



SCHIZOPHRENIA IN CHILDREN

Schizophrenia is a brain disease caused by biological and chemical changes in the brain. It is an uncommon illness in children and is hard to recognize in its early phases.

The behaviour of children and adolescents with schizophrenia may differ from that of adults with this illness. Child and adolescent psychiatrists look for several of the following early warning signs in youngsters with schizophrenia:

- Trouble telling dreams from reality
- Seeing things and hearing voices which are not real
- Confused thinking
- Vivid and bizarre thoughts and ideas
- Extreme moodiness
- Odd behaviour
- Ideas that people are “out to get them”
- Behaving like a younger child
- Severe anxiety and fearfulness
- Confusing television with reality
- Severe problems in making and keeping friends

The behaviour of children with schizophrenia may change slowly over time. For example, children who used to enjoy relationships with others may start to become more shy or withdrawn and seem to be in their own world. Sometimes youngsters will begin talking about strange fears and ideas. They may cling to parents or say things which do not make much sense. These early problems may first be noticed by the child’s school teachers.

Schizophrenia is a serious illness. Early diagnosis and medical treatment are important. Children with the problems and symptoms listed above must have a complete evaluation. Usually these children need individual treatment plans involving other professionals. A combination of medication and individual therapy, family therapy, and specialized programs (school, activities, etc.) is often necessary.

Psychotropic medication can be helpful for many of the symptoms and problems identified. These medications require careful monitoring by a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Parents should ask their family physician or pediatrician to refer them to a child and adolescent psychiatrist who is specifically trained and skilled at evaluating, diagnosing and treating children with schizophrenia.

Adapted from Dept. of Medicine, Univ. of Michigan