

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS

The **UCSF Path Program for Early Psychosis** is here to help.



## What is psychosis?

“Psychosis” is not a specific illness but a term to describe a broad range of mental health symptoms that may indicate a serious mental health condition. These symptoms can include changes in thoughts and perceptions that can affect one's ability to engage in school, extracurriculars or relationships.

# 100,000

**YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE PSYCHOSIS FOR THE FIRST TIME EACH YEAR.<sup>1</sup>**

It's more common than we think, and research has found that **teachers & counselors** are often among the first to notice changes in students.<sup>2</sup>

**Without early, specialized care, psychosis can disrupt lives.**

**SCHOOL DROP OUT**

# 3X

High school students with psychosis are ~3x more likely to drop out of school than their peers.<sup>3</sup>

**UNEMPLOYMENT**

# 7X

Individuals with severe mental disorders are 7x more likely to be unemployed than the general population.<sup>4</sup>

**UNHOUSED**

# 30%

30% of unhoused individuals also have a serious mental illness.<sup>5</sup>

**SUICIDALITY**

# 20-40%

20-40% of individuals with psychosis will attempt suicide in their lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

**Students with severe mental illness who stay in school while receiving treatment experience greater recovery.**

By learning about the early signs and symptoms of psychosis and understanding how to support students experiencing mental health changes, schools can play a critical role in supporting young people as they navigate recovery.

# Identifying signs of psychosis:

Every person's experience with psychosis is unique, but there are common signs of psychosis that you may notice in a student.



## CHANGES IN TYPICAL ACTIVITY

- Withdrawing from or avoiding social activities, friends or family
- Having difficulty concentrating, listening or reading
- Losing interest in previously held activities or hobbies

## UNFAMILIAR THOUGHTS OR FEELINGS

- Believing that ordinary things have special meaning
- Having difficulty organizing thoughts or finding the right words
- Having ideas that seem strange, grandiose or illogical
- Believing that others can read their mind or know what they are thinking

## SENSORY OR PERCEPTUAL CHANGES

- Seeming confused about what is real or imagined
- Thinking that others are watching or talking about them
- Hearing or seeing things that others do not, such as voices, shadows or images
- Thinking they are not control of their own thoughts, ideas or actions

## How to support students with mental health concerns:

Here are a few ways that schools can support students who may be managing symptoms or side effects of medication.

- **Connect students with school-based counselors** for school and social support
- **Provide preferential seating** away from distracting/noisy peers, windows or areas
- **Allow extra time & flexible deadlines** to complete exams, homework or projects
- **Offer note-taking assistance**, such as class recordings or shared notes
- **Give alternatives to public speaking**, such as submitting a recording to the teacher
- **Provide organization assistance**, including support with time management
- **Support the application process** for college/post-grad or jobs, for example
- **Provide 1:1 aide** that can shadow students to help them reach their academic goals
- **Allow accommodations for medication**, such as leaving class to take medication or address side effects

## Things you can say to express concern:

### TO CHECK IN:

- I just wanted to check in. I've noticed [...], and wanted to see if you're okay. Is there anything I can do to help support you?
- *If they share something:* Thank you for sharing that with me. My priority is ensuring your well-being. Can you tell me a little bit more about what's going on, so we can figure out how I can support you?

### TO LISTEN ACTIVELY:

- I'm sorry, that seems like a difficult situation. What has it been like for you?
- *Try to relate, share yours or similar stories.*

### TO CONNECT TO CARE:

- Thank you for being open with me. I want to make sure that you get the help you need. Would you be open to:
  - > Talking with a counselor, either at our school or outside of the school?
  - > Taking a confidential crisis number to text or call when you need it?

Sources: (1) NIMH. (2) Pathways to mental health services for young people: a systematic review, 2022. (3) Prevalence and Correlates of School Drop-Out Prior to Initial Treatment of Nonaffective Psychosis: Further Evidence Suggesting a Need for Supported Education, 2009. (4) Mental Health and Work, 2012. (5) UCLA Law Review, 2020. (6) Predictors of suicide attempt in early-onset, first-episode psychoses: a longitudinal 24-month follow-up study, 2013.