



December Edition 2023

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FROM NPN



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In memory of Dawn Gearing

A wonderful therapist and mother to three children and lovely wife to her husband.

I will never forget my first session in therapy. I've battled mental health most of my life, when I was in my twenties after a break down, I opened about a bit of it, but what happened to me I'll never forget for I was sectioned over the weekend and so severely drugged up. They even stuck me in a strait jacket, the fear factor was overwhelming, when I got out for better or worse, I'd never tell anybody my mental health again over the next 25 year I struggled few break downs along the way. So, on this morning I was apprehensive to say the least, my paranoia was off the chart the voices that I heard quadrupled I heard 15 different voices and struggled to hear my own. It was there I meet Dawn, an unassuming woman I thought, how wrong was I, Step by step she broke me down layer by layer peeling back the trauma to find the root, she told me it would get worse before better, because we were going back to a time were all I knew was trauma and pain. But in many ways, it was liberating to finally be able to speak about what happened to me without being prejudged by anybody far from it she reassured me on many occasions how could I do anything else because I was just a child, I was defenceless. Brings me close to tears writing it.

After 6 months I no longer see it as therapy but rather I was going to see a friend and offload on her, about things that I could never say to anybody else.

Around this time, I would bring us both a cake she loves a chocolate éclair, and me cream doughnut. After a year I felt like I hadn't moved on much for where I was.

Again, Dawn showed me how is it possible to deal with 40 years of trauma in 40 weeks of one-hour sessions. She always said she believed I could get better although I wasn't so sure, around this time I call it my awakening, she came me a book about other people's stories on mental health, and one story stood to me. A woman talked about how everyone around her family and friends all believed she could get better, but she never did, until she had the epiphany everyone believes I can, but I don't, light bulb moment for her and me. The realisation that the problem laying within us that we didn't believe that we could get better this is why I call it the awakening for me. No matter how I messed up or got things wrong, she would always make me see the positive side, but also, she was no one's fool. She would tell you straight and I like her more for it. One of her phrases she used a lot was take Control, to simply words, but with much meaning. Control of the voice for it is me that's stronger, and any power they have I give. If I'm having a flash back which happens multiple times a day sometimes, before meeting Dawn I would go with the flash backs let it take me, the images of Barry North but the emotion and the fear is so intense it's like you're there. But now no longer do I drown and go with this

flashback, but I take control like Dawn says take control and I snap myself as quick as I find myself in the flashback it helps me and slowly but surely one day, I hope that they decrease less and less. Dawn after breaking me down, slow build me back up, showing me all the things, I've gone through, but look at all the things you've done since then. When I meet Dawn, I was afraid to get out the house anxiety killing me stopping me. I started the gym after 6 months with dawn, and to this day still do, take control it won't come until you push yourself, another thing she was right about. After 3 years of therapy which she had to fight to get me that time which I'm truly grateful for.

Every few months Dawn would always keep in touch, we would be on the phone few hours sometimes, as friends talking. But if she heard me negative or had problems. She would always say!!

what aren't you doing Mark. Take Control. I will sorely miss you, but so happy and glad I meet you. It's up to me now to tell myself when I'm fucking up!

It better to push back take control. Quote from Albert Einstein the definition of madness is doing the same things over and over and expecting different results.

Take control

Identifying your feelings

People who were emotionally neglected were taught how to ignore their feelings—not how to spot a feeling as they were having it. Not knowing this essential emotion skill is a major impediment to living a life that is true to yourself. And learning how to answer this question can be a pivotal step toward healing your emotional neglect.

How do you know when you are having a feeling?

3 Ways to Identify When You Are Experiencing a Feeling

1. **Physical sensations:** Feelings can be described as physical sensations inside your body. Emotions are body sensations, so it can benefit you to pay special attention to your body. Which sensations are present right now as you are reading this? Which sensations come and go? I often ask, “Where do you feel that in your body?” Clients may answer with felt sensations in their throat, chest, or belly. You can also feel emotions in your head, hands, arms, legs, and pretty much any other part of your body. There is no right or wrong way to feel a feeling. Pause frequently

throughout your day and identify what you feel physically. This can help you to better pinpoint a feeling you may be experiencing.

