



NPN

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*Merry Christmas from the National Paranoia Network*

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## **Christmas and CEN**

It's that time again, the holidays are coming. First comes Thanksgiving so let's start preparing now.

Since Christmas is generally a family holiday, you may be excited about Christmas or not-so-much. And that is likely determined by the type of family you have.

How do you feel when you get together with your family? Is it enriching and enjoyable? Or is it more draining and challenging? Or is your family experience somewhere in between?

If your family has any kind of abuse, grief, or addiction in it, for example, this family-focused holiday may be extra challenging for you.

There is one very large group of folks who either look forward to Christmas and then find themselves disappointed every year, or have learned to dread it because of its draining, disheartening nature.

This large group of people struggles to identify why Christmas is disappointing each year. And the answer is not anything that happens at Christmas dinner. It is actually because of what does not happen when their family gets together.

What's missing is a real, substantial emotional connection.

**Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN:** Growing up with CEN is essentially growing up in a family that has "emotion blindness." These families are not able to see and respond to the feelings of the children enough. They may avoid meaningful discussion and tamp down or negate strong feelings instead of responding in a helpful, instructive, and supportive way to emotions.

### **CEN Families at Christmas**

- In a CEN family's Christmas gathering, things may appear to be normal and fine. But there is a sense that something is missing. Some vital ingredient that's hard to name.
- CEN families avoid talking about the most important things: things that are conflictual, painful, or difficult. If a topic like that comes up it may feel awkward or somehow wrong or unacceptable. This can make your holiday either awkward, superficial, or boring.
- Christmas, a holiday in which you are supposed to be thankful for the good things in your life, can end up actually emphasizing what's missing. So if you do not have a healthy family, you are destined to end up disappointed.

Recent research studies have found that feeling gratitude makes people happy. So Thanksgiving is a special opportunity to focus on what you are grateful for.

And there is a silver lining to growing up with Childhood Emotional Neglect. Being raised in a family that ignores your emotions forces you to adapt. You learn some life skills that will be useful throughout your lifetime.

So now, at Christmas, you have some valuable things in your life to be thankful for. And when you do, I hope it will help to bring you some of the happiness that you deserve this holiday season.

### **5 Things You Can Be Thankful For When You Have Childhood Emotional Neglect**

1. **Your inner guide for directing you.** Having grown up without adequate emotional attention and personalized guidance from your parents, you had to learn how to make choices for yourself without much outside help. So you learned. Making decisions may be a struggle for you now. But on some level, somehow, you often do make good choices. Most CEN people, even if they agonize over personal decisions, even if they make some mistakes in their choices, generally have good judgment and common sense. And a good gut sense, if only

they would listen to their gut more. Your helpful inner guide is something to be thankful for.

2. **Your ability to do what needs to be done.** As a child, you couldn't be confident that your parents would provide you with help when you needed it. Now as an adult you are remarkably capable. You learned how to take care of things as a child and you are still good at it. These useful life skills are something to be thankful for.
3. **Your willingness to help others.** By overlooking your feelings as they raised you your parents inadvertently taught you how to overlook your own feelings and needs as an adult. This leaves you too focused on other people and their feelings and needs. But there is a silver lining to this. You are there to help others, and you likely ask for little back. Other people can see your good heart and they appreciate how giving and reliable you are. You can be thankful for possessing this lovable quality.
4. **Your parents for the things they did give you.** If your parents were abusive or extremely neglectful to you then you do not owe them any thanks. But perhaps they struggled to provide you with life's necessities; perhaps they loved you in the only way they could. Perhaps they gave you more than they had in their own childhoods. You can be thankful for what they did give you while also recognizing what they did not.

5. **One person in your life who has understood and supported you.** Was one of your parents more emotionally responsive than the other? Was there a teacher or friend who showed you understanding or a friend who validated you? A therapist who has guided you through some painful moments or transitions? You can feel thankful for this one special person who offered you something vital when you needed it.

Think about whether there might be one person in your family you can connect with more; it may be a sibling, a parent, aunt, uncle, cousin, or in-law. Just one person you can perhaps share your CEN experience with. You can ask them to read this blog. It helps enormously to have an understanding person in your family.

# **Christmas time can cause a lot of people to feel depressed**

## **Tips for Overcoming the Winter Blues One Step at a Time**

Depression drains your energy, hope, and drive, making it difficult to take the steps that will help you to feel better. But while overcoming depression isn't quick or easy, it's far from impossible. You can't just will yourself to "snap out of it," but you do have more control than you realize—even if your depression is severe and stubbornly persistent. The key is to start small and build from there. Feeling better takes time, but you can get there by making positive choices for yourself each day.

