



The Broadoak
‘What is real & what is not?’
Group Programme

A psychosis group in four sessions for an inpatient unit

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Adapted from Group Manual by Isobel Clarke & Kirstyn Pragnell (2008)

Woodhaven Psychological Therapies Service.

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Session Plans

Session 1- Introduction

Introduce the group

Introduce the group members and facilitators and explain the aims of group:

- To share experiences within confidential environment - can be helpful
- To share ways of coping with hearing voices, having experiences/ideas others don't share, or having thoughts you can't get out of your head and explore new techniques for coping with these experiences
- To discuss in an open manner different ways of making sense of these experiences, to understand them, make them less distressing and help manage them in everyday life (and get out of hospital).
- To be able to be more in control of your experiences, and spot in good time if they are returning and do something about it.

Consent

if people are happy to take part then ask them to sign the consent form. If they do not want to sign (or take part) then ask them to leave but encourage them to think about coming to the next group in 4 weeks.

**** SIGN CONSENT FORMS ****

Measures

Explain that the group is new at XXXX and although it has been shown to be helpful in other hospitals we want to find out if people here find it helpful.

So we would like to ask people to fill in some very short questionnaires before and after the group.

**** GIVE OUT - CORE-10, MHCS, VOICES & BELIEFS QS****

DISCUSSION (Ground rules): Try to get the group to generate the rules

- Confidentiality,
- Commitment – i.e. regular attendance. Encourage people to come back to the group if discharged before the end.
- Control - People choose what they talk about – no need to disclose things you do not want to.
- Respect for each other, supportive of each other.

1. Normalising unusual experiences



What do we mean by unusual experiences?

- Hearing or seeing things that other people don't (e.g. voices or visions)
- Having beliefs or ways of looking at things that are different from other people (sometimes called delusions)
- Feeling frightened or threatened by people when other people around you don't think you should be worried (often called paranoia)

ANYONE can have these sorts of strange experiences.

EXPLANATION

Romme and Escher's work with Voice Hearers

This type of group started as a result of the work of two researchers in Holland. Romme & Escher wanted to study voice hearing. They used a TV and radio phone in first, and then conferences to locate people who heard voices, but who were not in touch with the psychiatric services.

They found that a lot more people heard voices than ever went to the doctor. A lot of people did not find their voices a problem. At their conferences, people who coped well with voices were able to give tips to those who did not.

Romme & Escher's work led to a 'Hearing Voices Network' which runs self help groups all over the place.

Famous voice hearers – Ghandi, Charles Dickens, Beethoven, Mozart etc

Extending the approach to other unusual experiences - We use the same approach with other strange experiences or symptoms e.g.

- Having beliefs and ways of looking at things that are different from other people
- Feeling frightened or threatened by people when they are not actually out to get you (often called paranoia)

These are also experiences that are much more common than you would think – and there are ways of understanding and coping with them that help – hence the group.

**** DISCUSSION - go round the group & write answers up on FLIPCHART****

- How does this fit with your experience?
- If prepared to talk about it– what sort of unusual/unique experiences have brought you here?

2. Openness to unusual experiences

EXPLANATION

Everyone can have these sorts of strange experiences. Some people are very open to them – and that applies to all of you. For other people it takes more for them to be able to access this sort of experience – or to have it just happen to them.

**** DISCUSSION – write up on FLIPCHART****

What sorts of things or circumstances might make people more open to strange experiences?

- Lack of food or sleep
- Fever or very high temperature (through illness)
- Extreme stress
- Trauma e.g. abuse, assault, solitary confinement
- Taking drugs
- Spiritual practices



Other people are naturally very open to unusual experiences. Whether you are more open or not depends on physical differences in the brain. It is also something very important about who you are as a person.

EXPLANATION - There has been research into the spectrum of openness to these sorts of experiences. We are all somewhere along this line....

**** Draw on FLIPCHART ****



**Not very open to
experiences**

**Very open to unusual
unusual experiences**

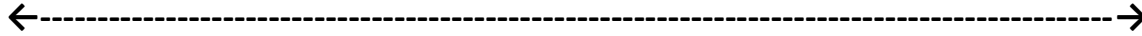
**** DISCUSSION – add onto flipchart diagram ****

- What sort of people would you expect to find at each end of the spectrum?
- What would people at the low end be like?
- What might people at the high end be like?
- Do we know any famous people who might be at the high end?

e.g.

Not very open to experiences

Very open to unusual unusual experiences



Common ideas and beliefs
Feet on the ground
Realistic/ rational
Bit boring
Less vulnerable to psychosis

Unique ideas and beliefs
Sensitive
Creative/ spiritual
Imaginative
More vulnerable to psychosis

e.g. Tim Henman, John Major

e.g. Van Gogh, Stephen Fry

EXAMPLE: David Bowie - used his high openness for a successful career as a musician. His half brother had a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

DAVID BOWIE

In order to use his openness to strange experiences successfully in his career, David Bowie had to be able to balance his common and unique ideas. What would have happened if he had 100% believed that he was an alien from out space?