2. Physical pain or somatic symptoms: Research going back to the year 2000 and beyond (Härenstam, A., Theorell, T., & Kaijser, L., 2000) has shown that repressed anger is connected to coronary disease and an increased likelihood of heart attacks. With that damning evidence, it's clear that since your emotions live in your body ... and if they go unattended ... they can do you harm. You may end up experiencing muscle tension, especially in your back, neck, or shoulders; fatigue; restlessness; jaw clenching; headaches; backaches; or even migraines. If you notice physical pain or unpleasant somatic symptoms, consider whether you may be ignoring vital feelings in your body.
3. Surprising or confusing behaviours: Emotions motivate and direct us. When you are in touch with what you are feeling, you can then listen to ways in which you're being driven to take action. When you are aware of this, you then have the power to control and manage what your feelings tell you to do. When you are not aware of this, you may very well be confused or surprised by the actions you may take. If this happens, pause and consider the feelings

you're having that led you to do the things you find puzzling.

How to Identify What You Are Feeling: The Identifying and Naming Exercise

- Step 1: Pause and take a moment to close your eyes. Imagine a blank screen in your mind's eye, blocking any thoughts that pop up. Focus on this blank screen and turn your attention inside.
- Step 2: Ask yourself this: *What am I feeling right now, at this very moment?*
- Step 3: Become aware of any thoughts that are bouncing around in your mind and choose not to engage with them. Refocus your attention on your body and what you are feeling right now.
- Step 4: Attempt to identify a word to describe what you are feeling. Perhaps you need more than one word. Use sensations in your body to help you identify your feelings.
- Step 5: When you identify a word that may describe your feeling experience, say it out loud. "I feel ____." How does this seem when you say it? Does it encapsulate your experience? If not, continue finding more

words to accurately describe your blend of emotions.

- Step 6: Once you find language to match your experience, you are then set up to gain all the benefits that come with feeling and knowing your emotions. Guidance, self-knowledge, clarity, authenticity, connection, and motivation will all be on the table for you in a way they have not been before.

Where to Go From Here

Your emotions take the form of energy running through your body. If you don't notice or respond to your feelings, you are taking a big risk. You may develop physical issues or may even engage in behaviours that don't reflect your values or leave you feeling regretful, lonely, confused, or in misalignment with yourself.

If you have trouble identifying feelings as you're having them, place any judgments on yourself and your abilities aside. Growing up in a household plagued with childhood emotional neglect excluded you from learning the essential emotion skills. Instead of learning how to identify, validate, understand, and manage your feelings, you learned how to minimize, ignore, and suppress them. This is not your fault.

Now, when you notice the speeding beat of your heartbeat, actions that leave you baffled with yourself, or tightness in your jaw, know that you can learn about yourself from these signs. It's not your job to get rid of it; it's your job to learn from it. This is your opportunity to choose something different.

It is your opportunity to feel



The impact of Yoga

I was lucky enough to have yoga training that was informed by trauma-therapy. At the time, the school I learned in blended a mixture of lineage practices with Somatic Experiencing®, which is a type of somatic therapy created by Dr. Peter Levine who is the founder and President of the Ergos Institute for Somatic Education in the USA.

Peter Levine worked for 30 years to study trauma and create this therapy, which he believes offers an alternative to a lifelong prospect of medication or complete inability to engage with life.

“Trauma is a fact of life. It does not, however, have to be a life sentence. Not only can trauma be healed with guidance and support, but it can also be transformative.” (Waking the Tiger)

This has been, for me, an incredibly helpful form of therapy. But it's very challenging as an experienced and capable practitioner guides you through your most traumatic memories. These are felt like (for those of you who do) flashbacks, except with the guidance of your practitioner, you are now in control of the situation. You revisit the sensations and feelings and can start to do psychological work around these trapped memories that are stored within you.