### **How do you deal with the blues?**

Dealing with depression requires action but taking action when you're depressed can be hard. Sometimes, just thinking about the things you should do to feel better, like exercising or spending time with friends, can seem exhausting or impossible to put into action.

It's the Catch-22 of depression recovery: The things that help the most are the things that are the most difficult to do. There is a big difference, however, between something that's difficult and something that's impossible. You may not have much energy, but by

drawing on all your reserves, you should have enough to take a walk around the block or pick up the phone to call a loved one.

Taking the first step is always the hardest. But going for a walk or getting up and dancing to your favorite music, for example, is something you can do right now. And it can substantially boost your mood and energy for several hours—long enough to put a second recovery step into action, such as preparing a mood-boosting meal or arranging to meet an old friend. By taking the following small but positive steps day by day, you'll soon lift the heavy fog of depression and find yourself feeling happier, healthier, and more hopeful again.

### **Coping with depression Reach out and stay connected**

Getting support plays an essential role in overcoming depression. On your own, it can be difficult to maintain a healthy perspective and sustain the effort required to beat depression. At the same time, the very nature of depression makes it difficult to reach out for help. When you're depressed, the tendency is to withdraw and isolate so that connecting to even close family members and friends can be tough.

You may feel too exhausted to talk, ashamed of your situation, or guilty for neglecting certain relationships. But this is just the depression talking. Staying connected to other people and taking part in social activities will



make a world of difference in your mood and outlook. Reaching out is not a sign of weakness and it won't mean you're a burden to others. Your loved ones care about you and want to help. And if you don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, it's never too late to build new friendships and improve your support network.

### **How to reach out for depression support**

Look for support from people who make you feel safe and cared for. The person you talk to doesn't have to be able to fix you; they just need to be a good listener—someone who'll listen attentively and compassionately without being distracted or judging you.

**Make facetime a priority.** Phone calls, social media, and texting are great ways to stay in touch, but they don't replace good old-fashioned in-person quality time. The simple act of talking to someone face to face about how you feel can play a big role in relieving depression and keeping it away.

**Try to keep up with social activities even if you don't feel like it.** Often when you're depressed, it feels more comfortable to retreat into your shell, but being around other people will make you feel less depressed.

## **Challenge negative thinking**

Do you feel like you're powerless or weak? That bad things happen and there's not much you can do about it? That your situation is hopeless? Depression puts a negative spin on everything, including the way you see yourself and your expectations for the future.

When these types of thoughts overwhelm you, it's important to remember that this is part of your depression and these irrational, pessimistic attitudes—known as cognitive distortions aren't realistic. When you really examine them, they don't hold up. But even so, they can be tough to give up. You can't break out of this pessimistic mind frame by telling yourself to "just think positive." Often, it's part of a lifelong pattern of thinking that's become so automatic you're not even completely aware of it. Rather, the trick is to identify the type of negative thoughts that are fueling your depression and replace them with a more balanced way of thinking. Try using the Pause-Choose-Action Technique

## Pause -Choose-Action

### Pause

Everything you do, you *choose* to do albeit often subconsciously. You choose to get up in the morning; you *choose* whether to eat breakfast or not (and whether to have cereal or toast); you *choose* whether to smile at people or not; you *choose* whether to drive to work or walk. Hence, it follows that you can *choose* whether to respond positively or negatively to any situation.

By pausing before reacting, you can gain far more control over your thoughts and consequently your response the situation. So the first step into changing negative thought patterns into positive ones is to pause. Resist the urge to react immediately. If you are a habitual negative thinker, any immediate reaction to a situation is likely to be negative. If it helps, count to ten. By doing this, you avoid making a knee-jerk reaction which you might later regret. A pause also allows you time to consider your choices and weigh up the pros and cons of you proposed reaction.

## **Choose**

During the pause – which can be as long as you feel is necessary to clarify your thinking – direct your mind towards the positive response. If applicable, consciously stop yourself from thinking negative thoughts. However strange and uncomfortable it might feel at first, make yourself choose the positive reaction over the negative reaction. Whenever faced with a choice you may find it helps to think about how you would want others to treat you in such a situation. We have found that it makes life far less complicate if you follow this simple rule.

## **Action**

Once you have chosen the positive response, act on it, otherwise this can become the point at which the thinking becomes ‘ineffective’. Do whatever is necessary to turn that thought into words or deeds. Have faith in your choice. Do not be tempted to back down or moderate it.