To manage a successful career, he had to have his feet on the ground as well as giving free reign to his imagination.

The theme of this group is to look at how you can have the best of both worlds – use your sensitivity to enhance life, but be able to bring yourself back into common reality when you threaten to float off into the stratosphere.

That way life will work better for you and you are less likely to end up back in hospital.

**** DISCUSSION ****

- Any thoughts about David Bowie?
- Anyone else we can think of? E.g. Lady Gaga – very unique and creative but also good business woman

If you are open to unusual experiences you might benefit from:

- Learning to manage your unusual experiences so that:
 - They don't get in the way of you getting on with your life, and
 - You do not end up in hospital
- **This is what the group is about!**

Now that you know a bit more about what the group is about let's think about what you would like to get from the group. What your own personal goals are:

****GIVE OUT - GOALS FORM****

Help people fill in the 'Measuring what you would like to get out of the group' form with:

- Their own goal for the group
- How they far away they are from achieving their goal now
- In the last session we will rate it again and see if they are any closer

Recognizing unusual experiences

In order to manage your unusual experiences better, you need to be clear about whether you are experiencing/seeing/hearing things the same way as everyone else (common) or in an unusual way.

For some people it is hard to face that they are experiencing "personal reality", but for others it is a big relief! Noticing the sorts of unusual experiences that you have and noting them down is the way to start being aware of this.

KEEPING NOTES

To get the most out of the group, we'd like you to note down any voices/ strange experiences/ unusual thoughts you have in between each group session.



- Please fill in the Keeping Notes chart!
- If you fill this out regularly, it will give you a better idea of when you are most likely to get these experiences. This is very useful for doing something about them!
- This chart is useful even if all you do is tick the boxes at times when they occur or are bad. There is space to add a bit more – that is even more helpful!

**** GIVE OUT - Keeping Notes sheet ****

Give example to demonstrate filling in the Keeping Notes chart and encourage people to bring it with to the next group!

Questions and comments?

Session 2: Different states of mind – Different sorts of reality

Review Keeping Notes charts:

- When are voices, unusual experiences more likely to happen? Or get stronger?
- What were you doing? Who with? Where? How did you feel?
- Any patterns emerging?

**** DISCUSSION – when are your triggers? ****

- What are the times when you notice you are more likely to get these sorts of experiences?

Different states of mind

People who are sensitive to unusual experiences have found that there are 2 main times when they are MORE likely to happen:

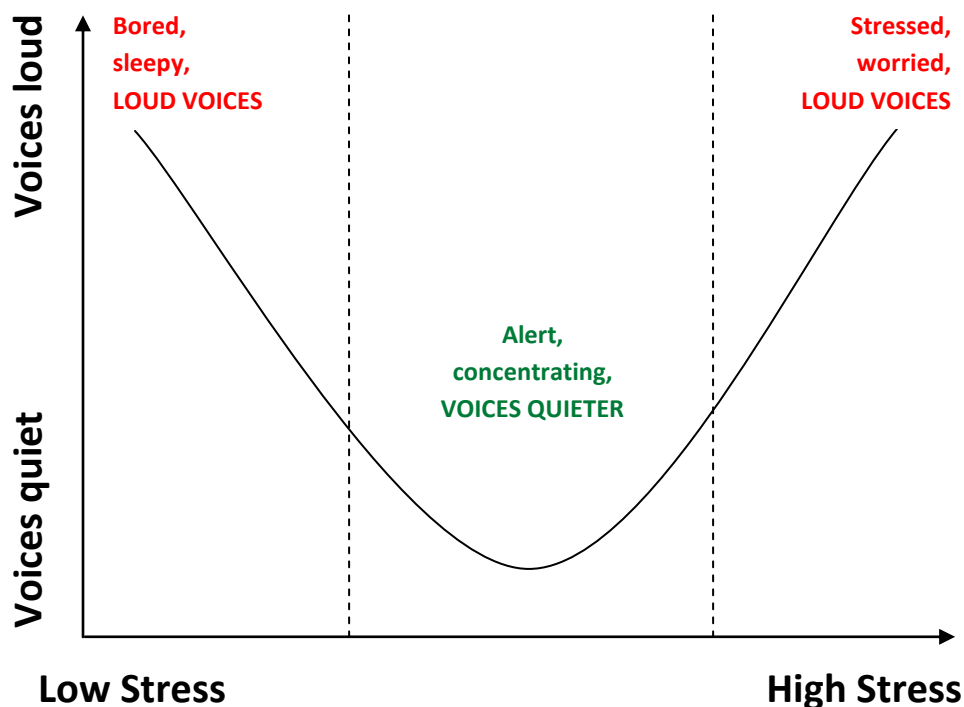
- When they are under **lots** of stress or pressure
- When they are bored, not really concentrating on anything or trying to go to sleep



There are also 2 main times when people say they are **LESS likely** to happen:

- When they are alert or concentrating on something (but not overly stressed)
- When they are chatting with other people or busy doing something.