In his book, *Waking the Tiger*, Levine uses a combination of case studies from his clients/patients and practices you can follow along with to try out. What differs from Van der Kolk is that it is primarily concerned with how he personally works with trauma without learning about other practitioners. Peter Levine intuitively came to a healing method that mirrors practices like Reiki healing and can also be seen in many indigenous shamanic cultures. In these cultures, trauma is seen as something that causes energy to leak indefinitely to a point in space and time. A healer with these, visits this “leak” and repairs it with a soul retrieval or psychological work, or energy healing.

Dr Levine believes that imagination is key to performing this psychic surgery.

The idea is that “supernatural” experiences: hallucinations both audial and visual and multi-sensory are natural parts of the human experience. In fact, having these doors open in your psyche actually offer the biggest gateway into rebuilding a sense of self after one or many traumatic events.

He sees a healthy human mind as having a defined sense of self, with a playful and colorful (even childlike) imaginative space.

So, what does hearing voices or experiencing things that are not there point to exactly?

This: The exact rich space that can become the fertile ground for healing.

Which leads us to the question, how can you use this imagination space for your own wellbeing and better quality of life?

In my experience, the more time I am actively using my own imagination space, the less time it's taken up by invasive or frightening voices and scenarios.

Imaginations can be used for anything. You can plan out your day, which is a fairly boring but standard use of imagination. You can imagine every conversation in advance of them happening. You can daydream and imagine your next holiday: imagine the heat-soaked blue sky fading into a mirrored, glittering sea, birds soaring and nothing to interrupt you from these beautiful surrounds.

You could imagine a winter wonderland, the cold of the snow and the playfulness of water expressed in this way.

Or you could do what I do all day long: imagine and experience the processes and organism of your own body and how that feels to be alive.

2. Sacral

The Sacral chakra is the second of the 7 bodily chakras and is concerned with creativity, sexuality and also the seat of the individual self. For this reason, in almost everyone, it is out of balance.

With most people who occupy a lot of psychic space, the challenge can be to pull yourself out of the clouds, and down into the body to have your own personal experience.

This month's practice is a very simple move which, for me is an intuitive movement that reminds me I have floated out of my body and can be practiced either sitting, or if you wish to challenge yourself, on all fours.

Spinal Rocks

How to:

1. Sit on a chair or kneel/sit cross-legged on the ground.
2. Feel heavy in the bones of your legs, so that your bones feel like they could connect to the earth.
3. Imagine the pelvis like a bowl, containing all that it contains at the end of your digestive and reproductive systems, which you can imagine as water.

4. Tip the bowl gently as though to pour out in front of you, allow the spine to follow the movement.
5. Tip the bowl back as though to pour out behind you, again allowing the spine to follow the movement.
6. You can place hands on your hips and knees to stabilize.
7. Play with speed and move with your breath, inhaling to tip forward, exhaling back.



8. Inhale, pour pelvis forward and let the spine follow, gaze lifts and eyes roll up.
9. Exhale, tip pelvis back, spine arches, gaze to navel

10. Repeat as many times as feels good in your body, varying speed and movement as you intuitively need.



I hope these practices are both accessible and feel good in the body and keep you in a good space to keep dreaming and imagining. As of last month, if you have any questions or feedback, please write in to share your thoughts.

Jazmin Jewel

My name is Aaron Pyne, and I'm a third-year clinical psychology doctoral student at Cardiff University.

My area of research is in people who hear voices but do not find them distressing. This is an area I'm incredibly passionate about as a voice hearer myself. In this group of people, I'm curious to understand why their voice hearing experiences feel less distressing and more manageable. I am suspecting that having greater psychological flexibility and self-compassion may play a part here. Also, we know from the research that those who have experienced trauma are at greater risk of developing auditory hallucinations and may become more distressed by voices. I'm wondering similarly in those who have experienced trauma, yet do not get distressed by their voices, whether psychological flexibility and self-compassion reduces the risk of experiencing distress and the development of more severe distress and 'clinical' voice hearing. I'm hoping this study would be helpful in informing research and practice around how we support people who hear voices, and hopefully, prevent that transition towards clinical and distressing voice hearing.

