

PSYCHOSIS: WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER KIDS?

A NEWSLETTER FROM EASA'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



A Family Affair

Much like an earthquake, the emergence of a psychotic illness in one child can shake the entire family to its core. Every family member experiences the effects, and life as they know it is completely disrupted, with routines and relationships undergoing significant changes.

In this issue, we offer guidance on how to support the other children in your family while their sibling undergoes both the experience of psychosis and the challenging recovery process.

Research has shown that involving the entire family in the treatment of early onset psychosis is crucial.

It's essential to create a supportive environment where every child feels heard and understood, even amidst the chaos.

When One Child's Crisis Silences Another's Pain

"My child, let's call him Paul, is sobbing quietly in his room with the door closed. He doesn't want me to see him. He says I have more important things to worry about.

Paul's older sister is in the midst of her first full episode of an early onset psychotic illness (EOP). I'm scared and not sure what's happening. *Now what?*

I experience a rush of panic as I realize that I won't be able to protect Paul from the chaos and terror in our household that comes with a psychotic episode.

I know Paul is scared and extremely worried about having a seriously ill sister and seeing someone he loves suffer. He's confused by his sister's unpredictable and violent behaviors: *what would his friends think if his sister did something unexpected at school?* He also has great anxiety about the likelihood of becoming ill himself. *Does it run in the family? And what about the future? Would he end up having to take care of his sister? Would it be forever?*

But maybe Paul's sobbing is completely unrelated, something that happened at school today. High school is plenty hard on its own. *Does everything always have to be about his sister?* Psychosis seems to have sucked all oxygen out of our lives. Maybe he feels unseen and thinks he *should* be unseen."

— EASA Parent

Helping Siblings Cope During a Brother or Sister's Psychosis

It's essential for everyone in your family to learn about the illness, as well as to recognize how the unique rhythms and stressors within your household may affect symptoms.

Siblings might feel anxious about their own mental health, worry about taking on care-taking roles, and experience stress due to uncertainty regarding their brother or sister's prognosis. You may share these concerns as well.

Instead of shielding your other children or feeling compelled to resolve issues beyond your control, many families in similar situations have found these suggestions helpful:

- **Listen to and validate** sibling concerns.
- **Share openly what you know** and don't know about the illness to provide necessary transparency. Acknowledge that the current situation may present intense challenges.
- **Inform siblings that psychosis is a state**, not a permanent condition.
- **Trust your instincts.** Every family is unique, and you know the best communication strategies for yours.
- **Seek additional support** for other family members as needed. Just as you prioritize self-care, others in your family may need it too.
- **Allow kids to be kids.** Protect their time and interests as much as possible.
- **Dedicate regular time for each child.** Even small moments matter.

While psychosis may bring unwelcome changes, obstacles and uncertainty, it can also increase your family's resilience, empathy, and flexibility over the long term. Your EASA team can help you sort through what this looks like in real life, offering insight shaped by years of working closely with families who've faced similar moments.

Supporting Siblings: Resources to Strengthen Family Well-Being

Here's a short list of tools to help siblings respond when psychosis first shows up.

Quick Tips: The one-pager **What To Do If A Brother Or Sister Develops Psychosis**, a one-pager that offers simple guidance to help siblings navigate a family mental health crisis. View and download at https://easacommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/if_sibling_develops_psychosis-1.pdf.

Information Guide: The teen-friendly suggestions in **A Sibling's Guide to Psychosis** is great for siblings ages 12 and up. Read the guide at <https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ASiblingsGuideToPsychosis.pdf>.

Activity Book: For young children ages 7-14, the **Someone in My Family Has a Mental Illness** coloring workbook can help get the conversation going about what's happening. Download and print the book at <https://famillemaladiementale.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/someone-in-my-family-has-a-mental-illness-workbook.pdf>.

OPEN PHONE LINE

Want to talk to another caregiver who understands what you're going through?

Call EASA's Open Phone Line:

971-610-1529

Mondays, 5 - 6 PM

Fridays, 9 - 10 AM



Or, email Karma at clarkejung@ohsu.edu to schedule a time that works for you.

FFLC Needs YOU! Family & Friends Leadership Council is a group of adults caring for youth currently or formerly participating in EASA. We gather to support each other and work on projects (like this newsletter!) to improve EASA. Most months we meet online on the 4th Thursday from 6:30 - 8:00 PM. For details, contact Karma at clarkejung@ohsu.edu.