

Early warning signs formⁱ

What are the early signs?

Usually there are some changes in an individual before the obvious symptoms of psychosis develop. These changes are called early signs and this phase just before the psychosis is called the 'prodrome'. By identifying and acting on these early warning signs, relapse can be prevented or the severity of relapse reduced.

Early signs vary from person to person. There may be changes in the way some people describe their feelings, thoughts and perceptions. However, they have not started experiencing clear psychotic symptoms, such as hallucinations, delusions or confused thinking.

A person may become:

- suspicious
- depressed and lacking interest in things
- anxious or tense
- irritable, quick-tempered or angry.

A person may experience:

- mood swings
- sleeping problems
- appetite changes
- loss of energy or motivation
- difficulty in concentrating or remembering things.

A person may feel:

- their thoughts are slowed down or speeded up
- things are somehow different
- things around them seem changed.

Often family and friends are the first to notice changes.

Family and friends may notice when:

- a person's behaviour changes
- a person's studies or work deteriorates
- a person becomes more withdrawn or isolated
- a person becomes less active.

Families often sense that something is not quite right even though they don't know exactly what the problem is.

Identifying early warning signs and developing a plan to respond to the signs is a cooperative effort. The individual with the disorder, family or carers and health professionals should all be involved. The individual and family members can also share responsibility for the regular monitoring of signs. Early warning signs identified should be individual to the person with the disorder, specific and understandable to the individual and his or her carers. For example, 'unable to read for more than five minutes at a time

without thoughts crowding into my head', rather than 'difficulty concentrating'; and 'spending more than four hours alone in my room for three days running', rather than 'withdrawing'. This information can then be recorded on the early warning signs form.

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| <p>Early warning signs</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>I am at risk of developing episodes of: _____</p> <p>My early warning signs are (eg changes in sleep, eating/drinking or mood, becoming quiet or loud or more withdrawn):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. _____2. _____3. _____ <p>Whenever I have <i>any</i> of these signs I will respond by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. _____ _____2. _____ _____3. _____ _____ <p>My health worker is: _____ Phone: _____</p> <p>My home contact is: _____ Phone: _____</p> <p>My advocacy contact is: _____ Phone: _____</p> <p>If I have any concerns about my illness I will contact: _____ immediately.</p> |
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ⁱ Adapted with permission from Falloon IRH, Laporta M, Fadden G, Graham-Hole, V. *Managing Stress in Families: Cognitive and Behavioural Strategies for Enhancing Coping Skills*. London: Routledge, 1993, quoted in Andrews G, Jenkins R, eds. *Management of Mental Disorders* (UK Edition). Sydney. World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, 1999. Distributed for the publishers in the UK by IN 2 Mail ltd, Fax: +44 (0)1252 322315; PO Box 55, Aldershot, Hampshire GU12 4FP.