I have designed an online survey to explore this, and the title of the project is: 'The relationship between psychological flexibility, self-compassion, traumatic life experiences and auditory verbal hallucinations in healthy voice hearers'. My study has received ethical

approval through Cardiff University's School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (attached). I have also included my research advert. For those considering participating, the survey is completely anonymous, and takes approximately 15 minutes. Participants will also have the opportunity to enter a prize draw to win one of six Love2Shop vouchers (1x£50, 5x£10).

The link for the survey

https://cardiffunipsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1FIB6GmwViMtsl6/

Research into child adversity & unusual experiences

<https://www.callforparticipants.com/study/RDWL0/stories-about-childhood-adversity-and-unusual-experiences>

<https://www.callforparticipants.com/study/RDWL0/stories-about-childhood-adversity-and-unusual-experiences>

[Stories about Childhood Adversity and Unusual/Psychotic-like Experiences - Call For Participants](#)

Through hearing people's life stories, we hope to learn more about the role of the timing of childhood adversities on people's later experiences of unusual experiences or psychotic-like experiences. Childhood adversity could be, but not restricted to: experiencing/witnessing physical, sexual,...

www.callforparticipants.com

Alternatively, if you would like to hear more about the study, it would be great to have a conversation (07400 981 270) or you can reply with any questions. Best wishes Yoko

Compassionate approaches to the Stigma of Schizophrenia

Stigma is terrifying and stressful and may perpetuate the illness of schizophrenia. You may lose friends and family who may act as a source of strength with fear and soothe the self-blame of the stigma by not esteeming who you are. Then without such support you will be on your own confronting the stigma. Yet with support you won't be on your own in the hostile world of stigma and the fear it generates. So, you can tackle the problem in the same way as tackle the persecution from the paranoia.

Stigma is all you ever hear about in the media to the point it surrounds you in everyday language. People unconsciously use labels and don't realise what they are saying. This acts as a constant reminder. So, it helps to live in a stigma free environment like sheltered accommodation where people understand your problems. Otherwise, day centers have a role as they give you somewhere safe to go and give you a rest so you can better confront the terrors of stigma.

Such places will be a bit of a lifeline with the stigma as it gets you out of the house and away from anyone that might notice you. It is common in schizophrenia that the neighbours are spying on you so they will always be watching you so they might notice your unusual behavior. You won't feel like leaving the house and going out. Yet once you get to the day center you should be

free of these feelings. That still leaves the problem of going out of the house and getting there. This might be worth the risk as being at home long term under these conditions can be intolerable.

Distraction and confrontation are both possible with stigma. So, keeping busy around the house is important as this will not concentrate your mind on the dangers. It is also important to have your friends around and get out once each day as this will all keep your strength up to confront the stigma. Then once you have spent time in your new home and nothing happens with the neighbours you should start to calm down a bit more. You may still have to avoid them but when coming into contact you don't have to look in their direction, which should be a good safeguard.

You may be living independently so will have to avoid people in case they notice any unusual behaviour, as in my case by staying up all night to stop the neighbours banging on the walls. I have to avoid them when I leave the house because I think they might be spying. In particular waiting for buses is very dangerous so it is better to use taxis or travel with your family. Then there is less danger of bumping into your neighbours than when out and about where you won't see the people again and this is a lifeline as it allows some time away from the stigma.

At first it is better to take the rubbish out at night and do your shopping off the internet instead of the local shop. It helps to keep the blinds drawn when you are

practicing safe place imagery at home. When waiting for the bus to take a Walkman with you, so you won't be visibly hearing or talking back to the voices. This can also be done by having a friend with you to talk to. All this until you get to the point when you are not showing symptoms that might be noticed.

Using exposure therapy, a sequence occurs when someone comes with you and then you are left on your own. A first step can also be taken by coexisting with fear, and this will need to be practiced before you leave sheltered accommodation. It also helps to begin by going somewhere safe or new and then tackling stronger associations of fear elsewhere. It might also help to use some insight for taking the edge off things at more moderate levels of anxiety. Then practicing some compassion is good for building on all this, especially during more severe times and places. This can eventually be enhanced by with the safe place imagery and breathing once we have calmed down a bit. The list of steps involved was this:

- ! Getting over the doorstep
- 2 Going to places with moderate paranoia.
- 3 Going to places with increased paranoia.
- 4 Watching the news about causing wars at home and with support.
- 5 Watching the news about causing wars alone at home.

