

## **How to Help Children with Psychosis**

### **“Caring for Children’s Mental Health Parent Education Series**

Education Bureau 2022

#### **What is “Psychosis”?**

Psychosis (including Schizophrenia, Delusional Disorder, etc.) is a kind of brain disease. Owing to the disorder of the brain neural network, there are disturbances in one’s “thoughts” and “perceptions”, which leads to abnormal emotion, speech and behaviours of the person. “Thoughts” refers to the content and organization of thoughts, while “perception” refers to the sensation felt by the five different sense organs. When suffering from Psychosis, people cannot accurately understand the reality around them, nor could they get control of their own thoughts and feelings, and express themselves clearly.

Common symptoms of Psychosis include the following:

- Hallucination, such as hearing, seeing, smelling, or feeling some non-existent sounds, objects or odours
- Delusions that are unbelievable and out of touch with reality
- Confused thoughts, talk incoherently and illogically
- Lack of motivation
- Neglecting to care for one’s appearance and personal hygiene
- Deterioration of the ability to express emotions
- Poverty of speech

#### **Roles of Parents**

##### **If I suspect that my child has Psychosis, I should...**

- Seek psychiatric consultation and assessment for my child as early as possible, so that appropriate treatment and support training can be arranged for him/her
- Initiate contact with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), class teacher, the School Guidance Team or school social workers for arrangement of appropriate support services

##### **After my child has been assessed as having Psychosis, I should...**

- Cooperate with healthcare professionals in undertaking the suggested treatment plan to make sure that my child receives the treatments he/she needs and takes medication as prescribed (if applicable)
- Take the initiative to provide the school with the information about my child’s special educational needs as early as possible, including passing his/her psychiatric report to the school for arrangement of appropriate support services
- Maintain communication with the School Guidance Team or school social workers, SENCO, Student Support Team, class teacher and subject teachers to understand my child’s learning and adjustment condition; and jointly discuss appropriate support strategies if necessary

#### **The following strategies may be considered when supporting your child:**

##### **Arrangement of Medical Follow-up and Medication Management**

- Medication plays the most important role in the treatment of Psychosis. You should take your child for follow-up visits on time to meet with psychiatrists, take medication as instructed and observe his/her progress after taking medication
- In order to reduce the chance of relapse, even if the child’s condition has been stabilised, he/she should continue to take medication according to doctors’ instructions, and he/she should not reduce or stop the medication by himself/herself

##### **Arrangement in Environment and Daily Activity**

- Reduce the number of items at home that may cause irritation to your child
- Basing on the child’s condition, try to arrange regular and appropriate amount of family or social activities for him/her, to prevent the child from being too socially isolated

##### **Communication Skills**

- Keep calm while speaking and avoid triggering your child’s emotions
- Use simple sentences to communicate directly with your child, clearly express your thoughts and feelings, and repeat what you have said when necessary
- Show concern and acceptance through actions and words, such as spending more time with your child or writing encouraging notes
- Praise your child on his/her strength and the efforts he/she has made, and encourage him/her in time to boost his/her confidence
- When your child encountering difficulties, teach him/her to solve problems step by step with systematic problem-solving strategies
- While responding to your child’s hallucinations and delusions, you should listen to his/her experiences patiently, understand his/her feelings of being disturbed by the illness and avoid arguing with him/her about the truthfulness of these hallucinations and delusions. At the same time, you do not have to pretend that you can feel his/her

hallucinations and delusions

### **Emotion Management**

- Understand and accept your child's feelings, and guide them to use appropriate phrases and sentences to express his/her feelings
- Guide your child to use appropriate relaxation methods, such as deep breathing and relaxation exercises, to reduce the anxiety when hallucinations or delusions occur

### **Family Management**

- Maintain a positive way of discipline and avoid over protection or over criticising your child's behaviours
- Adjust your expectations and standards toward your child according to his/her abilities
- During the course of recovery, you can encourage him/her to learn to take care of himself/herself so as to develop his/her independence

### **In addition to caring for your child's condition, caregivers should also pay attention to their own mental health. Therefore, you may:**