## **Little Thoughts That Help a Lot – Thoughts to Encourage Positive Thinking**

- Express your feelings. Do not suppress them.
- Don't be too proud to ask for help. It can be flattering as well as productive.
- Have Faith – whether in your God or a higher power.
- Live for the present moment. Do not miss out on the joys of life.
- The truth sets you free.
- It is never too late to follow your dreams.
- Every day write down at least three things (no matter how small) that made you feel good. Read through your list regularly.
- Take up a new challenge.
- Love and accept yourself.
- De-clutter your home
- Make your garden a beautiful place in which to be.
- Kiss procrastination goodbye. Deal with things as they arise. Do it now.
- Practise a relaxation technique e.g., yoga, meditation, or t'ai chi.
- Accept there are some things that will always be beyond your control. Don't waste time worrying about them (e.g.: other people's feelings, the weather.)

- Only watch television programmes you really want to see – and notice how much extra time you gain.
- Join an evening class, learn a different language or skill, and meet new people.
- Do something for someone else without expecting anything in return.
- Make a difference to people's lives by doing some form of voluntary or charity work.
- Step outside your comfort zone, remember it is better to have experienced failure than never to have tried out new experiences.
- Keep telling yourself; "I can...and I will..."
- If you look for failure you will find it. Make a point always of looking for success.
- Make leisure time, pleasure time.
- To have a true friend, you must be a true friend.
- Make people feel important, that way you will have a much better relationship with them.
- Do not attempt to impress other people. Enjoy watching them make the effort to try and impress you.
- Be genuinely enthusiastic.
- Value health and time over money
- Treat yourself with respect; then others will too.
- Believe that you are as good as everyone else and act as if you believe it.

- Say something genuinely nice to someone, you will feel better for it and so will they.
- Do something kind/helpful but unexpected. It can be something as small as holding a door open for someone. But will bring pleasure to you and the person on the receiving end of your good deed.
- Next time you feel yourself about to shout at someone, pause and choose to stay calm instead.
- Smile more – from deep within yourself -when you meet new people.
- When someone upsets you, think: “How much will this matter in 12 months’ time?”
- See the good in people not the bad. Avoid dispensing criticism and passing judgment.
- Banish the words ‘I should...’ and “I ought to....” From your vocabulary. If you are doing what you want to do, there is no need for them.
- Be unselfish.
- Don’t worry, be happy.
- Live for the present moment, not in the past or future.
- Treat other people the way you would want them to treat you.

## SETTING YOURSELF ACHIEVABLE GOALS

(Branching out)

Identify what you used to like doing in your life what were your dreams? It is important to hold onto your dreams

Identify what you would like out of life now what would make your quality of life acceptable to you now?

**Be realistic**-you're not going to get out of bed one morning and find your life is perfect, but you can make small changes that will make a difference

For example, you may decide to get out of bed before lunchtime, weekday's maybe this feels difficult, but it is an **ACHIEVABLE** goal

Keep working on your own achievable goals

Set new ones only when you are ready

If you don't manage to do something on a particular day

Don't give up

A step back is not a failure it is a learning curve

**Always remember it is OK to have a bad day we all have them it doesn't mean you are having a relapse**



## **Showing the Effectiveness of the Maastricht Interview for Hearing Voices with the Elderly**

After attending the Maastricht Interview training facilitated by Peter Bullimore in Orange NSW Australia I started working with people in the community as well as the hospital setting, and I am currently working with two elderly women who are very distressed by voices. One of the women is 91yrs old and, lives alone, is essentially independent and she is a 'knockout'....she is highly intelligent, a very saucy personality, articulate and has a rather regal presence about her ...however her deep sense of paranoia was really impacting on her life. Working with her has me up on my toes! Since we completed the Maastricht interview, and she gained more understanding of her voices her paranoia is less intense. I believe the incidence of older people hearing voices is very much underestimated. It is a regular feature of the distress people are experiencing when they are admitted to the unit where I work. I am new to the community role with the aged care assessment team so it will be interesting to see how many people I come into contact with who are distressed by voices and how I am able to work with them effectively

**Sally Taylor NSW Australia**

## **Understanding & Helping with Dissociation & Body Flashbacks**

Dissociation can include Spacing out- A change in consciousness and awareness

Flashbacks- Reliving the traumatic events with intensity, affecting senses such as

Smell, texture, taste, voice, vision

Intense emotions intrusive thoughts

Identity Change- Shift between identities

It can be seen as a sign of extreme distress that the individual cannot handle at that very moment.

