



**KNOWLEDGE  
NETWORK**

## **Taking Care: Child and Youth Mental Health**

### PSYCHOSIS – TREATMENT OPTIONS

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### **TREATMENT OPTIONS**

Psychosis is highly treatable, especially if caught early. The prognosis for recovery has increased significantly in the last five years due to an emphasis on education and family support, in addition to medication. Treatment involves a combination of education, medication and psychosocial interventions such as developing a support group, learning to cope with stress and being able to recognize the onset of psychotic symptoms.

Antipsychotic medication is usually a necessity to control the symptoms of psychosis, whereas psychosocial interventions focus on preventing relapses by ensuring the sufferer is paired with case managers and counsellors who assist them to reintegrate into their daily lives and routines.

#### Medication:

Medication is necessary to reduce the symptoms of psychosis and to prevent relapse—often for the first two to five years after an initial episode. Antipsychotic medications are used to treat psychosis and are divided into two categories:

1. Typical antipsychotics: haloperidol, loxapine and many others
2. Atypical antipsychotics: risperidone, olanzapine, quetiapine, ziprasidone and clozapine

There are also other medications that are sometimes used along with antipsychotics, depending on the symptoms. For example, antidepressants or mood stabilizers may be used for problems with mood associated with psychosis. It is difficult, however, to achieve optimal results with medication because more than 50% of young people who have had a first psychotic episode abandon their medications in the first year due to side effects or the belief that they no longer need treatment.

Antipsychotics can cause side effects, depending upon the particular medication used. Common side effects can include weight gain, dry mouth, feelings of dizziness or light-headedness, constipation, blurred vision and fatigue. It is crucial to closely monitor young people during their first few months on an antipsychotic, as side effects are most likely to occur during this period. If side effects do occur, it is important to consult your doctor before making a change. Pulling your child off a drug cold turkey can be dangerous.

In British Columbia, virtually all typical antipsychotics, along with the atypical medications risperidone and quetiapine, are designated under the provincial health insurance plan as available for use as first-line medications.

### Psychosocial Interventions:

Psychosocial interventions such as education, peer support and counselling help people learn how to live with psychosis and how to get through a psychotic episode. This type of treatment focuses on day-to-day issues such as getting through the school-day, talking to friends about the challenges of the illness, dealing with side effects of the medication, coping with family, etc.—issues that are practical in nature and strategies that are specific to particular situations. It also includes treatment for co-morbid depression and anxiety, case management and vocational rehabilitation for older youth.

### FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions About Treatment Options

1. How can I get treatment?
2. What kind of specialist should my child see?
3. What is the cost of treatment?
4. What is a day treatment program?
5. When is hospital treatment required?
6. How long is medication required?

### **How can I get treatment?**

In British Columbia, the mental health service system for children and youth includes a range of options. Services are offered throughout the province by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, both directly as well as through partnerships with community organizations, schools, medical facilities, doctors and others. Click the following link for a full list of the Ministry of Children and Family Development's Child and Youth Mental Health Offices in BC:

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental\\_health/pdf/services.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/pdf/services.pdf)

If you know your child needs treatment, you can take him or her directly to one of these offices. He or she will then go through a screening and intake process to determine appropriate treatment and referral. In some areas of the province, a wait for Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health services may occur. All new referrals are screened for severity and urgent cases are seen first. If you suspect someone you know is having a psychotic episode, you can also take them directly to the local emergency ward.



In some areas of British Columbia, early psychosis services may be available, either as an established program, a newly developing service or a contact person. Call the following for early psychosis information if you live in:

Vancouver

604-225-2211

Fraser Valley North

604-469-5152

Fraser Valley South

604-538-4278

Victoria

250-889-4284

Campbell River

250-850-5800 (Adult)

Courtenay

250-338-9777 (Adult)

Cowichan Valley

250-701-5910 (Adult)

250-715-2896 (Youth)

Vernon

250-549-5737

Kamloops

250-851-7450 (Adult)

250-376-7855 (Youth)

Kelowna

250-868-7788 (19 - 25 years)

250-861-7301 (13-18 years)

Penticton

250-770-3555 (19-30 years)

250-487-4422 (18 and under)

If you aren't sure whether you need treatment, or where to start, go to your family doctor or local clinic. Physicians are trained in assessment and diagnosis of mental health disorders and can treat them directly or refer your child to an appropriate specialist if necessary. You may also wish to consult a school counselor as a first step in getting help.

