

Disorganized Symptoms of Psychosis

The Care Transitions Network

National Council for Behavioral Health
Montefiore Medical Center
Northwell Health
New York State Office of Mental Health
Netsmart Technologies



for People with Serious Mental Illness

Objectives

By the end of this webinar participants will be able to:

- Conceptualize thought disorder and its common psychiatric terminology from a linguistic point of view
- Identify signs of disorganized behavior
- Conceptualized catatonia and its diagnosis from a DSM-5 perspective

Symptoms of Psychosis

Disorganized Symptoms

Grossly Disorganized or
Catatonic Behavior

4

Disorganized
Speech

3

Positive Symptoms

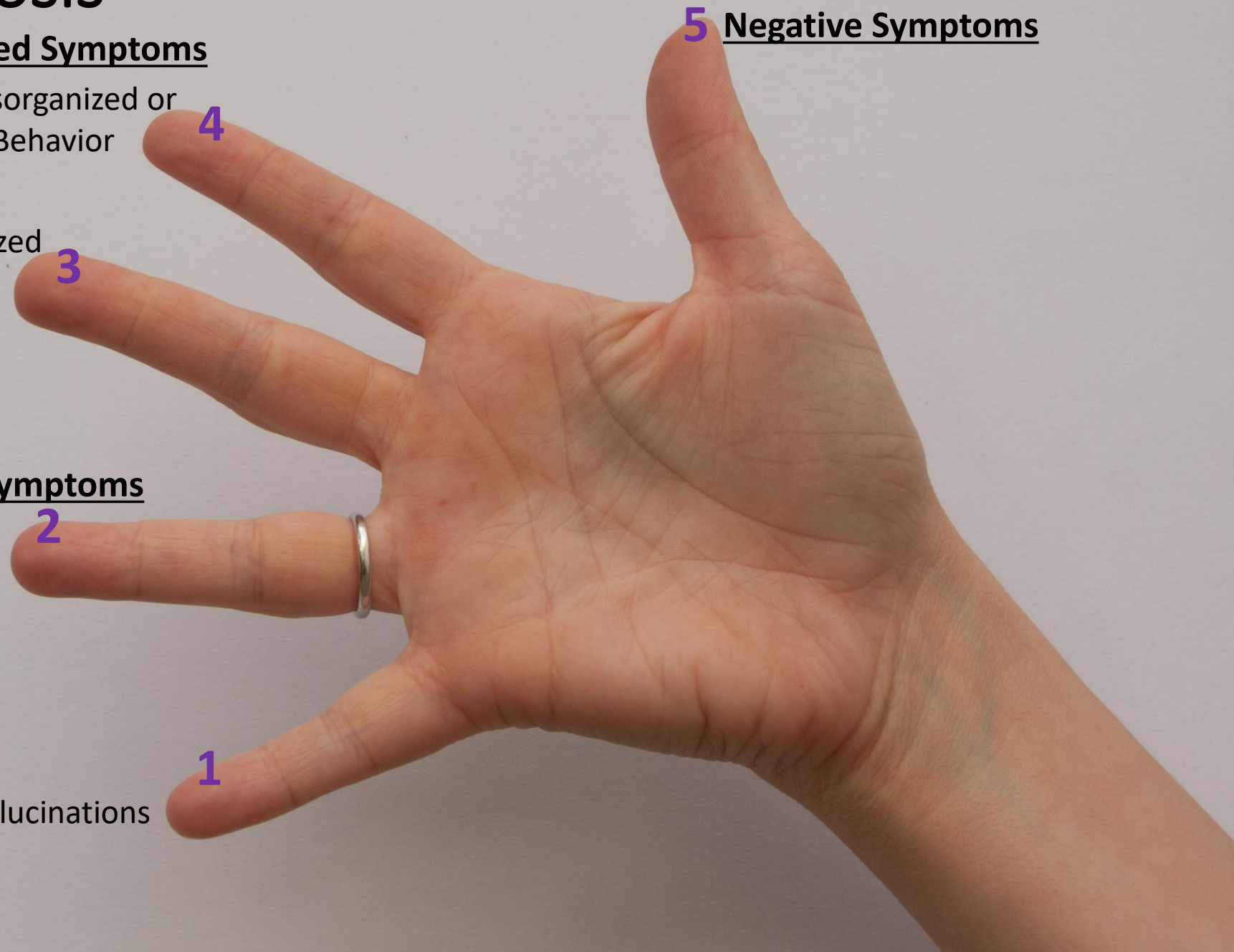
Delusions

2

Hallucinations

1

5 Negative Symptoms



Thought Disorder

Disorganized Language and Communication

Language and Communication Disorders

- The term "Thought Disorder" describes Disorders of Language and Communication occurring in mental illness.
- The most important approach to eliciting language disorganization is to allow enough time during the interview for the material to present.
- Traditional language to describe symptoms of thought disorder is descriptive redundant, overlapping, and broadly referred to as **“disorganized”**.
- We will review some of the more relevant descriptive terms, but first...