### **What to do at the very moment?**

#### **Use Grounding Techniques**

- Explain calmly and gently who you are, where are you, what are you are doing, when it is (day/date)
- If it is appropriate, you can ask these questions to the person. What they see in the room, any questions related to five senses.
- Ask the person if they can identify six red and six blue things in the room.

### **What to do later on?**

- Support the individual to feel safe. Explore what they need to make them feel safe.

- Support the individual to make connections between past experiences and present feelings and behaviors- when the individual expresses readiness to explore.
- Explore what triggered the dissociation when the person feels ready.
- When you dissociated where did you go in your mind?
- Was it a place of safety?

### Helping with Body flashbacks

Childhood trauma increases the risk of future trauma

**Many people experience tactile experiences, that is, a feeling that someone or something is actually touching you. In some cases, this touching can seem to be of a sexual nature and can be extremely distressing.**

When childhood trauma is not resolved, this fundamental sense of fear and helplessness carries over into adulthood, setting the stage for further trauma. During an experience of feeling frightened or overwhelmed the person can experience what is known as a body flashback, they experience being touched or they can feel things like spiders crawling on or under their skin. This can occur when you are discussing the past trauma or just after discussing it or if you are under any form of stress. These experiences are perfectly normal for people who have had severe trauma in their life especially people who have been sexually abused,

their bodies are still in a state of trauma and reminding them of unresolved issues in their lives this usually occurs when the person has been sexually or physically abused in childhood.

### Ways of helping with body flashbacks

Keep your sleeping area relaxed and calm. Open the window during the daytime; close it at night to stop you getting cold and if it feels like a relaxed atmosphere you have a better chance of dozing off.

Stick to a daily routine, with regular times for walking, sleeping, eating, working and exercise. Make sure to schedule time for relaxing and social activities, too.

Break large jobs into small manageable tasks. Take pleasure from the accomplishment of achieving something, even if it's a small thing.

Find activities that make you feel better. Keep your mind occupied (reading, cooking playing with a pet) so you're not dedicating all your energy and attention to focusing on the traumatic experience.

### Staying grounded: A trauma self-help exercise

If you are feeling disorientated, confused, or upset, you can do the following exercise.

Sit on a chair. Feel your feet on the ground. Press on your thighs. Feel your behind on the seat and your back against the chair.

Look around you and pick six objects that have red or blue. This should allow you to feel in the present, more grounded, and in your body. Notice how your breath gets deeper and calmer.

You may want to go outdoors and find a peaceful place to sit on the grass. As you do, feel how your body can be held and supported by the ground. The more you get in touch with your body the more control you will have over the flashbacks.

Try to get plenty of sleep and take regular exercise, eating a balanced diet can be helpful. The body flashbacks are related to stress and anxiety the more you reduce these experiences the less frequent the flashbacks should be.

Importantly don't be afraid to ask for help these experiences can be very difficult to cope with alone.

- A way of dealing with this is to use retaliation.
- Visualize the abuser and warn them that you would do exactly the same to them as they did to you, ask a trusted person to be present as you do this if you need them. It's important to retaliate as forcibly as you can. The person or person's that you have visualized often don't like a dose of their own medicine. Alternatively write a letter to your abuser/s telling them how they made you feel as a child, let them know that you are an adult, and they can't hurt you anymore

**Maastricht Interview Training for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thought Beliefs & Paranoia Is available online and face to face from the National Paranoia Network. Other training available Working through Paranoia, Making Sense of Hearing Voices & Working with Childhood Trauma**

It can be delivered across the world for more information and costings Email [enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org](mailto:enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org)

Online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Groups Join our online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group Meetings on ZOOM

Thursday 3pm -4.30pm with Paul Meeting ID 88460268952 Password 375878

Sundays: HVN USA on ZOOM 6:30p - 8:00p USA Time with Cindee 11.30pm – 1.00 am UK Time Meeting ID 827 5463 8654 No Password Needed

Saturdays Texas USA HVN Meeting on ZOOM 10am-11.30 USA Time with Paul 4pm-5.30pm UK Time Meeting ID 83079149464 No Password Needed

Monday Sheffield Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group with Emma & Lyn on ZOOM 11am-12pm UK Time Meeting ID: 558 685 8263 Password 6DyVca

## **Hearing Voices Group Ireland**

A group for people who hear voices or experience  
paranoia and unusual beliefs, on Zoom

Facilitated by Michael Ryan

Every Sunday @ 4pm

Zoom Link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89201253186>

Email: [vhmichael9345@gmail.com](mailto:vhmichael9345@gmail.com)

With enquiries