- Develop effective personal stress management methods and maintain physical and mental balance to support the growth of your child
- Make good use of community resources or share the childcare work with family members
- Participate in support groups for family members and share the difficulties and experiences with the group members

### **Support Measures and Strategies**

In general, schools may provide the following support according to the needs of individual students:

#### **Helping the Student on School Adjustment**

- Discuss with the medical team to develop appropriate support measures and strategies for the student so as to help him/her cope with hallucinations and delusions in school
- Assist the student to apply the strategies used in psychological treatment in school, to improve his/her ability to distinguish between thoughts and reality
- Allow the student to participate in class activities according to his/her ability and condition to avoid putting the student under too much pressure
- Flexibly handle routines and attendance requirements based on students' conditions and needs

#### **Helping the Student Get Along and Communicate with Teachers and Peers**

- Establish a caring school culture, increase teachers' and students' understanding of Psychosis and accept students with Psychosis with an inclusive mindset
- Teachers should show care for the student with Psychosis more often, such as praising and explicitly pointing out his/her improvements, or writing down some encouraging words for him/her
- Arrange helpful peers to support the student with Psychosis and provide academic support

#### **Engaging the Student in Learning Activities**

- Provide appropriate learning support for the student in need to reduce the load on his/her memory, concentration and organisation
- Give brief instructions and repeat them when necessary, or give verbal or visual cues
- Adjust expectations toward the student according to his/her ability, divide tasks into smaller parts and teach the student to use organization methods and memory aids to process learning materials in class
- Provide homework accommodations according to the student's needs to reduce his/her pressure
- Provide special examination arrangements according to the student's needs and suggestions from professionals

#### **Strengthening Support and Home-School Cooperation**

- Provide intensive support services for students with serious difficulties as needed, such as formulating an Individual Learning Plan, conducting regular reviews and follow-up
- Maintain close collaboration and communication among the school, parents and professionals (such as healthcare professionals, social workers and psychologists, etc.) to know about the follow-up and the situations of taking medication of students
- If the student shows symptoms of relapse, the school should communicate with his/her family and medical staff as early as possible to seek appropriate assistance

### **Useful Websites**

#### **Education Bureau**

Homepage of the Education Bureau

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

“SENSE” Integrated Education and Special Education Information Online Information  
<https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

“Mental Health @School” Student Mental Health Information Online  
<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education  
[https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/integrated-education/download-area-and-related-links/ie\\_guide\\_en.pdf](https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/integrated-education/download-area-and-related-links/ie_guide_en.pdf)

Teacher's Resource Handbook on Understanding and Supporting Students with Mental Illness  
[https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/types-of-special-educational-needs/mental-illness/Teacher's\\_Resource\\_Handbook\\_on\\_Understanding\\_and\\_Supporting\\_Students\\_with\\_Mental\\_Illness\\_\(August%202017\).pdf](https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/types-of-special-educational-needs/mental-illness/Teacher's_Resource_Handbook_on_Understanding_and_Supporting_Students_with_Mental_Illness_(August%202017).pdf)

**Department of Health**  
Child Assessment Service  
<https://www.dhcas.gov.hk/en/>

Student Health Service  
<https://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/eindex.html>

**Hospital Authority**  
Early Assessment Service for Young People with Early Psychosis (EASY)  
<https://www3.ha.org.hk/easy/chi/service.html>

**Social Welfare Department**  
<https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/>

**The Hong Kong Council of Social Service**  
<https://www.hkcss.org.hk/?lang=en>

### Telephone Numbers for Enquiry

**Education Bureau**  
General Enquiries on Special Education 3698 3957

**Hospital Authority**  
Hospital Authority Mental Health Direct (24 hours) 2466 7350  
Early Assessment Service for Young People with Early Psychosis (EASY) 2928 3283

**Department of Health**  
Child Assessment Service 2246 6659  
Student Health Service 2349 4212

### Community Resources and Helplines

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/early-identification-at-the-selective-level/helplines-and-community-resources.html>