

# D·PREP THOUGHT DISORDERS

Schizophrenia is one of the most upsetting and difficult mental health problems to address with a student. The media portrays those with schizophrenia as knife wielding, crazy people looking to stab mothers walking their young children in baby carriages. Schizophrenics are seen as talking to themselves, responding to voices from another place, and presenting a danger to the community as a whole.

Individuals with schizophrenia are very rare (less than 1 percent of the population) and are often so lost in their own internal logic and paranoia that they struggle to relate to those around them. They are often scared of the world and overcome with worry that they will be hurt. Students may be concerned and worried about the odd behavior they notice in other students who have schizophrenia and will need help to understand what the student is experiencing. They may worry about what the student may do and that they might act unpredictably or put others at risk.

Those with schizophrenia (which means “split mind”) often have difficulty regulating their cognitions (thinking) and emotions. They may become upset by strange or unseen threats and need an instructor or other students to reassure them and to assist them when they are becoming overwhelmed. For schizophrenic students to be successful, it is essential they have a strong group of supports that have access to their treatment team in the case of difficulty. This often involves case managers and flexible communication among team members. Students with schizophrenia need connection to mental health services such as therapy and psychiatry. This connection to services can help them monitor their illness and obtain medication to help with the symptoms they experience. Helping a schizophrenic student to access care for their disorder can be difficult.

Staff might also have to take on the role of educator and support for the student as they interact with other students. It may be that other students have not experienced an individual with schizophrenia before and are at a loss on how to communicate. Staff can provide a much-needed buffer and assistance during crisis times when a schizophrenic student may struggle more with their communication, thoughts or emotions. Individuals with schizophrenia may have difficulty in the classroom with dulled emotions or problems concentrating on the assignments and discussion at hand.

Individuals with schizophrenia may wander off in their thinking or respond to odd or strange tangential issues. Students with schizophrenia who are following their medication regimen will be more likely to stay focused and will avoid drawing attention to themselves. Those students experiencing schizophrenic symptoms in will often derail the discussion and engage in off-topic lines of thought.

*Adapted from Van Brunt, B. & Murphy, A. (2017). A Staff Guide to Addressing Disruptive and Dangerous Behavior on Campus. Routledge Press. (p. 36)*

