

Social Supports

Your social relationships play an influential role in promoting recovery from psychosis and maintaining health and well-being.

Unfortunately, individuals affected by psychosis often withdraw socially and become socially isolated. It is not uncommon for the family to also become socially isolated.

A number of factors may contribute to lowered levels of social relationships and supports. Avoiding people, not being able to socialize as well as before, the problems caused by symptoms and worries about stigma may all lower social supports.

It is important to try to maintain your current social relationships.

If you have experienced a loss of contact with friends and relatives, it is important for your recovery to try and build new social relationships and find sources of social support.

Research has shown that individuals with large social networks tend to have fewer psychotic flare-ups and hospitalizations than those with smaller social networks,

presumably because a larger social network is more likely to fulfill social needs (such as the needs for communication, company and receiving feedback and support from others). It may be that loneliness and social isolation increase stress which can lead to relapse.

Good social supports may help promote recovery in many different ways.

Some of the positive aspects of social supports are that they can:

- Provide opportunities for you to express your emotions openly without fear of criticism
- Allow you to obtain practical feedback from others about any day-to-day problems you might be experiencing
- Provide motivation and encouragement for you to achieve your goals
- Assist you with symptom monitoring – letting you know when they are concerned that there are early warning signs of relapse

- Provide you with opportunities to do things you enjoy with others – and have more fun by sharing the experience.

Maintaining or developing a good social network requires you to be proactive - keeping in touch with old friends, making new friends by joining leisure groups or taking educational classes.

Joining a support group is one way of finding other supportive individuals who are going through a similar experience.

Some people who have experienced early psychosis find that certain social situations (that they once handled with ease) have suddenly become difficult or awkward.

Problems with social skills and social interactions are not uncommon in early psychosis.

If you have any concerns about your social functioning, communicate these to your EPI Clinician. Effective strategies can help you regain your ability to function well socially. Treatment for problems with social functioning is most effective when started as early as possible.