



# Differential Diagnosis: Psychosis and Trauma

Ryan Melton, EASA Clinical Director  
Portland State University

[rymelton@pdx.edu](mailto:rymelton@pdx.edu)

[www.easacommunity.org](http://www.easacommunity.org)



**THE TA NETWORK**  
the national technical assistance network for children's behavioral health



# Case 1

- 20 yo man
- Abusive alcoholic father – lived in fear
- Obsessive symptoms through childhood
- L side of brain gives commands to self-harm
- Reaches down into heart and squeezes
- Chronic SI
- Unemployed, depends on parents
- Idealizes care providers who will cure him

## Case 2

- Palestinian immigrant
- Participated in Intifada, jailed, tortured
- Proud of his resistance, no PTSD
- Symptom onset on anniversary of jail release
- Depersonalization, paranoia, hallucinations, erratic behavior
- Response to risperidone, relapses on taper

# Differentiating PTSD & Schizophrenia

- 20% of people with PTSD experience psychosis
  - With dissociative symptoms specifier in DSM
  - No psychotic features specifier
- Childhood trauma - ↑ risk for schizophrenia
- Re-experiencing vs hallucinations/delusions
- Are hallucinations related to trauma?
- What are themes of delusions ?
- Graphic nature of experience common