****Flipchart – draw diagram and explain****



Different sorts of reality

There are 2 different types of experiences:

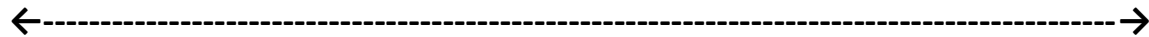
- **Common reality** (normal, usual, run-of-the-mill type experiences that are shared by others) and
- **Personal reality** (unusual, strange, out-of-the-ordinary type experiences that are unique to you).

EVERYBODY can have these 2 types of experiences, when we are in **different states of mind**.

****Flipchart – draw diagram and explain****

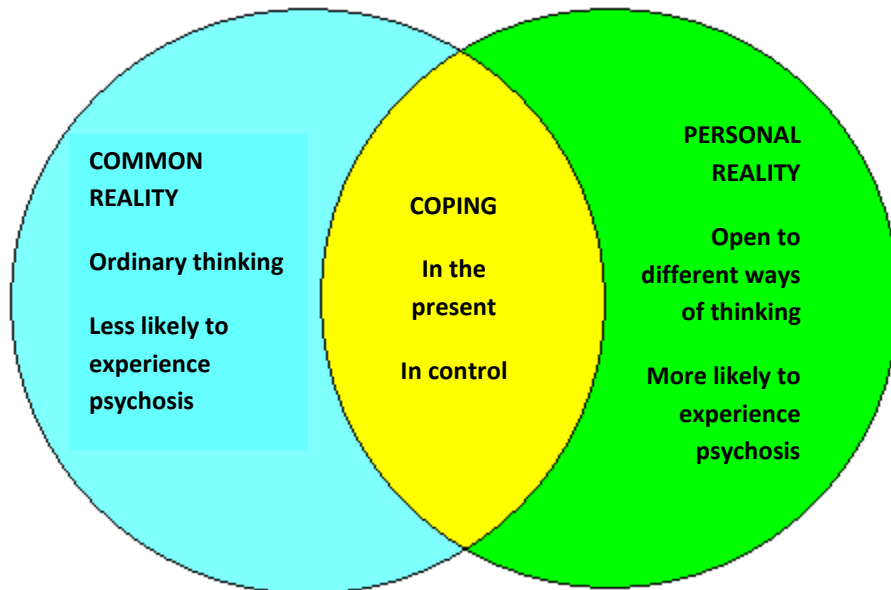
COMMON REALITY

PERSONAL REALITY



Not very open to experiences

Very open to unusual unusual experiences



Common and personal reality

- People vary in how open they are to personal reality.
- Being open to this way of experiencing makes you more vulnerable to psychosis
- It is also associated with high creativity, spirituality etc.
- If you can learn to cope with personal reality, and find the middle ground – you can have the best of both worlds!

**** DISCUSSION ****

- What are the characteristics of personal reality?
- Important to be able to spot the difference between common and personal reality in order to be able to manage both.
- COURAGE is sometimes needed - to accept that your reality is different to other people!

****FLIPCHART ****

COMMON REALITY	PERSONAL REALITY
Rational thinking	Thinking outside the box
More moderate – easier to hear both sides of the argument	Strong conviction in one side of the argument
Things feel ordinary	Things are super-important – supernatural
Less meaningful	Lots of things appear very meaningful
Realistic about the self	Confusion about the self – can lead to a sense of importance
Boring	Exciting

**** DISCUSSION - PROS and CONS ****

- What is the upside of personal reality?
- What is the downside?

COPING: Now that you are in hospital, coping is the first priority. People cope differently in different situations:



- **High stress situations** - Crowds/ shopping/ relatives
- **Low stress situations** - In bed/ mind drifting/ unoccupied/ staring at TV/ bored



What do you find most helpful? How do you cope in these different situations?

**** DISCUSS - techniques currently used to cope with experiences - FLIPCHART ****

- The different states of mind diagram gives clues about how to make yourself less vulnerable to personal reality.
- If stress brings it on – ways of reducing stress (breathing, relaxation) will help you cope.
- If not enough concentration brings it on – concentrating on something and staying alert will help you cope.
- Medication should help you cope.

**** DISCUSSION - The role of alcohol and street drugs****

- How effective/adaptive are these?
- What problems do they bring?
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Recognize that alcohol and cannabis can be used as ways to access personal reality when the person misses it because common reality is boring or has little to offer them.

COPING TECHNIQUES

What techniques might people be able to try this week to help them cope while they are in hospital?