6 Going to places with severe fear with support.

7 Going to places on my own for a while with back up.

8 Going to places on my own with no support.

9 Living independently with support

10 Living independently alone.

12 Being able to confront the stigma.

Fear of stigma can also be soothed but is so terrifying compassion might be the only answer. It can reach the same levels schizophrenia can. As Francis Jeffreys said, "opinions based on prejudice are always sustained with the greatest violence". It is often no good having graded exposure to stigma as with schizophrenia as the fear will sap your strength for it. Having support is just as necessary for confronting stigma as it is for paranoia.

The problem I that I have to keep clam about stigma when I might bump into the spying neighbors. This is extremely difficult and requires a number of approaches. To avoid the stigma having an effect on me I need cognitive or compassionate coping with the illness. All this should calm you down so you can act normally around your neighbors, and it will take some exposure training to practice these approaches.

There are many ways to take your mind off the stigma such as chatting and going out with friends. Yet sometimes the stigma is more frightening than schizophrenia. So, you can tackle each step by step by

confronting the paranoia first then build to the stigma next. Then you feel less visible with the stigma, and it is less frightening. Living anonymously in our large impersonal society is becoming more possible and there will be less need for sheltered accommodation. Finally, once inside your own house it is easier to put thoughts of stigma to the back of your mind as you won't see the neighbours for most of the time.

Yet there is a problem people with schizophrenia think the neighbours are spying on them. So, if they are always watching you then you might think they also know you are schizophrenic. Some insight might be needed at this point. Yet even if you overcome the fear the perceived danger might still be there when whether at home or out and about. You might still need to avoid people, especially when coming into contact with the neighbours. Your behavior will also still seem odd, so you still have to be careful. This might still have answers.

The getting out and about will allow you to practice being around people eye to eye. This takes some courage in case you give them a guilty look. Then people are going to wonder what is going on. Having someone with you to remind you of the insight you have can help prevent this reaction. So, the support might give you the courage to look them in the face in the first place. Also, the guilty looks only happen because you are frightened of the punishment so with insight or compassion this can be overcome and be avoided.

Here you can also confront schizophrenia by having someone to go with you and avoid the spying neighbours. You can confront the stigma in the same way by doing it gradually. So, once you overcome the paranoia you can use your courage to confront the stigma which is just as frightening. Then going out might give you a rest so you cope with the difficult times with the stigma and don't feel so visible with being drained by the fear. You won't be so easily spotted.

Living in a mental health project should protect you from the feelings of terror with the stigma so you can eat and sleep better. This will give you the strength to practice going out and overcoming the problems of fear. Then when practicing exposure, you won't be so visible to other people. The 24/7 social contact will also act as a distraction when it there which will bring you out of yourself so you won't become isolated and withdrawn which will again make you look more normal.

You have got to be careful when first going out as this is the risk you have to take that you might be seen by the neighbours. The exposure therapy works best doing this. Yet it gets to be a psychological barrier just getting over the doorstep when the thought of doing this is frightening. You have to get psyched up for the danger as the thought of this makes you visible. If anyone sees you, these feelings will stop getting out, so you won't get a chance to practice this being around other people. You will need support at this point.

It is best to avoid the neighbours at the start as much as you can. It helps to get your shopping off the internet and put the bins out late at night. In my case it was possible to leave the house through the back door. It only takes one instance of unusual behavior to make you conspicuous then problems of stigma become inescapable. Again, it is better to prepare for this by living in sheltered accommodation while doing exposure therapy at the same time.

At these times it is more possible to go shopping and travel on buses. Then if the neighbours did spot you looking odd you have the protection and feelings of safety back in the project. Again, this allows for an opportunity to go out in the local area as people cannot touch you when you get back home. With some of this fear removed from the equation it is more possible to practice this on your own as well as with the project staff or social workers.

