Schizophrenia

This leaflet has been designed to make you think again about how you view people who suffer from schizophrenia.

The campaign to increase the understanding of mental health problems and reduce their [stigma] and discrimination.

1. Schizophrenia
   This man has schizophrenia. Have you any idea what is going on inside his head? If you ask him he might tell you.
   Schizophrenia can occur in any family. People with it may have trouble talking. It can be difficult to understand what they say. They may use words in an odd way or even make up their own. It doesn't mean that they don't understand you. And it doesn't mean that you can't get to know them. Have a conversation. You might have more in common than you think.

2. Schizophrenia
   This woman has schizophrenia. It is nothing like cancer or a broken leg. But then neither is being in love.
   Anyone can get the symptoms of schizophrenia. People with it may read special meanings into things they see around them. They may feel that everything is wonderful and important, or frightening and strange.
   We don't know exactly what causes these feelings. It is something to do with genes and brain chemicals. It is everything to do with life. People may find it hard to make relationships. They can be very sensitive to stress. Schizophrenia affects the whole person from the outset.

3. Schizophrenia
   This woman has schizophrenia. Can she boil an egg? Of course she can, and a lot more besides. Schizophrenia can occur in any family. At times people with it may find it difficult to plan and to do things. They may find it hard to get up and get going. Everything may seem dull and pointless. These symptoms can make it hard for them to do things for themselves. It can look like they are being lazy. But they are not. It is something to do with the connections between nerve pathways in the brain. With effort and encouragement they can move mountains – even if it is only of washing up.

4. Schizophrenia
   This man has schizophrenia. Is it likely that he will hit you? About as likely as it is that anyone else will.
   Anyone can get the symptoms of schizophrenia. People with it may think that other people are talking about them. They may be convinced that they are plotting to harm them. This can be extremely frightening. A person may act to protect himself or others he believes to be in danger. People get attacked every day – many in their own homes by people they know. Others go out on a Saturday night looking for a fight. Some people are aggressive, most are not. People with schizophrenia are not much different.
5. Schizophrenia

This woman has schizophrenia. Is she ever going to get better? Only if your attitude does. Schizophrenia can occur in any family. People with it may say they can hear voices when no-one is there. They may think they can read minds. Some people get well very quickly and never have another breakdown. Others can have symptoms for the rest of their lives.

Treatment gives everyone a better chance of living a normal life. That doesn’t just mean medication, it means activities, talking therapies, and you. The way that you treat people with mental illness can make all the difference. Show some respect.

FACTS ABOUT SCHIZOPHRENIA

What is schizophrenia?
Schizophrenia is usually thought to be a mental disorder or illness which disturbs how a person thinks, feels and behaves. How it affects the person changes over time. Some may be unwell for a few months only, others may have longer and repeated episodes. For an unfortunate few, the episodes may be severe and continuous. It is now possible to predict within the first two years, which form it will take. Schizophrenia profoundly affects their health, happiness, and social life. They are more likely to be physically ill or commit suicide, and many live in poverty and isolation. Good treatment can go a long way to prevent this.

Who suffers from schizophrenia?
One in 100 people develops schizophrenia at some time in their life. It usually begins during adolescence or early adulthood, generally a little later for women than for men. It may occur in people from all classes and walks of life. However, it occurs more frequently in the most deprived areas of our larger cities, and many people sleeping rough also suffer from this problem. About half of those people admitted to hospital for mental health reasons have schizophrenia.

What causes schizophrenia?
This is an area of great debate. Many theories have been put forward in the past which have not been supported by later scientific research. It is probable that there are a number of different causes. Modern techniques have demonstrated that some affected people have changes in the structure of their brains. There is also evidence that some of these individuals may have been affected by infections before they were born. Occasionally the disorder appears to run in families affecting many members.

Increasingly, it has been shown that some of the chemical messengers in the brain (particularly two called serotonin and dopamine) are not working correctly. The individual’s breakdown may occur as a result of drug or alcohol misuse, emotional stress or difficulties in life experiences. There is no scientific evidence to support the idea that how parents bring up their child can cause schizophrenia.

What treatments are available?
Effective treatment involves a number of different approaches. Ideally it is most effective when given early in the illness. Some form of medication is essential for most cases. However, this should be in combination with education about the disorder, support and counselling for the emotional effects, and psychological training in how to manage those symptoms that continue despite medication. This work should be carried out both with the individual, and their family and/or close friends.

There should be a treatment plan developed in partnership with the person and their family. This may include attending a rehabilitation programme to enable them to return to work, regain social contact with others, and care for themselves. It can be carried out within a hospital setting but increasingly it is possible to assist people to live in their own homes. In many services a team of professionals including nurses, social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and others are able to contribute their different skills in assessing and enhancing
the abilities of the affected person. In some areas people who have experienced mental ill health are employed in this process, through giving advice, counselling and support, as well as becoming skilled therapists themselves. No one can understand the distress of a serious mental breakdown as well as someone else who has had the experience. Self-help groups are another way of using this valuable expertise.

**What can society do?**
People who experience schizophrenic breakdown have to cope with terrifying experiences. The vast majority of them do this with dignity, courage and great humanity. They need to be able to live their lives as ordinary citizens, taking on the responsibilities as well as the freedoms of that role. This includes being able to work, learn and take part in leisure activities in the same way as other people can. Popular prejudice often prevents this – for instance through campaigns to stop supportive residential facilities being built in particular neighbourhoods, or through bullying behaviour in the workplace.

**There are three ways in which a modern society can improve life for those people affected by schizophrenia:**
1. Through public education, reducing ignorance and prejudice about the disorder.
2. By implementing anti-discrimination measures, so that affected people can take their proper place in society.
3. By improving the therapeutic services available, and ensuring that treatment programmes are carried out in partnership with the individual, their families and friends, and an adequately resourced team. This partnership should have access to ordinary resources of employment, training, education and leisure.

---

**Helpful Sources of Advice**

**Rethink**
Head Office
5th Floor
Royal London House
22-25 Finsbury Square
London EC2A 1DX
General enquiries 0845 456 0455
National advice service
020 8974 6814 (open 10am to 3pm, Monday to Friday) or e-mail:
advice@rethink.org
www.rethink.org

Organisation which is dedicated to improving the lives of everyone affected by severe mental illness, whether they have a condition themselves, care for others who do, or are professionals or volunteers working in the mental health field.

**Schizophrenia Ireland**
38 Blessington Street Dublin 7
Information Helpline: 1890 621 631;
Tel: 00 353(1) 860 1620
e-mail: info@sirl.ie
www.sirl.ie

Provides support, information and mutual help for people with schizophrenia and their families.

**SANE**
1st Floor Cityside House
40 Adler Street
London, E1 1EE
National helpline:
0845 767 8000
(noon to 2am - seven days a week)
www.sane.org.uk

National helpline offering emotional support and practical information to anyone coping with mental illness, whether as a sufferer, carer, family member or professional.
Acknowledgements
We would like to thank Dr V Y Allison-Bolger and Dr R L Ramsay for their tremendous help in writing these booklets and factsheets. Our thanks also go to the Campaign Management Committee and to the members of the College Faculties and Sections who have generously given their advice and help.

Professor Arthur Crisp
Chairman,
Changing Minds Campaign Management Committee

Please note that we are unable to offer advice on individual cases.