- Distraction - reading, music, talking, TV, elastic band around wrist, hot bath
- Relaxation - breathing techniques, progressive muscle relaxation
- Anxiety management, exercise, healthy lifestyle,
- Time for self, time management, Social support,
- Education (understand voices and what might mean, others experiences etc)

KEEPING NOTES

Continue to keep note of voices/experiences/thoughts/ideas, when, where, etc and include techniques employed to cope and rate how successful on scale 1-10.



**** GIVE OUT - more Keeping Notes Sheets if needed ****

Questions and Comments?

Session 3 - Coping Strategies

Review Keeping Notes charts:

- Were they able to use coping strategies? Successful/ unsuccessful? Any others discovered?

Cognitive Coping Strategies

1. DISTRACTION – getting away from the experience by concentrating on something else. We all use different distractions, whatever we enjoy or find helpful.

Distraction could be:



- Listening - to music or talking radio programmes or watching TV
- Mental tasks – reading, writing, doing maths or puzzles
- Physical activity – cleaning, running, gardening, playing tennis etc
- Talking to others



2. FOCUSING – paying attention to the experience (you have already begun to do this with the homework).

Focusing is:

- Noticing the experience
- Not trying to push it away
- Not getting drawn into it
- Noticing what it is like instead of just what it is about (e.g. with voices notice what the voice is like – is it male/female, it's tone of voice? - instead of what it is saying to you)
- Letting go of the experience and absorbing yourself in an activity



Focusing versus distraction - Which is better?

Evidence suggests focusing is an effective coping strategy and can improve self-esteem.

- Research has compared people taught to use distraction for voices and those taught focusing.
- What do you think the result would be?
- Answer: the same, but those who used focusing had improved self esteem.

Why does focusing help self-esteem?

- It is the opposite of avoidance and puts you more in control.
- It takes courage to focus on something that is frightening – but this can help to overcome it!

How to do focusing:

1. First use breathing to reduce your anxiety.
2. Then notice the content of the thought, or the characteristics of the voice, and notice what they are like.

**** PRACTICE – Lead relaxation breathing exercise ****

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a way of focusing on your experience. Research has shown that mindfulness is helpful for dealing with voices and unusual experiences:

- Mindfulness helps you to face things that are difficult;
- Mindfulness helps you to be in control while doing this;
- Mindfulness helps you to let them go.



How to do mindfulness:

**** PRACTICE – Lead brief grounding mindfulness exercise****

**** DISCUSSION - Pros and cons of attending to the experience in a mindful way****

- What can get in the way of really noticing the experiences; attending to the voices?
- These experiences can be frightening/disturbing/wish it wasn't happening. Natural to want to block out or push away if it is like that.
- Who finds their thoughts, voices distressing so tries to block them, or otherwise not think about them? This is normal but does it always work?
- Did anyone not do the homework because they thought it might make things worse?

Mindfulness means paying attention to your experiences, but this can be difficult and you may find you try to avoid doing so. There are different reasons why some people find this hard:

1. FEAR



- Fear of voices, thoughts or unusual experiences is natural.
- Fear leads people to try and avoid them or block them out.
- This means they are never faced or dealt with.
- Focusing on them and facing them means that you are in control.
- You can then let them go.

2. MEANS FACING THAT THEY ARE PERSONAL & NOT COMMON EXPERIENCES

- Some people do not want to look at their experiences mindfully because it might mean facing that they are not real to others;
- Admitting that what you thought is not common to others is very difficult for all human beings – but it is the first step to getting back to normal life and getting out of hospital.

3. PERSONAL REALITY IS NICER

- Other people have nice unusual experiences or ways of understanding things
- They might prefer this to common reality
- Mindfulness means facing common reality (but can make it possible to be in touch with both common and personal reality safely), if you can manage both you can have the best of both worlds.



Perfectly possible for someone to have all 3 reasons for finding this difficult!



KEEPING NOTES

Mindfulness takes practice. Encourage people to try it using the relaxation breathing and grounding mindfulness sheet.

Try it out this week and record in the Keeping Notes Chart how you get on. Note any resistance or difficulty you have with it – this is normal.

****Give out – Mindfulness and Breathing handouts****

Questions and Comments?

Session 4: So what is real and what is not?

Review Keeping Notes charts:

- Have people made use of focusing/mindfulness or distraction strategies?
- Get examples (might not be formal practice – might simply be that they are getting better at noticing what state they are in).

Reality Testing

There are different ways of testing what is real (common reality) and what is not (personal reality).

1. Focusing and mindfulness - give you the chance to consider what is real and what is not, and this can be the key to you having more control.

You can be in the driving seat – not your experiences or symptoms. Mindfulness helps to see

that...

****Flipchart – write the following****

- **A thought as just a thought** – (not something you can be blamed for having; not something you have to follow);
- **A voice is just a voice** – (you do not have to obey it, or believe it).
- **A feeling is just a feeling** – (you can choose whether it is useful or not).



**** DISCUSSION ****

- Can people see it like that? Anything that gets in the way?
- It takes a lot of COURAGE - especially if you have believed for a long time that thoughts, voices or feelings have a lot of power and control over you.
- Realising this – gives you control back!

