This may enable you to make gentle enquiries about some of the more worrying signs: e.g. “it’s not uncommon for people with your type of problem to sometimes hear things other people do not – have you ever had an experience like this?”

Some people may not feel able to admit to mental health problems but they may describe problems in terms of “things getting on top of me” or “need to get my head sorted”.

Ways to get help for someone you are worried about

1. Try to encourage the young person to visit their GP to talk about their problems. Remember, GP’s only get to spend 10 minutes with each patient so it might be a good idea to get the person to take a list of all the things which are worrying them. If the person you are worried about is a student, a letter from a teacher/tutor might also make it easier for the GP to pick up that the problems are more than just “teenage moodiness” and refer to the Mental Health Services.

2. There are link workers based at specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in each of the four corners of the county.

You can contact them about your concerns.

Somerset Coast: 01278 720275
Taunton Deane: 01823 330510
South Somerset: 01935 384140
Mendip: 01794 836561

These services put you in touch with Early Intervention in Psychosis Services.

3. People may be willing to see an advisor in a non-statutory organisation even if they are not prepared to see their GP or link worker - this could be a helpful first step. Go to:

www.connexions-somerset.org.uk/contact us/centre locations.html

To locate your nearest Connexions office or suggest the person calls Mindline on 01823 334906, Weds, Fri, Sat 8pm-midnight.

4. If you have difficulties accessing mental health services via your GP and you would like to discuss your concerns, please telephone 01823 346122 or email: stepinsomersetarea@sompar.nhs.uk

This leaflet was produced by the Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust.
Spotting the Early Warning Signs of Psychosis

Spotting the early warning signs can be difficult, as many of the problems someone at risk of psychosis may experience, are problems we all experience from time to time. If you are worried about a person, ask yourself:

• Do they seem to experience a combination of many of the problems listed below?

• Do they seem to be “just not right” or “a bit odd” lately - have you got a gut feeling that this is more than just a low patch?

• Have things seemed to be getting worse for a while now?

Early Warning Signs

• Depressed and/or anxious

• Irritable or angry

• Mood swings

• Difficulty concentrating or remembering things

• Feeling vague or confused

• Not able to keep up with study as they usually would

• Losing interest in the things they used to enjoy

• Lacking motivation

• Changes in sleep pattern

• Changes in appetite

• Feeling strange - feeling uneasy about seeing friends or going out

• Prefers to spend time alone

• Acting oddly - either impulsively, doing things they wouldn't usually do, or perhaps being wary or guarded

• Speaking strangely - maybe over elaborates, or goes off track, or gets words jumbled

The following early warning signs are problems that a person might not feel so comfortable telling anyone about - these are the more worrying signs, and mean it’s really time to get help NOW:

• having strange visual experiences - perhaps feels as if their eyes are playing tricks on them, or being sensitive to light and colour, or seeing things other people don’t see

• having strange aural experiences - perhaps feeling their ears are playing tricks on them, being sensitive to sound or hearing things other people don’t hear

• has strange beliefs or weird ideas that they didn’t have before

• feels people are against them or talking about them behind their backs

If you know someone who is having problems like these, they may be at risk of developing a psychosis - this means their problems may get worse and develop into an illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. It is very important to make sure this person gets help for their problems.

How to talk to someone you are worried about

Remember they may be feeling very strange and sensitive and may be looking at the world from a very different perspective to you (for example, they may be feeling paranoid).

You need to be honest about your concerns but broach the subject very gently, in private, in a place where the person feels comfortable. Ask them how they are feeling – give them a chance to say what’s going on for them. Listen and try to be reassuring.

Try to avoid saying things like “you are not yourself”, “not well” or “behaving crazily” as this may make them feel defensive – try instead to say something like:

“I am worried about you because you are not getting your work done / don’t seem to want to hang out with your friends any more / seem really distracted and down.”

Perhaps you could say that you read something in the “Pete's Story” leaflet that reminded you of them and you know there are ways the person could get help to get over the difficulties they are having. It might be a good idea to look at the leaflet together.