



# Diagnosing Psychotic Disorders

This resource reviews how mental health professionals diagnose psychotic disorders. Mental health professionals use information from multiple areas to diagnose these conditions.

## Who can diagnose psychotic disorders?

Many health professionals can diagnose psychosis. These include psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. Some individuals with autism have thoughts and behaviors much the same as those seen in psychosis, making it important to work with a professional familiar with autism.

## What is the DSM-5?

Mental health professionals use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 5th Edition (DSM-5) to diagnose mental health conditions. Each condition has specific criteria that must be met to give someone a diagnosis.

### The Clinical Interview

A clinical interview is one tool a mental health professional can use to diagnose psychosis. A clinical interview is a detailed conversation with patients and/or family members. A mental health professional reviews the person's history, mental and physical health concerns, and mood symptoms. The doctor will ask if there are any big changes in behavior, appetite, or sleep. The clinician will ask about any unusual thoughts, beliefs, or fears. They will ask if the person hears or sees things that others cannot. The clinician will consider how the person's symptoms and concerns match with symptoms of psychosis. The clinical interview will also help figure out what may be symptoms of autism and what may be symptoms of psychosis.

### Input from family, friends & support staff

It is often hard for people to recognize and describe their moods, emotions, and behaviors accurately. For a person with autism it can be even more difficult. Because of this, the mental health professional may ask for input from those who know the individual well.

### Screening Tools

A mental health professional might use specific tools to assess for psychosis. These screening tools are called 'rating scales'. Rating scales do not diagnose a mental health problem. Rating scales can only tell the mental health professional how likely it is the symptoms are due to psychosis. Rating scales may be filled out either by the individual, a family member, or support staff. These rating scales are used along with the clinical interview and other information to develop a diagnosis.

## Medical Tests

Doctors might also order medical tests, such as blood tests or scans. These medical tests can help the doctor rule out a physical or medical reason for symptoms of psychosis. If the symptoms are for medical reasons, doctors will follow up with a medical treatment. If the symptoms of psychosis are due to mental health reasons, a mental health professional will work with the person to develop an appropriate treatment plan.



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The ASERT Collaborative  
is funded by the Office of  
Developmental Programs,  
PA Department of Human Services.