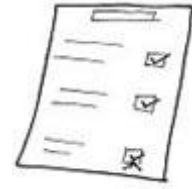
2. By asking others - can be a useful way of checking whether to take a thought or voice seriously. Do they see it the way you do?

- It can be hard to admit that others do not see things the same way – especially when the person has held those beliefs for a long time.



Warning – sometimes this can be taken too far. It is important to build your own confidence about what is real rather than to repeatedly seek reassurance from others.

3. By looking at the evidence – challenge the thoughts or voices, can they provide evidence for what they say. For example:



If you think everyone is looking at you in the shop, deliberately look up and note what they are really looking at.

- Is there any evidence that they are all looking at you?
- What do you think they might actually be looking at?

If the voices tell you every night that you will die when you go to sleep, what does it mean when you continue to wake up every morning?

- What evidence is there that what the voices say is true?
- Is this evidence fact (could it be used in a court of law?) or is just their opinion (not strong evidence?)
- What evidence is there that what the voices say is not always true?

**** DISCUSSION- can we look at the evidence for each other? ****

How could you challenge your own thoughts or voices? How could we challenge those of the person sitting next to us? What evidence do we have to believe the voices or thoughts? What evidence do we have against believing them?

How do people make sense of their experiences?

**** DISCUSSION ****

- Go round the group and ask the individuals for their thoughts on what is going on when they experience symptoms or personal reality.
- Introduce the idea from Romme and Escher that people have lots of different explanations for voices – same for other strange experiences.
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of different explanations

1. Stress

You can get clues about what unusual experiences mean by thinking about what was happening in your life when the thoughts or voices started. Often this is when people go through:



- Stressful times
- Life changes
- Losses

2. Life events

Difficult experiences or things that happen when we are very stressed can keep 'popping up' again and again in the form of:

- Voices
- Thoughts
- Beliefs



For example, if you have experienced abuse in childhood it is not unusual to hear voices saying abusive things to you.

This can mean you end up having a personal reality which is quite different from what other people think - e.g. you might end up believing you are a bad person because the voices say you are.

So this is a good reason for checking out what others think. Having a balance between your own reality and everyone else's is helpful and healthy.

3. Openness to unusual experiences

Some people are more open to unusual experiences than others, and so more likely to have unusual experiences. You need to recognise your own level of openness to the unusual and manage your life accordingly.

- **What helps you cope?**
 - Any strategies? Medication? Being careful with drugs and alcohol?



4. Problem solving

When life gets really difficult, staying in personal reality can be easier or more comforting than facing common reality. This can lead to creative solutions to the problem. The danger is of becoming stuck in personal reality, which has problems of its own.

e.g. sometimes voices or beliefs can be positive and comforting, they can provide company if you are lonely. But if you only spent time listening to the thoughts or voices you will never meet any new people, which might also help you to be less lonely.

**** DISCUSSION ****

Any examples of this from the group? Any times when they think their experiences have helped them to get through something very difficult?

What might the problems be if they stayed in personal reality all the time and could not also see common reality?

**** PRACTICE - Lead Brief Mindfulness Exercise ****

Questions and Comments?

**** IMPORTANT – GIVE OUT END OF GROUP MEASURES ****

1. GOALS VISUAL ANALOGUE SCALE

Present this again for people to mark how far they have got with their own goal for the group.

How do they feel about this? Is there any progress? If not do they feel they can continue working towards this goal?

2. REPEAT QUESTIONNAIRES – explain we want to know if the group is helpful and whether it has made any differences to them!

Ask people to fill in the same questionnaires as before the group

1. CORE-10

2. Mental Health Confidence Scale

3. Voices & beliefs questionnaires (if relevant)

3. SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE - how can we make the group better in the future?

**** Remind people about FOLLOW UP ****

Explain we will ask them again in 1 month to see if there have been changes after finish the group.

Stress that is very helpful for them to return these questionnaires – very few studies have done a follow up in this area of research – therefore **VERY** helpful for designing future groups!



Handouts

How open are you to unusual experiences?

Session 1 Handout

What do we mean by unusual experiences?

- Hearing or seeing things that other people don't (e.g. voices or visions)
- Having beliefs or ways of looking at things that are different from other people
- Feeling frightened or threatened by people when other people around you don't think you should be worried (often called paranoia)



ANYONE can have these sorts of strange experiences.

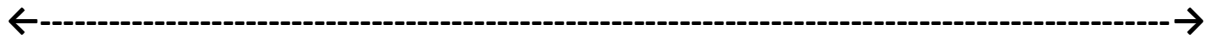
Some people will only become 'open' to these sorts of experiences if, for instance:

- They are deprived of sleep or food (or choose to go without sleep or food)
- Have a very high body temperature (a fever) through illness
- They are under extreme stress, or bad things happen to them (e.g. being abused, attacked or very overworked)
- They take street drugs



Other people are naturally very open to unusual experiences. Whether you are more open or not depends on physical differences in the brain. It is also something very important about who you are as a person.

