: <http://www.rethink.org/services-groups/groups/harrow-rethink-support-group>

### **Rethink Recovery House Harrow**

Offer residential support for up to six people (between 18-65) with serious mental health problems, who are already under the care of the Community Mental Health Team. Referral is by a CMHT professional.

There is one place reserved for a crisis admission with expected length of stay 2-4 weeks

13-17 Roxborough Road Harrow Middlesex HA1 1NS

Tel: 020 8861 3717

Email: [rethinkrecovery@rethink.org](mailto:rethinkrecovery@rethink.org)

Website: [http://www.rethink.org/services-groups/services/rethink-recovery-house-\(harrow\)](http://www.rethink.org/services-groups/services/rethink-recovery-house-(harrow))

## Helplines

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### **Harrow Samaritans (24hrs)**

44 Station Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 2SQ

Tel: 020 8427 7777 Sunday to Friday: 10:00am to about 9:00pm and Saturday: 10:00am to about 6:00pm / National Number: 08457 90 90 90

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Website: [www.samaritans.org/harrow](http://www.samaritans.org/harrow)

### **Hearing Voices Network**

c/o Sheffield Hearing Voices Network

Helpline: 0114 271 8210 Mon-Fri (10am-4pm)

Email: [nhvn@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nhvn@hotmail.co.uk)

Website: [www.hearing-voices.org](http://www.hearing-voices.org)

Raises awareness of voice hearing and other sensory experiences, and supports people who experience these through local support groups and through information. Also produces 4 newsletters a year.

### **SANE**

SANE works to improve the quality of life of anyone affected by mental illness.

SANE Head Office, St Marks Studios, 14 Chillingworth Road, Islington, London, N7 8QJ

Helpline: 0300 304 7000 from 6.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m. every evening

Telephone: 020 3805 1790 General enquiries

E-mail: [info@sane.org.uk](mailto:info@sane.org.uk) (admin queries only)

Website: [www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

## National Organisations

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### **Rethink**

Aims to improve the lives of people affected by severe mental health issues, by providing information, advice and advocacy services, as well as raising awareness of mental health issues, and challenging stigma

Head Office, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP

Tel: 0300 5000 927 Advice service Mon-Fri 10a.m.-2p.m.

Tel: 0121 522 7007 General enquiries Mon – Fri 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

E-mail: [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org) for advice

Email: [info@rethink.org](mailto:info@rethink.org) for general enquiries

Website: [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

## Websites

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National Mind online booklet 'Understanding Schizophrenia'

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/schizophrenia/#.VBrHtpRdWyo>

### **Royal College of Psychiatrists**

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the professional body responsible for education, training, setting and raising standards in psychiatry.

Website: <http://rcpsych.ac.uk/>

**Schizophrenia.com**

A web community providing information, support and education for individuals and families who affected by schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia.com is an internet community dedicated to providing high quality information, support and education to the family members, caregivers and individuals whose lives have been impacted by schizophrenia.

Website: [www.schizophrenia.com](http://www.schizophrenia.com)

**World Fellowship for Schizophrenia and Allied Disorders**

Aims to lighten the burden of schizophrenia and allied disorders for individuals and their families.

Website: [www.world-schizophrenia.org](http://www.world-schizophrenia.org)

**Created by:**

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