

The centre can help put people in touch with mental health professionals who speak their language.



English
[BHC-4390]

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

Schizophrenia and Young People

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
Website: <http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>
Email: mhcs@sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au
Tel: (02) 9816 0347



Schizophrenia and Young People

Unlike most 17 year-olds, Kate spends very little of her leisure time seeing friends. One reason is that she often feels very frightened because she hears voices telling her she will be captured and locked in a cage. Sometimes this makes her feel so anxious she doesn't want to go out anywhere. Another reason is that her behaviour makes many of her teenage friends feel uncomfortable. Sometimes she seems to be talking to herself, or she laughs at things which aren't funny. Sometimes her conversation is difficult to follow because she jumps from one topic to another.

Kate is one of many thousands of young people in Australia with a serious mental illness called schizophrenia. Although the problem affects between one to three percent of people of all ages, it often begins in the teens and early 20s and is partly caused by an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. Doctors think that this imbalance causes people with schizophrenia to hear and see things which aren't really there, and to have very disordered thoughts.

But it's hard for Kate's teenage friends to understand this. Just when she needs their help and understanding most, they say she's crazy and they avoid spending time with her. This means that Kate has to cope with, not just a frightening and bewildering illness, but also the loss of her friends.

This is why it's so important for all of us to know the facts about diseases like schizophrenia so we can be more understanding towards people with the illness. Because schizophrenia can make people behave oddly and make them hear or see things that no one else can, some people think they are "possessed" by bad spirits. This isn't true of course. These are just symptoms of the illness which can usually be

controlled by medication just like any other disease. In Kate's case for example, her doctors hope that medication will soon improve her condition.

Knowing more about schizophrenia also makes it easier for families to recognise the symptoms if a relative develops the disease. This is important because it means the disease can be more effectively treated if it's detected early, giving the person a better chance of leading a normal life, and staying out of hospital.

But when schizophrenia begins in adolescence, the warning signs such as changing moods, personality changes, depression, difficulty concentrating and withdrawing from the family, are sometimes assumed to be just normal teenager behaviour. But with normal adolescence, things like moodiness and depression only last for a few days at a time, while with schizophrenia, the moods go on and on. Another difference with schizophrenia is that teenagers who are developing the disease sometimes withdraw from their friends and their social life as well as from their families - this is different to most teenagers who may withdraw from their families sometimes, but not usually their friends.

Anyone who is concerned that a family member may have signs of schizophrenia should contact their doctor, the Mental Health Team at their Local Community Health Centre, or:

Transcultural Mental Health Centre
Cumberland Hospital
5 Fleet Street
North Parramatta NSW 2151
Tel: 9840 3800 or 1800 648 911 for callers outside Sydney.