We are ALL somewhere along this line...



**Not very open to
experiences**

**Very open to unusual
unusual experiences**

People who are very open to unusual experiences

- Tend to be highly creative or spiritual
- Have a tendency to be think outside the box or differently to others
- Are also more vulnerable to experiencing **psychosis** (when voices, beliefs or feeling paranoid is getting in the way of your everyday life)

People who are not very open to unusual experiences

- Are less likely to suffer problems with psychosis.
- Have a tendency to be more conventional thinkers.

If you are open to unusual experiences (and people who have been chosen to attend this group probably are) you might benefit from:

- Learning to manage your unusual experiences so that:
 - They don't get in the way of you getting on with your life, and
 - You do not end up in hospital

This is what the group is about!

In order to manage your unusual experiences better, you need to be clear about whether you are experiencing/seeing/hearing things the same way as everyone else (common reality) or in an unusual way (personal reality).

For some people it is hard to face that they are experiencing “personal reality”, but for others it is a big relief! Noticing the sorts of unusual experiences that you have and noting them down is the way to start being aware of this.

KEEPING NOTES

To get the most out of the group, we'd like you to note down any voices/ strange experiences/ unusual thoughts you have in between each group session.



- Please fill in the Keeping Notes chart!
- If you fill this out regularly, it will give you a better idea of when you are most likely to get these experiences. This is very useful for doing something about them!
- This chart is useful even if all you do is tick the boxes at times when they occur or are bad. There is space to add a bit more – that is even more helpful!

Fill in the Keeping Notes chart and bring it with you to the next group!

Keeping Notes Chart

Day & Time	What were you doing?	What was the thought / voice or experience?	How did you feel?	What did you do & did it help?	How did you feel after?
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Different states of mind – Different sorts of reality

Session 2 Handout

Different states of mind



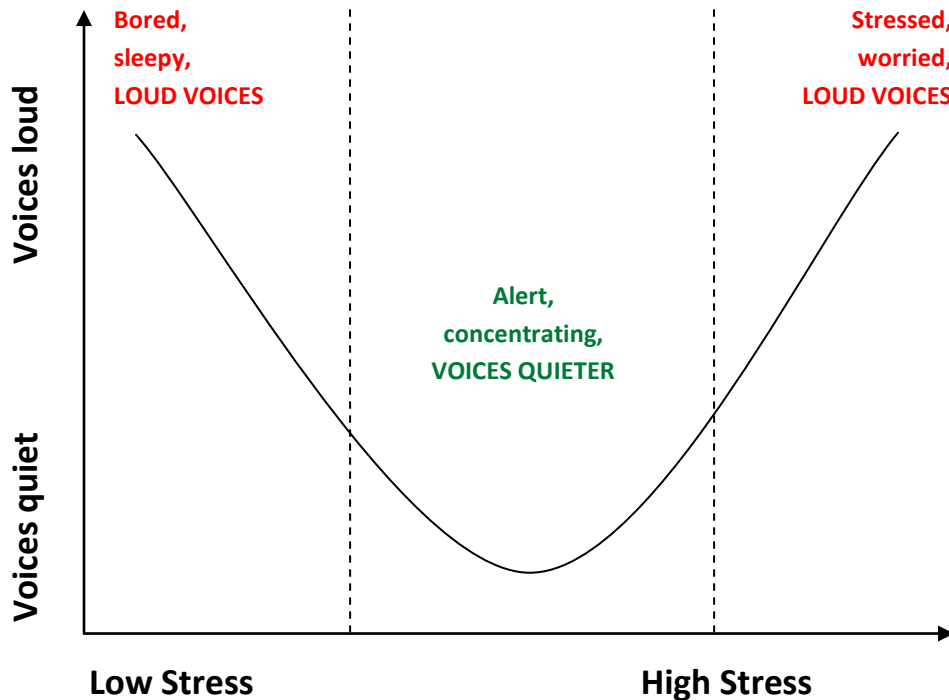
People who are sensitive to unusual experiences have found that there are 2 main times when they are MORE likely to have them:

- When they are under **lots** of stress or pressure
- When they are bored, not really concentrating on anything or trying to go to sleep



There are also 2 main times when people say they are LESS likely to experience unusual things:

- When they are alert or concentrating on something (but not overly stressed)
- When they are chatting with other people or busy doing something.
-



When do you notice MORE unusual experiences?

.....

When do you notice LESS unusual experiences?

.....

Different sorts of reality

There are 2 different types of experiences:

- **Common reality** (normal, usual, run-of-the-mill type experiences that are shared by others) and
- **Personal reality** (unusual, strange, out-of-the-ordinary type experiences that are unique to you).