Hospitals, sheltered accommodation, and day centers are all stigma free environments...you can escape from the neighbours in these places and calm down enough to socialize and grow despite stigma. Yet you still must be careful when going back home as the project might start to get a reputation. This will help with mood and might be a bit of a lifeline if you live independently and are on your own trapped inside the house for long periods with the dangerous stigma.

You can start to deal with the spying neighbours and put these thoughts to the back of your mind by practicing

taking your mind off things inside the house. Then to build up to going out the door and risk bumping into them doing the same. So, once you get used to them in terms of keeping calm with insight you might be able to say hello instead of running back inside the house which will make you invisible. Yet you might still have to run because you will still see it as unsafe even if you are less visible by keeping calm. Then this is how insight is needed to question the paranoid delusions.

Still stigma doesn't always mean hiding away at home. You can still be anonymous in a crowd and that will allow for a lot of getting out doing things which will provide a rest from the confines of hiding. This means you can enjoy shopping or travel once you get your behaviour under control with compassion. This might also need someone to go with you as well as compassion.

Then compassion can eventually help with living outside the mental health system in a non-protected environment independently and on your own. To do this is a gradual process as you need to replace the sanctuary of sheltered accommodation with the sanctuary of independent living. Is best to practice leaving one before living in another as the problem is the same in that you have got to be around people. So, hiding away inside the project isn't going to work and we need exposure therapy.

Learning not to stare at people was helped by compassion so I could act normally. I found if I calmed

down, I stopped doing this so when I looked around and realized people were not noticing me. It was difficult to distinguish the hostile reactions to the paranoia. So, I wasn't just thinking about the stigma sometimes at these points and thus the insight could reduce the combined fear here. To do this it helped to have someone with you to explain the difference. Then the paranoia and the stigma might not seem to be so overwhelming so you can then cope with feeling visible better.

In sheltered people will not notice your unusual behaviour and the distractions of living there will help take your mind off the neighbours around you. So instead of being confined under surveillance you can be free from spying and feel at home. This provides a good rest in between practicing exposure when getting out which was in a way that living independently would not. So, it is also good for exposure therapy as you can practice this without the fear of stigma when getting back home.

It is a big step when moving out of sheltered housing as the opportunities for distraction through conversation are not always available 24/7. Yet doing a day center course allowed me to get absorbed in doing the homework back at the project and once calmed down a bit meant I could do it with independent living. Then if having a bad experience with the exposure therapy there was something to take my mind off the problem when back at home again.

You may become reliant on the television for therapy. Yet this can be frightening if you think your thoughts are being broadcast on the screen. This will remind you that you are paranoid and will keep your mind on the stigma. In my case I could watch movies once I already knew what was in them and this became a bit of a lifeline as I could multitask with the calming effect this had and concentrate on the writing at the same time. I could rest indoors and take my mind off the dangerous stigma in between practicing the going out.

It was important for my graded exposure to watch a video about causing wars safer in my own room at the project with its soothing atmosphere and with having my friends with me. Again, this was a useful first step in confronting fear and coexisting with it. So, when I had to move out, I was on my own with these thoughts but with watching the video this became very important as being confronted face to face with the delusion was a very difficult step to take with fear.

The difference with watching the video was I didn't think other people were passing back information back to the CIA. There was a very clear step here with going out and being exposed to this fear. With the support the feeling of doing the levels of fear was equivalent to being outside. Yet going out on my own was going to be more difficult. Then after that the next step was being indoors doing the same thing in isolation as this concentrates the mind on the thoughts and voices. This needed having someone with you again.

The video proved important in another way as I could practice being on my own with it despite the support from the social worker. The levels of fear with this were similar to going to places that triggered off the terror. After practicing this a few times, I elected to try going to these places on my own and see how long I lasted. That again was good for independent living as I would be on my own most of the time, so I had to build this up gradually before I left sheltered accommodation.

Eventually watching the video meant I could look at something that was frightening and not divert my gaze. This allowed me to look at people who I was afraid of that they might be reading my thoughts about disasters and maintain eye contact. I wasn't reacting with fear to doing this and could keep my composure. I could put these thoughts to the back of my mind so they couldn't be noticed. This, with some practice, allowed me to act normally around my neighbours and overcome the stigma.

