

It takes each of us to make a difference for all of us.

It's whānau ora, and it is the foundation that inspires every aspect of our work.

Yellow Brick Road is a national organisation that specialises in providing support for whānau who have a loved one experiencing mental health challenges.

After 40 years of experience working with people around New Zealand, we know that if the family of a loved one experiencing mental distress are correctly supported and empowered, the path they walk leads to increased wellbeing for the whole whānau.

We will walk alongside any family in New Zealand who needs support, knowledge, advocacy and empowerment as their loved one journeys towards mental wellbeing.

If you are supporting a whānau member who is experiencing psychosis, we can help you.

You can access our services nationwide

Our regional branches in the North and South Island allow us to reach a broad range of communities with our services.

We also provide online services including wellbeing webinars, group support and self-development programmes.

You can also find a range of support materials and resources on our website.

Contact us to find out more

Our services are free and confidential. Contact us today to find out more.

Northern Region

0800 732 825

Central North Island

0800 555 434

South Island

0800 876 682

yellowbrickroad.org.nz



Supporting families
towards mental wellbeing

A background image of a beach with grey pebbles in the foreground, a blue ocean, and a blue sky with several seagulls flying. The Yellow Brick Road logo is overlaid in the top left corner.

**Yellow
Brick
Road**

Understanding Psychosis

**A guide for whānau of people
experiencing psychosis or a
psychotic episode.**

1. What is psychosis?

Psychosis is a state of mind in which a person loses touch with reality.

Psychosis itself is not an illness. However, it can be a symptom caused by some mental illnesses. This symptom is called a psychotic episode.

2. How do you recognise the early signs of a psychotic episode?

Early signs can be hard to detect but can include:

- A drop in grades or job performance.
- A decline in self-care and personal hygiene.
- Strong and inappropriate emotional responses, or none at all.
- Spending more time alone than usual.

The affected person often becomes suspicious of others and may feel depressed, anxious, withdrawn, tense, irritable and/or angry. Mood swings, sleep disturbances and changes in appetite, as well as difficulty in concentrating and remembering things, are also common.

A combination of some of those symptoms can indicate a person is experiencing the early stages of a psychotic episode.

3. What are the symptoms of a psychotic episode?

Early symptoms of a psychotic episode can include:

Confused thinking

Everyday thoughts can become confused, making it hard to remember things or follow a conversation. This affects a person's ability to express themselves clearly.

Delusions

A delusion is a fixed or false belief that is not shared by others of similar culture and/or is inconsistent with the affected person's social background. There are a variety of different types of delusions:

- Paranoid delusion – A belief that you are being watched or singled out for some sort of harmful purpose, or are disliked.
- Grandiose delusion – A belief that you have special powers.
- Depressive delusion – A belief of personal guilt or responsibility for some horrific event that you had no direct part in, or believing you are not fit to be with others.
- Delusion of control – A belief that an outside force is controlling your thoughts, feelings or actions.

Hallucinations

Hallucinations involve seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling something that is not physically there. Hearing voices that no-one else can hear is the most common type of hallucination.

Changed feelings

During a psychotic episode, the affected person can experience an extreme change in the way they feel and express emotions. There is sometimes a sense of flatness, often called blunted affect, where they feel less than they used to or experience an elevated mood.

Changed behaviour

Someone experiencing a psychotic episode will often behave differently from normal.

4. What causes psychosis?

Psychosis can be caused by:

- A developing mental illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar mood disorder.
- Excessive intake or abuse of alcohol and drugs.
- Reactions to emotional stress caused by severe personal trauma.
- Physical injury or the onset of another illness.
- A chemical imbalance in the brain.

A chemical imbalance that interrupts the normal transmission of information from one part of the brain to another can result in many of the symptoms of psychosis.

5. Can psychosis be treated?

Yes. Early treatment is important as this can reduce the risk of a serious mental illness developing. It is also important to recognise the signs of psychosis early, as the longer psychosis goes untreated the greater the disruption to the affected person and their whānau.

6. How is psychosis treated?

Determining the best treatment will depend on factors such as how severe the symptoms are, how long they have been present and what the apparent cause is. The symptoms of psychosis are best treated with medication, which can provide a rapid decrease in symptoms and relief for the affected person.

Whānau support, specialised types of counselling and psychotherapy can help reduce stress levels.

Early intervention increases the chances of a rapid recovery.