



*Canadian Psychiatric  
Research Foundation*

# When Something's Wr ng

O

*Ideas for Teachers*

# Schizophrenia

**SCHIZOPHRENIA** Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that is characterized by disturbances in perception and disorganization in thinking and behaviour. This disorder has nothing to do with a split or multiple personality, which is a common misperception. It is comprised of two groups of symptoms: negative (such as social withdrawal, apathy, emotional unresponsiveness) and positive (such as delusions, hallucinations, bizarre behaviour).

Schizophrenia affects about one percent of the population. This prevalence appears to be the same across countries, cultures, and socioeconomic groups. The disorder usually begins in the adolescent or early adult years and normally begins with the “negative” symptoms.

The causes of the disorder are a topic of ongoing research. Current evidence indicates that genetic factors are the most important, but that non-genetic factors such as drug abuse, childhood head injury and infection during a mother’s pregnancy (e.g., the influenza virus) can also play a part in the development of schizophrenia.

It is important to note that schizophrenia is associated with a high risk of suicide, so early intervention and treatment is key.

## Behaviour Characteristics

- ❑ loss of ability to relax, concentrate or sleep in the early stages
- ❑ showing no emotion, sitting still for long periods of time
- ❑ denying that anything might be wrong
- ❑ odd speech and expressions
- ❑ delusions—false beliefs that have no basis in reality; e.g., “someone is spying on me”
- ❑ hallucinations—hearing voices that make insults or give commands; sufferers more often hear voices than see things that are not there
- ❑ disordered thinking—illogical thinking and loose associations between thoughts
- ❑ marked impairment in school performance (decrease in grades)
- ❑ difficulty relating to others, social isolation or withdrawal
- ❑ marked impairment in personal hygiene and grooming
- ❑ peculiar or bizarre behaviours, such as talking to an inanimate object, collecting garbage, or hoarding food
- ❑ possible suicidal thoughts and behaviours (especially in early stages)

## Classroom Strategies

- Keep in mind that the symptoms of schizophrenia can be similar to other disorders and illnesses, such as mood disorders or epilepsy. A professional diagnosis is essential.
- Try to express a low degree of emotional response to the student’s behaviour.
- Try not to take the student’s negative behaviour personally. He or she is behaving this way due to illness and not by choice.
- If your student expresses thoughts that are distorted or delusional, do not try to disprove them. Make a calm statement of disagreement and then leave it. Appealing to reason and logic will not be productive.
- Communicate in brief, clear sentences. Give instructions one at a time.
- Seek professional help, above all. Work with a team. Continue (as much as possible) with the student’s daily activities.

## Treatment

The treatment of schizophrenia requires a range of interventions. Symptoms of schizophrenia generally respond well to anti-psychotic medications, and there are many different ones available in Canada. The majority of people with schizophrenia will improve greatly with the appropriate medication and many will find their hallucinations and delusions subside significantly. Many of these medications will help improve negative symptoms as well, making it more likely for patients to benefit from social therapies. It is also necessary and important for people to stay on their medication in order to prevent the return of symptoms once they recover from an acute phase. Extensive research to create better, long-acting medicines is ongoing (e.g., new long-acting atypical medications that are injected into the body are now available).

The best approach to recovering from schizophrenia includes taking medication, attending social therapies, and leading a healthy lifestyle, including effective stress management activities, eating a proper diet, and exercising regularly.

## Resources

### **Schizophrenia.com**

(An online, not-for-profit information, support and education centre)

Web: [www.schizophrenia.com](http://www.schizophrenia.com)

### **Schizophrenia Society of Canada**

50 Acadia Avenue, Suite 205  
Markham, ON L3R 0B3

Phone: (905) 415-2007

Toll-free: 1-888-SSC-HOPE  
(1-888-772-4673)

Web: [www.schizophrenia.ca](http://www.schizophrenia.ca)

(Also able to direct you to further resources in your province or community)

Schizophrenia



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