



A leaflet to support you
in understanding your
experiences and what
the Early Intervention
service has to offer





Understanding unusual and distressing experiences

Unusual distressing experiences include things like paranoia, or fear that someone's following you or out to get you, having other strange or upsetting thoughts, or seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, or tasting things that other people don't.

People can have unusual distressing experiences for lots of different reasons. These experiences can be linked to spiritual experiences. They can also happen when you don't get sleep for a long time, take drugs, have epilepsy, or have a lot of stress or trauma.

These experiences are quite common. They can start in someone's teens or early 20s, although for some people this can occur much later.

When these experiences are frightening and have a big effect on someone's life, they are sometimes called psychosis, but other people view these experiences as an extension of normal anxieties. Psychosis is simply a word that describes experiences.

These experiences can be scary at the time, but you can recover, have a life, a good job, a relationship, and a family.

There are two main phases of unusual distressing experiences. In the acute phase, you might experience paranoia, hearing and seeing things, and having jumbled thoughts, but then you begin to recover. In the recovery phase, you might have similar beliefs and experiences, but they may be less upsetting and affect you less.

It's what you do next that counts! If you think you have these experiences, choosing to work with early intervention services is an important step in moving forward from these experiences.

Evidence suggests that what you do and the support you receive early on, in the critical first months and years with these experiences is especially important.

What are Early Intervention services?

What do they do?

Early intervention (EI) services are specially designed to support people who have unusual distressing experiences to manage and recover from their experiences, to feel more positive, to get on with their life, and to reduce the chances of this happening again.

EI services focus on all aspects of mental and physical health and work in lots of different ways: medical, psychological, social, and physical, helping with work, school and college, family and friends, relationships, housing, money, drugs, alcohol, and health. It aims to provide useful treatments and broad all-round support that also fits with your spiritual, religious, cultural or family background.

Because EI works in an all-round way, there are lots of different types of people who work in the service. They're all used to working with people with these experiences. These people include care coordinators, psychiatrists, psychologists, pharmacists, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, and support time and recovery workers. You can find out more about these particular people and what they can offer on our website: likemind.nhs.uk.

Everyone is different in terms of culture, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and many other ways. Lots of people who use mental health services have said they find religion or spirituality helpful for managing their mental health issues - but sometimes they find it difficult to speak about this with their health care professionals. Your EI service care coordinator may not know everything about your particular cultural or spiritual background, but they will aim to listen, understand, and respect your views.

Your care co-ordinator and service will help you to find the most helpful support or treatment and can adapt their approach for your particular situation. You can ask them how they might include aspects of your spiritual beliefs or people from your religious/spiritual circle in supporting you. They may, with your permission, take advice from a spiritual leader or family member.

If there are people you don't want EI services to talk to, this is fine - you can let them know. EI services normally work with family and friends and will also support them. This is because people are more likely to recover from any distress more quickly if they have supportive family and friends around them.

EI services offer support for up to three years, even if things get better in a matter of weeks. This is because quite a few people may struggle with these unusual distressing experiences over a longer time. Getting the right support is really important to give you the best chance of recovery.



Do Early Intervention services work?

Research has shown that EI services are better able to reduce unusual and distressing experiences, and are better at preventing these experiences from returning, than standard community health services.

People using EI services also tend to be more engaged and satisfied and have a better quality of life than people using more traditional community health services.

EI services lead to better outcomes as they offer a broad set of support including medicine, psychological therapies that involve talking and understanding experiences (e.g., Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and family therapy), vocational support (e.g., support to get and keep a job), and support for related physical health issues and general wellbeing (e.g., diet, exercise, support from peers, accessing outdoor green spaces). Certainly, one of the main treatments for psychosis is medication, but generally you don't absolutely have to take medication, and there are other treatments that are also helpful – EI services don't want to put people in hospital. In fact, they were set up to reduce the number of people who need hospital treatment. Our "Treatments

choices' booklet and website likemind.nhs.uk tells you more about all sorts of things that might be helpful.

Your care coordinator can help you to choose and adapt treatments and support to fit with your (and your family's) cultural, religious or spiritual beliefs and practices.



Where can I find more information?

The content in this handout is based on the "Early intervention in psychosis" booklet, which was developed based on feedback from people (aged 14–35 years) who use EI services.

Visit our website, likemind.nhs.uk, for more information, including copies of the "Early intervention in psychosis" booklet and other booklets, information on places to get help, and feedback and advice from other people who've had similar experiences. Although the translations are not perfect, you will be able to translate the content of the website into your own language by clicking on your language in the "Language" section on the left-hand side.



Feedback on this leaflet

This leaflet has been translated into Gujarati/Bengali/Panjabi/French/Portuguese/Romanian/Polish/Spanish/Urdu/Tamil/Somali/Farsi

Please let us know how helpful you found having this information in your native language by completing the following questions. Your feedback will be anonymous and will help us to develop new and better resources for you and improve early intervention services.

1. I am (please circle 1 option):

a) A person using the early intervention services

b) A friend or family member of someone who is using early intervention services

2. Age in years: _____ years

3. Gender: Male / Female / Prefer not to say / Other (please specify)

4. Please indicate how help it is to have this leaflet written in your native language, by circling one of the numbers below on the scale from 1 (not at all helpful) to 5 (very helpful):

1 2 3 4 5

5. Please write any extra comments here, for example, which information you found most helpful and what you would like to know more about:

Thank you for completing these questions. Please tear off this section of the leaflet and give this to an EI staff member. You can also post this back to us using the stamped and addressed envelope provided.