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SCHIZOPHRENIA

What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a complex mental health diagnosis which can include periods of psychosis. Around 1 in every 100 people has schizophrenia and there are many misconceptions about this illness.

Many experiences and behaviours can be part of schizophrenia. They can start suddenly, or they might develop gradually over time. Each person's experience is unique.

Professionals sometimes talk about schizophrenia symptoms as being 'positive' and 'negative'. But this doesn't mean 'good' or 'bad'.

- **Positive symptoms** are experiences or behaviours that the condition adds to someone's life, like hearing or seeing things that others don't, or having a belief that something is real or true when it isn't.
- **Negative symptoms** are experiences or behaviours that the condition takes away from life, like finding things less interesting or enjoyable, moving their body less, or having less motivation.

Misconceptions about schizophrenia

There's lots of misinformation about schizophrenia in the media. Stories in the news and on TV programmes are often sensationalised and misleading. The truth is:

- It does not mean someone has a 'split personality'.
- It does not mean that someone is dangerous or violent. Most people with schizophrenia do not commit violent crimes. Some research suggests that the risk may be slightly higher among people who have this diagnosis than people who don't. But it's not clear that schizophrenia is the cause. Evidence shows that factors like drug and alcohol misuse are far more likely to play a part in violence. People with schizophrenia are more likely to be victims of crime – or to harm themselves – than to harm someone else.

Someone with schizophrenia might experience:

- disorganised thinking and speech
- feeling disconnected from emotions
- a lack of interest in things
- wanting to avoid people
- hallucinations, such as hearing voices or seeing things others don't
- difficulty concentrating
- delusions (strong beliefs that others don't share), including paranoid delusions
- not wanting to look after oneself.
- psychotic episodes where a person experiences a break from reality

They might also:

- disagree with people who think something is wrong
- not be able to carry on with day-to-day activities
- become upset, confused or suspicious of other people or particular groups (like strangers, or people in authority)
- feel worried or afraid of seeking help.