Insight was another way of putting these thoughts to the back of my mind. This meant they were less visible even when I wasn't manifestly afraid. Instead of shying away from contact with other people I found it more possible to be distracted by talking to them. I could chat with shop assistants and so I began to see another way of dealing with the stigma. People were none the wiser about what was going through the mind and so it became more helpful to meet the neighbours than trying to avoid them.

The problem with simply coexisting with fear may mean you are still visibly frightened to other people so they will be wondering what is going on. At this point, once you have got it partially under control you can take a few deep breaths before you go outside. Then you can enjoy practicing the distraction by talking with your support worker or whoever you come into contact with. So, you just say normal things like “hello” or “it’s a bit chilly today” and leave it at that. Again no one will be any the wiser. Once you see this strategy working you will calm down and feel a part of things again instead of standing out and feeling visible.

Another disguise is learning to handle the voices, so you don’t look visible by being preoccupied or talking back to them. This again particularly when the neighbours are around. You cannot voice dialogue when out and about. So, you will need a way to stop the fear and emotional pain to stop being noticed. Compassion is the key here to soothe both reactions and being compassionate looks normal so what you are doing with your thoughts and feelings will not be noticed.

Eventually you don’t have to run off when you catch sight of the neighbours as fear can be controlled. It helps to live somewhere quiet where people are passing your door all day long. Then if you do have to leave the house someone can watch to see if there are any people about before you step out of the door. This will be the first step to practicing going to other places where people do not know you. Then if you practice doing this

on your own you can try to avert your gaze and pretend you haven't seen anyone as you leave the house

Yet there are problems as avoiding the neighbours is difficult to do completely. Once you are away from the house or even when waiting for a bus or getting exercise along the local foot paths you never see the same people twice. The problem with people next door or in a cul-de-sac is that they expect you to say more than hello sometimes. It is hard to chat about the normal things in life such as what kind of work you do when you are schizophrenic, and this leads to further problems.

You still have to take out the rubbish at night under cover of darkness. You must not miss the delivery of a parcel which might be left with a neighbour. Under these conditions you will need to be with a friend or family member to do this for you, as answering the door to a delivery may mean you will catch sight of someone and shoot them a suspicious glance. Even with practicing the eye contact when out this could still remain a significant problem. Yet as we have seen all this can be controlled.

Compassion and Self-Blame in schizophrenia

The voices may criticize you that being schizophrenic is your own fault. Yet there is growing evidence that stigma attitudes to schizophrenia are changing. People will blame you less and you can add this to the effects of self-compassion. The voices will judge you less and you will realize their attitudes are just ignorance. The world

of mental health will teach you this and what brings this home is the care you receive in the system. So, the powers that are providing care will overrule the attitude of society as a whole and you can show the voice this as well.

Self-blame will cause much emotional pain and it will be difficult to soothe as it seems the whole society is doing this to you. So, once you have accepted the stigma there will be much negative reinforcement and will be difficult to ignore. The pain this causes will be so severe as most people will see you as weak. Even emotional support from friends and family may not be enough to stop these feelings and you are going to need some compassion.

Schizophrenia is stress induced so it might at first seem like there is some truth in it. It also seems to go against the conventional wisdom that life is not a bowl of cherries. We need to learn this is just prejudice. The best answer is that many people with schizophrenia display much courage in confronting the symptoms. Then you feel less self-blame and shame. The more you practice exposure therapy, the more you can begin to overcome your fears and overcome the self-stigma through facing up to things. Then gradually the voices will grow quieter with this as you feel less bad about yourself.

It may be self-blame is generating the voices so this should give you some courage to stand up to them. The longer you spend in the mental health system the more

you will learn that the problem is just a chemical imbalance. This thought can be combined with exposure therapy as different ways to answer the voice and is said with much medical and scientific authority. Once we start to feel better about ourselves through coming to slowly understand all of this the voice should get quieter.