Illogicality

- A pattern of speech in which conclusions are reached which do not follow logically.
- It may also take the form of reaching conclusions based on faulty premises without any actual delusional thinking.
- Illogicality is a disorder of communication as a result of disordered thought, not a disorder of language.

Illogicality

- **Ex: “Parents are the people that raise you.**
- **Anything that raises you can be a parent.**
- **Parents can be anything: material, vegetable, or mineral, that has taught you something.**
- **Parents would be the world of things that are alive, that are there.**
- **Rocks, a person can look at a rock and learn something from it, so that would be a parent.”**

Bizarre Delusional Systems vs. Thought Disorder

- Also take care to not confuse inability to understand a patient due to the severity of their bizarre delusions.
- Focus on whether you can understand their language, even if the ideas expressed are strange.

Evaluating Thought Disorder

Consider....

- How much of the interview is incomprehensible.
- Of the parts that are incomprehensible, the degree of severity.
- Let's look at a standardized way to conceptualize relative descriptive terms and the degree of severity...

“Formal Thought Disorder”

Derailment

Incoherence

**Causes moderate to severe confusion due to communication failures between and within sentences.*

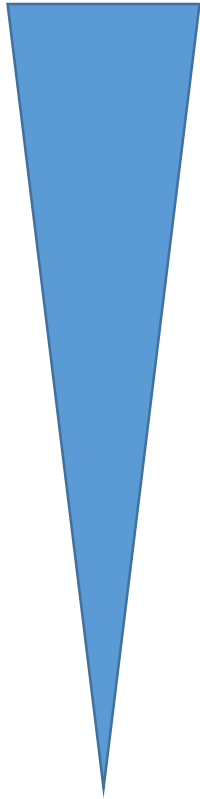
Word approximations

Neologisms

**Can cause mild confusion when occurring in isolation.*

Can also contribute to more severe confusion as combined with derailment and/or incoherence.

Levels of Disorganization



- 1) Discourse**
“Derailment”
- 2) Sentence/Clause/Phrase**
“Incoherence”
- 3) Word**
“Word approximations”
“Neologisms”

“Derailment”, aka “Loose Associations”

- The abnormality in derailment occurs at the *discourse level*, involving unclear or confusing connections between larger units, **such as sentences or clauses.**
- Connection between ideas is on spectrum from vague to completely unrelated.
- Most common manifestation is a slow, steady slippage, with no single derailment being particularly severe, so that the speaker gets farther and farther off track.
- In the following example, notice how each sentence makes sense, yet the meaning slips slowly off track.

“Derailment”, aka “Loose Associations”

Question: Why do people believe in God?

Ex: “This is a good question. People worship something. Primitive people worship airplanes when they first saw them. Science and technology are what this age is about. It is hard to say what started it. Perhaps the industrial revolution, then people have more time to think and study you see. A university degree is certainly an advantage these days. Life is hard.”

“Derailment”, aka “Loose Associations”

“Flight of ideas”

- a **derailment** which occurs rapidly in the context of **pressured speech**.

“Circumstantiality”

- differs from derailment in that the details presented are closely related to some particular idea
- the goal must, by definition, eventually be reached.

“Tangentiality”

- a **derailment** as the **immediate response to a question**.

“Clanging”

- When the word choice is dictated and connected by sound (rhyming) rather than appropriate meaning, this is called **“clanging”**.

Ex: “I’m not trying to make noise. I’m trying to make sense. If you can make sense out of nonsense, well, have fun. I’m trying to make sense out of sense. I’m not making cents anymore. I have to make dollars.”