### **What kind of specialist should my child see?**

The type of doctor you see will depend on the severity of the disorder and required treatment. Below are some basic definitions of the different kinds of specialists. Your family doctor or the Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health teams can help assess your needs more specifically. Early psychosis is best treated by a multidisciplinary team of care professionals, depending upon the specific recovery needs of each patient.

#### *Psychiatrist*

Psychiatrists are medical specialists trained to treat people with mental health disorders. They often use medication as the primary form of treatment but may employ non-drug therapies as well. Patients with severe psychotic disorders would likely be referred to a psychiatrist through their family doctor.

#### *Psychologist*

Psychologists typically provide counselling and psychotherapy, and administer and interpret psychological assessment tests. Psychologists are not medical doctors and do not prescribe medication. They have advanced training in clinical psychology and are licensed practitioners through the College of Psychologists of BC.

#### *Psychiatric Nurse*

Psychiatric nurses work with people to assess mental health needs, develop nursing diagnoses and care plans, and monitor treatment. At an advanced level, psychiatric nurses with master's degrees in mental health nursing provide a full range of services to treat mental health disorders.

#### *Clinical Social Worker*

Clinical social workers provide assessment and treatment of mental, emotional and behavioural disorders and conditions. They can provide psychosocial interventions to enhance personal, interpersonal and social functioning. A clinical social worker typically holds a master's degree in social work.

### **What is the cost of treatment?**

Visits to your family doctor and Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health teams (which include psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, counsellors and nurses) are funded by the provincial government and there is no cost to the patient or his or her family. However, not all of these mental health clinicians are available in every community. Some communities have all four disciplines represented, whereas others have only one or two. Treatment by private practicing specialists such as psychologists, therapists and counsellors may be covered under personal extended health care plans. Workplace employee assistance programs will often pay for some sessions, so check with your insurance provider for details. The cost will depend on the course and length of treatment.

For more info, contact:

College of Psychologists of BC  
<http://www.collegeofpsychologists.bc.ca>

Board of Registration for Social Workers in BC  
<http://www.brsw.bc.ca>

Registered Nurses Association of BC  
<http://www.rnabc.bc.ca>

### **What is a day treatment program?**

A day treatment program can be a very effective solution for young people with recurring or more severe psychosis who require daily support and care. It is community-based, offered in a non-hospital environment, and encompasses schooling and therapeutic support five days per week. Contact your local Child and Youth Mental Health Team for information on availability of day treatment programs in your area.

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental\\_health/pdf/services.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/pdf/services.pdf)

### **When is hospital treatment required?**

Hospital inpatient treatment is generally only required in very severe cases—if the child or youth is unable to function due to psychosis. Hospitals, which often see sufferers in the acute phase, are a key feature in early psychosis programs. Hospital beds, however, can be limited and wards are not always very child or youth-friendly. In Kelowna, a campaign is currently underway to raise funds for the construction of an adolescent psychiatry wing at Kelowna General Hospital. For more info, go to:

[www.180-degrees.ca](http://www.180-degrees.ca)

A new child and youth mental health wing is also being built at BC's Children's Hospital. For more info, go to: <http://www.cw.bc.ca/mentalhealth/index.asp>

Other hospitals with adolescent psychiatric wings include:

Surrey Memorial Hospital, Surrey  
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Victoria  
Prince George Hospital, Prince George

### **How long is medication required?**

The length of time medication is required will depend upon the severity of the disorder. Sometimes it is required indefinitely, however dosages can be reduced over time. Suddenly stopping medication can be dangerous—causing side effects or enabling the illness to return—so be sure to consult your doctor before initiating changes.