

## Early Intervention: Tips for School Staff and Coaches

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**H**igh school is an exciting time when teens gain greater independence. Many are thinking about college, full-time employment and life after graduation. Yet, it is also a time when many teens develop mental health conditions.

### **How common are mental health conditions?**

One in five teens experiences a mental health condition. Half of all lifetime cases of mental health conditions begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24. Early identification and intervention are essential to keep young lives on track. This is especially true for those experiencing psychosis, which affects about 100,000 youth and young adults each year. Psychosis exists when the brain's ability to interpret reality is interrupted, causing disruptions in thinking

and perceptions. There are many myths and misunderstandings about psychosis. What's important to know is that psychosis is treatable especially when it is identified early.

### **What is your role in early intervention?**

As school staff and coaches, you see students nearly every day. You may be the first to notice that something does not seem right, or you might notice significant changes that may not be obvious to family and could be early signs of psychosis. Students may also confide in you as a trusted adult when they experience mental health challenges. Subtle visible changes may signal emotional distress or the development of a mental health condition, including psychosis.

Here are some signs that a student may be experiencing psychosis:

- Starting to withdraw from family or friends
- Having thoughts that seem strange to the students or others
- Becoming fearful or suspicious of other people
- Hearing, seeing, tasting or believing things that others don't
- Strong and inappropriate emotions or no emotions at all
- A sudden decline in self-care
- Trouble thinking clearly or concentrating

**Getting help early makes all the difference.**



Experiencing such changes can often be scary and lonely for the student, but it doesn't have to be. Helping students develop connections and a strong network of support will help, and you can start that process. School staff, coaches, families and others in close contact with teens should be aware of the warning signs and know what to do if they see them.

### What can you do?

If you are worried, talk with the student and the school counselor for guidance and support. The best way to understand what is happening is to

ask the student. Collaboration among school personnel, the student and family greatly increases the likelihood of connecting the student with the right services and supports. Recommend that the student and family meet with a qualified health care or mental health professional for an assessment.

If psychosis is suspected, suggest that the family contact NAMI for support and information. Reassure the family that help and support are available. They are not alone.

## Contact NAMI to learn more



Visit NAMI's website:  
[www.nami.org/earlypsychosis](http://www.nami.org/earlypsychosis)



Call the NAMI HelpLine:  
800-950-6264  
(Monday-Friday  
10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. ET)



Email NAMI:  
[info@nami.org](mailto:info@nami.org)



National Alliance on Mental Illness

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