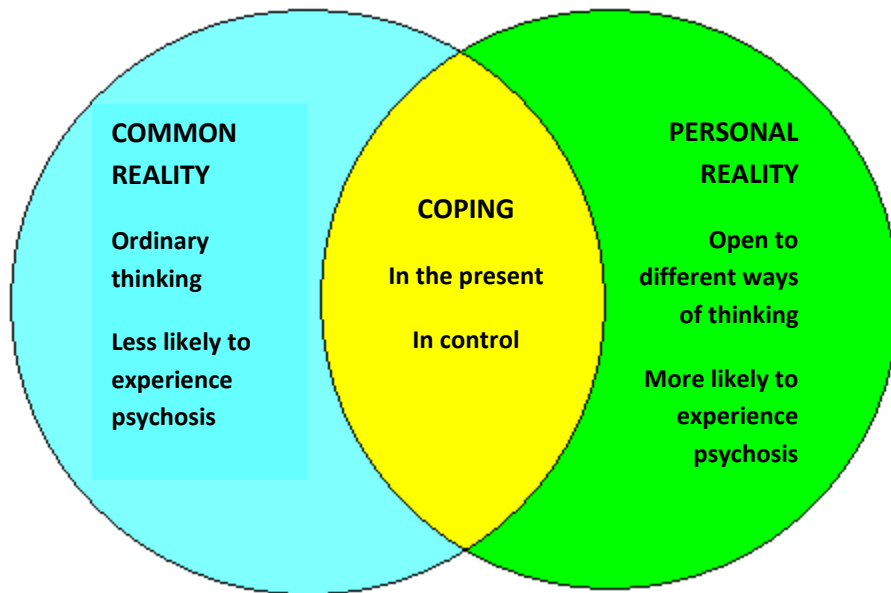
EVERYBODY can have these 2 types of experiences, when we are in **different states of mind**.

COMMON REALITY

←-----
People who are not very open to experiences are usually here.

PERSONAL REALITY

----->
People who are very open to unusual unusual experiences are usually here.



Common and Personal Reality

- As we discussed last session, different people can be more open or less open to unusual experiences or PERSONAL REALITY.
- Being open to this way of experiencing can be good – it can mean you are highly creative, or spiritual, or a lateral thinker (someone who thinks outside the box).
- BUT – it can also be a problem sometimes, if your reality is so unusual or unique that it starts to get in the way of your everyday life.
- If you can learn to **recognise** and **cope with** personal reality, it means you can have the best of both worlds!

COPING - Now that you are in hospital, coping is the first priority.

- If stress brings it on – find ways of reducing stress (breathing, relaxation etc.)
- If not having enough to do brings it on – concentrating on something and staying alert will help you cope.
- Medication can help ‘turn down the volume’ on some of the unusual experiences. This should also help you cope.

COPING TECHNIQUES



- Distraction - reading, music, talking, TV, elastic band around wrist, hot bath
 - Relaxation - breathing techniques, progressive muscle relaxation
 - Anxiety management, exercise, healthy lifestyle,
 - Time for self, time management, Social support,
- Education (understand voices and what might mean, others experiences etc)



What do you find most helpful?

Record it in your Keeping Notes chart!

Coping Strategies - Session 3 Handout

People use different strategies to cope with unusual experiences.

These often fall into 2 categories:

1. DISTRACTION – getting away from the experience by concentrating on something else. We all use different distractions, whatever we enjoy or find helpful.

Distraction could be:



- Listening - to music or talking radio programmes or watching TV
- Mental tasks – reading, writing, doing maths or puzzles
- Physical activity – cleaning, running, gardening, playing tennis etc
- Talking to others



2. FOCUSING – paying attention to the experience (you have already begun to do this with the homework).

Focusing is:

- Noticing the experience
- Not trying to push it away
- Not getting drawn into it
- Noticing what it is like instead of just what it is about (e.g. with voices notice what the voice is like – it's gender/ tone of voice etc instead of what it is saying to you)
- Letting go of the experience and absorbing yourself in an activity



Focusing versus distraction

Which is better? Evidence suggests focusing is an effective coping strategy and can improve self-esteem.

- Research has compared people taught to use distraction for voices and those taught focusing.
- What do you think the result would be?
- Answer: the same, but those who used focusing had improved self esteem.

Why does focusing help self-esteem?

- It is the opposite of avoidance and puts you more in control.
- It takes courage to focus on something that is frightening – but this can help to overcome it!

How to do focusing:

1. First use breathing to reduce your anxiety.
2. Then notice the content of the thought, or the characteristics of the voice, and notice what they are like

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a way of focusing on your experience. Research has shown that mindfulness is helpful for dealing with voices and unusual experiences:

- Mindfulness helps you to face things that are difficult;
- Mindfulness helps you to be in control while doing this;
- Mindfulness helps you to let them go.



