

## **THE MAIN MENTAL ILLNESSES & DISABILITIES**

The following summaries of the most common mental illnesses and disabilities provide a brief insight into the main features of each one and are not intended to be viewed as a comprehensive source of information. For more details on a particular illness, please refer to the section on useful contacts.

### **SCHIZOPHRENIA**

In people experiencing an episode of schizophrenia, the mental processes of thinking become distorted, making it hard for them to distinguish what is imagined from what is real. When severe, this can lead to immense panic, anger, depression, elation or over-activity, perhaps punctuated by periods of withdrawal.

The symptoms of schizophrenia are divided into two groups, called 'positive' [for example, hallucinations and delusions] and 'negative' [for example, slowness to move, think, speak or react]. These may occur separately, together or alternately. It is a relatively common condition, with approximately one in one hundred people worldwide experiencing an episode of schizophrenia at some time during their lives, although highest incidence is in the late teens and early twenties. In about one quarter of cases there is eventually a full recovery. The majority continue to have problems, but usually they also have long periods of good functioning.

### **Treatment**

Effective treatment involves a number of different approaches. It is most effective when begun in the early stages of the illness. Some form of medication is essential for most people; however, this should be given in combination with education about the disorder, emotional support and help with learning how to manage any continuing symptoms.

*For more information contact Rethink [see Useful Contacts].*