



Student Mental Health: First Episode Psychosis

What Is First Episode Psychosis (FEP)?

A first episode of psychosis (FEP) involves experiencing a disconnection from reality, which can manifest in various ways. FEP typically emerges during late adolescence or early adulthood, making high school and college students a vulnerable demographic.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of FEP?

- **Hallucinations:** People experiencing FEP may hear sounds and voices or see things that others do not. These experiences can be confusing and distressing.
- **Delusions:** Individuals may hold strong, unusual beliefs that are not based in reality. These beliefs may lead to unusual or risky behaviors.
- **Disorganized Thinking and Speech:** FEP can lead to disorganized thoughts, making it difficult for individuals to convey their ideas to others. Their speech may jump between unrelated topics, and they may appear confused or disoriented.
- **Difficulty Concentrating:** FEP can reduce the ability to focus on tasks, affecting academic performance and daily functioning.
- **Social Withdrawal:** Individuals may isolate themselves from friends and activities they once enjoyed.
- **Decline in Functioning:** A noticeable decline in the ability to carry out daily tasks, including schoolwork and self-care, may be observed.



How Do I Identify a Student Who Might Be Experiencing FEP?

- **Notice Changes:** Be attentive to any sudden or significant changes in behavior, appearance, or social interactions.
- **Gather Information:** If appropriate, speak to friends, roommates, or faculty who may have observed changes in the student's behavior.
- **Engage in Conversations:** Initiate open and non-judgmental conversations to understand their experiences and emotions.
- **Ask Directly:** If you suspect a student is experiencing psychosis, ask directly about their experiences without judgment. For example, you can say, "I've noticed you've been acting differently lately. Can you tell me how you're feeling?"



Student Mental Health: First Episode Psychosis

What Questions Can I Ask to Better Understand What a Student May Be Experiencing?

- “Do you have any concerns or worries that you’d like to discuss?”
- “Can you tell me what you’re experiencing right now?”
- “Are you feeling scared or overwhelmed?”
- “Is there anything specific causing these feelings or thoughts?”
- “Is there anyone or anything that helps you feel calmer or safer?”
- “Can you tell me more about the voices or things you see that others might not?”
- “Have you experienced anything like this before, and if so, what has helped in the past?”



How do I Support Students Who Might Be Experiencing FEP?

- **Engage with Empathy:** Approach them with an open, non-judgmental attitude.
- **Do Not Dismiss:** Avoid dismissing their experiences or beliefs; instead, listen actively and acknowledge their feelings.
- **Active Listening:** Listen without judgment and validate their feelings.
- **Connect to Resources:** Encourage them to consider professional help.
- **Promote Self-Care:** Emphasize self-care, stress management, and a healthy lifestyle.

Why Is Early Intervention Important?

- **Reduced Duration and Severity:** Early intervention can shorten the duration and lessen the severity of psychotic episodes, leading to quicker recovery.
- **Improved Outcomes:** Treatment is associated with reduction in hospitalizations and trauma, improvements in daily function and personal interactions, and enhanced quality of life.
- **Academic and Personal Impact:** Early intervention can help minimize disruption to students’ academic and personal lives, allowing them to continue their education and maintain relationships.

Where Can I Learn More?

- **EPC** (Missouri’s Early Psychosis Care Center) - epcmissouri.org
- **SAMHSA** (United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) - samhsa.gov
- **NAMI** (National Alliance on Mental Illness) - nami.org