So, if the voices try to reinforce the stigma you can point out what the psychiatrist said about the courage you have displayed with the symptoms to answer it. The exposure therapy might give you strength to stand up to the voice. You might also point out to the voice the only reason you were driven mad in the first place was you weren't being compassionate with yourself. You can further show the voice you have overcome the fear of the stigma so it cannot harm you by reinforcing this.

The voice can remind you of the danger you are in with the surveillance of the neighbours and that they might know through this that you are schizophrenic. This can be difficult when you bump into them as you will be less able to put these thoughts to the back of your mind. The trick is not to be afraid at this point and to remember how far you have come with exposure and compassion therapy. Again, you won't have to run from the situation as you can practice this problem elsewhere.

A further step involves answering the voices is that they are not being compassionate about the stigma. More than this, living in the mental health system you will meet people who are, and they can reinforce your

argument with the voice. You will not be on your own tackling this and there will be more people supporting you compared to the number of people you are hearing. Schizophrenia can happen to anyone, and it is not their fault through being too weak to handle things.

The voices will be causing emotional pain and much fear by stigmatizing you. So, it helps to be in a compassionate environment like sheltered accommodation where other people can soothe and calm these feelings. Then you might be able to think about being stigmatized instead of being forcibly subject to it. You will come to realize other people have been stigmatized and have been able to overcome the painful social exclusion that their voices are further inflicting pain on you.

Criticism from the voices may be amplified if your friends have abandoned you because of the stigma. The people who know you best will blame you for your mental incompetence and your weakness for allowing yourself to go insane. You may even hear their voices doing the criticizing which will make them more difficult to ignore. There will be less opportunity to dialogue with them by having someone take your side so your family will become an important lifeline here until you make new friends. The authority of your family should overrule what your friends say.

In dialoguing with the stigmatizing voice, you need to explain to it that you have a legitimate mental health problem, and you are not to blame yourself for this.

Indeed, your psychiatrist could dialogue with the voice that schizophrenia is such a common problem for many people and instead of blaming them they deserve compassion. The psychiatrist will be able to point out the voice is being insensitive to your suffering and this thought should be enough to stop the stigma from both people in general and the voice in particular. We all need to be more caring about this and motivated to help instead.

Eventually you will start to stand up to the voices instead of being afraid of it. So, you can once again show the voice you are displaying some courage which will be difficult for it to ignore. The voice will gradually become less powerful, and you can then ignore being reminded about the dangerous stigma 24/7. You can then practice distraction techniques which should further take your mind off the dangers of stigma. This will then allow life with stigma to get back to normal.

Finally attitudes to mental illness are based on prejudice and ignorance so if we are ignorant of something we will prejudge by incorrect beliefs about it. These beliefs are dark and cloud our understanding. So instead, we need a more enlightened and humane approach. BY getting across this message as national charities Like MIND and RETHINK try to do, we can slowly educate about the stigma. These campaigns gradually change our knowledge about the condition, and we can show the voices all this which should reduce their power over us.

Mark Ellerby

Maastricht Interview Training for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thought Beliefs & Paranoia Is available online and face to face from the National Paranoia Network. Training available, how to use the Maastricht Interview for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thoughts, Beliefs & Paranoia, 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 peterbullimore@yahoo.co.uk

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 85737775621 No Password Needed

Sheffield Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group. The group runs.

Every Monday 11.00am-12.00pm at the Gardner's Rest 105 Neepsend Lane Sheffield S3 8AT

Contact peterbullimore@yahoo.co.uk

Tel 07590837694

Online Hearing Voices Group in Ireland Facilitated by Michael Ryan

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.web/j/89201253186>

Email: vhmichael9345@gmail.com

With enquiries

Families/friends can contact

families@usahearingvoices.org

For support groups

Unusual beliefs group St Mungos

Every Thursday 2.30-3.30

93 Shirland Road, London W9 2EL

Contact Helen Claire Taylor (tayloh15@lsbu.ac.uk)

'Talking Heads' Support Group runs on every first Tuesday
of the month at Brunswick Centre, Strand Close, off
Beverley Road
Hull, HU2 9DB from 3pm – 4:30pm. People with
voices/visions and unusual beliefs are welcome
Contact Dan 07816 864727