

Paranoia and Paranoid Disorders

What is Paranoia?

Paranoia involves feelings of persecution and an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Paranoia occurs in many mental disorders and is rare as an isolated mental illness. Since the delusions involve only one area, a person with paranoia can usually work and function in everyday life, however, their lives may be limited and isolated. There are different types of paranoia including conjugal paranoia, erotomania, hypochondriacal paranoia, and different types of paranoid disorders such as paranoid personality and paranoid schizophrenia.

Symptoms of Paranoia:

Symptoms of paranoia and paranoid disorders include intense and irrational mistrust or suspicion, which can bring on sense of rage, hatred, and betrayal. Some people suffering from paranoid personality may have a high capacity to annoy or enrage others because of rigid and maladaptive behavior. Some identifiable beliefs and actions of paranoid-related disorders include mistrust, taking offense easily, difficulty with forgiveness, defensive attitude in response to imagined criticism, preoccupation with hidden motives, fear of being deceived or taken advantage of, inability to relax, argumentative, abrupt, stubborn, self-righteous, and perfectionistic.

What Causes Paranoia?

The cause of paranoia is a breakdown of various mental and emotional functions involving reasoning and assigned meanings. The reasons for these breakdowns are varied and uncertain. Some symptoms of paranoia may arise from repressed, denied or projected feelings. Paranoid thoughts and feelings can become part of a delusional system through an accident, a misunderstanding or minor injustice, heightened intimacy, or increased responsibility.

Treatment of Paranoia

Treatment of paranoia is usually via behavior therapy which is aimed at reducing sensitivity to criticism and improving social skills. It can be difficult to treat a person with paranoia as they may be irritable, emotionally guarded, hostile, and unwilling; therefore, progress is slow. Therapy attempts to break the cycle of suspicion and isolation by using relaxation and anxiety management and by aiding the person to change certain behaviors.

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Sources: “Mental Health Letter-Paranoia and Paranoid Disorders”, The Harvard Medical School Mental Health Letter, 74 Fenwood Rd, Boston MA 02115.