Video: Clanging

“Incoherence” aka “Word Salad”

- A pattern of speech which is essentially **incomprehensible** at times.
- This type of language disorder is relatively rare. When it occurs, it tends to be severe or extreme, and mild forms are quite uncommon.
- **Incoherence is often accompanied by derailment.**
- It differs from derailment in that the abnormality in incoherence occurs **within the level of the sentence, phrase, or the clause**, which contains words or phrases that are joined incoherently.

“Incoherence” aka “Word Salad”

- **Violations of rules of grammar** leading to incomprehensible speech.
- Sometimes coordinating ***function words*** such as “and”, “although”, “the”, “a”, and “an” are deleted.
- The following example contains few functional words and no verbs.

“Why do you think some people believe in God?”

Ex: “People God to ought, God...heaven my will point no all.”

“Incoherence” aka “Word Salad”

- Sometimes rules of grammar are intact, but ***words that confer meaning*** are affected (nouns and action verbs).
- Words are substituted in a phrase or sentence so that the meaning seems to be distorted or destroyed.
- The word choice may seem totally random or may appear to have some oblique connection with the context.

Ex: “People believe in God because of toys.
Embryology creates flowers behind the garages.
There are no bread in the house.”

“Incoherence” aka “Word Salad”

Question: “What do you think about the current political issues like the energy crisis?”

Ex: “They’re destroying too many cattle and oil just to make soap. If we need soap when you can jump into a pool of water, and then when you go to buy your gasoline, m-my folks always thought they should, get pop but the best thing to get, is motor oil, and, money. May-may as well go there and, trade in some, pop caps and, uh, tires, and tractors to grup, car garages, so they can pull cars away from wrecks, is what I believe in...”

Neologisms

- Completely new word or phrase whose derivation cannot be understood.
- Neologisms are rare.

Ex: “I got so angry I picked up a dish and threw it at the geshinker.”

“Word approximations”

- Old words used in new unconventional ways
- Meaning is often evident
- Form seems peculiar or bizarre

Ex: a ballpoint pen referred to as a **“paperskate”**

“Word approximations”

- Stock words used repeatedly to generate new meanings

Ex: watch = “**time vessel**”

stomach = “**food vessel**”

television set = “**news vessel**”

Video: Thought Disorder

Disorganized Behavior and Catatonic Symptoms

Disorganized Behavior

Disorganized behavior can manifest in a variety of ways.

It can include odd, bizarre behavior such as smiling, laughing, or talking to oneself or being preoccupied/responding to internal stimuli.

It can include purposeless, ambivalent behavior or movements.

It can include random, intermittent agitation for no clear reason.

Disorganized Behavior

- Grossly disorganized behavior also present as childlike silliness or unpredictable agitation.
- The person may be disheveled, dress in an unusual manner, show clearly inappropriate sexual behavior (e.g., public masturbation) or unpredictable and untriggered agitation.

Catatonic Symptoms

Catatonia, once thought to be pathognomonic for schizophrenia, is now known to occur most prominently in bipolar disorder.

It can occur in psychosis, depression, mania, due to general medical illness, or medication-induced.



Photo of patients
with catatonia
from Emil
Kaepelin's Psychia
trie
(1896)

Catatonia

- DSM-5 defined catatonia as a clinical picture dominated by ≥ 3 of 12 symptoms of marked motor disturbance.
- Catatonia is a syndrome of decreased reactivity to the environment involving:
 - decreased motor activity,
 - decreased engagement during interview or physical examination, and/or
 - excessive and peculiar motor activity

Decreased Motor Activity

1. Stupor

- No psychomotor activity
- Not actively relating to environment

2. Catalepsy

- Passive induction of a posture held against gravity

3. Waxy flexibility

- Slight, even resistance to positioning by examiner

Decreased Engagement with the Environment

4. Mutism

- No, or very little, verbal response (outside of aphasia)

5. Negativism

- Opposition or no response to instructions or external stimuli

Excessive & Peculiar Motor Activity

6. Posturing

- Spontaneous and active maintenance of a posture against gravity

7. Mannerism

- Odd, circumstantial caricature of normal actions

8. Stereotypy

- Repetitive, abnormally frequent, non-goal-directed movements

Excessive & Peculiar Motor Activity

9. Agitation, not influenced by external stimuli

10. Grimacing

11. Echolalia

- Mimicking another's speech

12. Echopraxia

- Mimicking another's movements

Next Steps

- Stay tuned for the next webinar in the series in which we will review how the timeline and presentation of psychotic symptoms differentiate between the different psychotic spectrum disorders.

References

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Thank you!

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