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## Early signs and intervention with mental illness

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### Summary

- Signs of mental illness can include confusion, unusual thinking and risky behaviour.
  - Almost all mental health problems can be treated. Getting help early gives you the best chance of a full recovery.
  - If you are having suicidal thoughts or thinking of hurting yourself in some other way, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**.
  - In mental health crisis situations involving others, call for an ambulance or the police by phoning **triple zero (000)**.
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The symptoms of mental illness may come on quickly. Almost all mental health problems can be treated or at least lessened in their severity. Getting help early can prevent what could become a lifelong mental illness.

### Possible indications of mental illness

Signs that a person might have or be developing a mental illness include:

- bizarre or unusual thinking
- confusion and disorientation
- destructive or high-risk behaviour
- hallucinations (you can see, hear, feel or taste something that is not actually there)
- problems with functioning in your work or social life
- restless, agitated and disorganised behaviour or marked decrease in activity
- significant changes of mood (up or down)
- significant impairment in self-care
- suicidal thoughts or acts of self-harm
- delusions (false beliefs, you strongly feel something is real, but it is not).

Experiencing one or two of these symptoms does not necessarily mean you have a mental illness but a few occurring together can mean it is time to talk to a healthcare professional, especially if the symptoms are affecting your study, work or relationships.

If left untreated, these early mental illness symptoms may progress to be more serious or lead to a psychotic episode. Psychotic episodes can develop very gradually.

### Getting help for mental illness

If you are having suicidal thoughts or thinking about hurting yourself in any way, call **Lifeline** on **13 11 14**.

In serious mental health crisis situations, call for an ambulance or the police by phoning **triple zero (000)**.

If you need non-urgent help, start by contacting your local doctor or community health centre. Local doctors can assess and treat many common mental health concerns including depression and anxiety. They can also provide referrals to psychiatrists and other mental healthcare professionals if needed.

Alternatively, you could also discuss your concerns with a trained social worker, psychologist or counsellor. These mental health professionals are available through most community health centres.

Treatments for mental illness are more effective than ever before. Sometimes feelings like shame, fear or denial can stop you from seeking help, believing that mental illness is a weakness or, in the case of children and teenagers, the result of bad parenting. Mental illness is a medical issue and help is available.

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## Specialist mental health services

**Public specialist mental health services** are available to assess and treat people with serious mental illness, including those experiencing a psychiatric crisis.

Mental health services can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Professional staff at the mental health service will ask you about the problem, including questions about why you have contacted the service and whether you have used public mental health services before. This information will help staff decide which service will be most useful to you.

The service they recommend may be delivered in a hospital or while you continue to live in your home, depending on the issue and its severity. In Victoria, the mental health service system is divided into services for adults (aged 16–64), children and youth (aged 0–18) and older people (aged over 64).

Victoria's mental health service system is delivered via 16 'catchments': nine in metropolitan Melbourne and seven in rural Victoria. To find your nearest service, visit the Department of Health & Human Services [website](#).

### When to contact a mental health service

If you begin to notice signs of mental illness it is best to get advice and help as soon as possible.

Finding information can be helpful:

- do some research about **common mental health conditions** to see if you recognise any of the signs or symptoms of mental illness
- speak to a family member or trusted friend about your thoughts, feelings or behaviour
- visit your local doctor for an assessment and advice, or
- speak to a counsellor about your thoughts and feelings and learn stress management techniques if required.

Early intervention may make an important difference so seek mental health advice early.

For emergencies call triple zero (000).

### Where to get help

- Your doctor
- A counsellor
- Lifeline
- Sane Australia

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Better Health Channel - (need new cp)

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