Mindfulness means paying attention to your experiences, but this can be difficult and you may find you try to avoid doing so. There are different reasons why some people find this hard:

1. FEAR



- Fear of voices, thoughts or unusual experiences is natural.
- Fear leads people to try and avoid them or block them out.
- This means they are never faced or dealt with.
- Focusing on them and facing them means that you are in control.
- You can then let them go.

2. MEANS FACING THAT THEY ARE PERSONAL & NOT COMMON EXPERIENCES

- Some people do not want to look at their experiences mindfully because it might mean facing that they are not real to others;
- Admitting that what you thought is not common to others is very difficult for all human beings – but it is the first step to getting back to normal life and getting out of hospital etc.

3. PERSONAL REALITY IS NICER

- Other people have nice unusual experiences or ways of understanding things
- They might prefer this to common reality
- Mindfulness means facing common reality (but can make it possible to be in touch with both common and personal reality safely, if you can manage both and achieve “wise mind”).



- **Mindfulness takes practice – use the handouts!**

TRY it this week and note how you get on in the Keeping Notes Chart

So what is real and what is not?

Session 4 Handout

There are different ways of testing whether you are experiencing common reality (what is real for everyone) or personal reality (what is only real for you).

1. Focusing and mindfulness - give you the chance to consider what is real and what is not, and this can be the key to you having more control.



You can be in the driving seat – not your experiences or symptoms. Mindfulness helps to see that:

- **A thought as just a thought** - not something you can be blamed for having; not something you have to follow;
- **A voice is just a voice.** You do not have to obey it, or believe it.
- **A feeling is just a feeling.** You can choose whether it is useful or not.

2. By asking others - can be a useful way of checking whether to take a thought or voice seriously. Do others see it the way you do?



Warning – sometimes this can be taken too far. It is important to build your own confidence about what is real rather than to repeatedly seek reassurance from others.

3. By looking at the evidence – challenge the thoughts or voices, can they provide evidence for what they say? For example:

If you think everyone is looking at you in the shop, deliberately look up and notice what people are really looking at.



- Is there any evidence that they are all looking at you?
- What do you think they might actually be looking at?

If the voices tell you every night that you will die when you go to sleep, what does it mean when you continue to wake up every morning?

- What evidence is there that what the voices say is true?
- Is this evidence fact (could it be used in a court of law?) or is just their opinion (not good enough evidence?)
- What evidence is there that what the voices say is not always true?

How could you challenge your own thoughts or voices?

What is the evidence for and against what they say?

DIFFERENT WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

1. STRESS



You can get clues about what unusual experiences mean by thinking about what was happening in your life when the thoughts or voices started. Often this is when people go through:

- Stressful times
- Life changes
- Losses

2. LIFE EVENTS

Difficult experiences or things that happen when we are very stressed can keep 'popping up' again and again in the form of:

- Voices
- Thoughts
- Beliefs



For example, if you have experienced abuse in childhood it is not unusual to hear voices saying abusive things to you. This can mean you end up having a personal reality which is quite different from what other people think - e.g. you might end up believing you are a bad person because the voices say you are.

So this is a good reason for checking out what others think. Having a balance between your own reality and everyone else's is helpful and healthy.

3. OPENESS TO UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

Some people are more open to unusual experiences than others, and so more likely to have unusual experiences. You need to recognise your own level of openness to the unusual and manage your life accordingly.

- **What helps you cope?**
 - Any strategies? Medication? Being careful with drugs and alcohol?



4. PROBLEM SOLVING

When life gets really difficult, staying in personal reality can be easier or more comforting than facing common reality. This can lead to creative solutions to the problem. The danger is of becoming stuck in personal reality, which has problems of its own. For example, sometimes voices or beliefs can be positive and comforting, they can provide company if you are lonely. But if you only spent time listening to the thoughts or voices you will never meet any new people, which might also help you feel less lonely.

Basic Grounding Mindfulness

Aim: To bring yourself 100% into the present, where you are in control.

Exercise: Take your attention away from your thoughts, away from your head and into your body.

Awareness of body

- Notice what it feels like to be a body sitting in a chair
- Notice your weight on the chair
- Notice how your back feels against the chair
- Notice all the things you can feel, in your arms and legs, fingers and toes
- Notice things that normally your mind ignores because they are not 'interesting'

Awareness of breath

- Notice your breathing
- Going in and out – keeping you alive
- Connecting you with the world

Awareness of sounds

- Notice what your senses tell you about the world around you
- Notice what you can hear
- Notice any judgments – the mind automatically judges
- Just note them and let them go
- Come back to just hearing

Awareness of sights

- Notice what you can see
- Again note and let go of judgments
- Can you see anything in here that you never noticed before?

Awareness of thoughts and letting these go

- If we are quiet for a minute, you will notice thoughts coming into your head
- Perhaps taking you away – into the past or the future
- Away from the present. That is what thoughts do.
- Note them and let them go
- Come back to the breath and to the present moment.

Awareness of emotions

- Notice any emotions
- Note where you feel them in the body
- Note that they are just an event in the body
- No need to follow them.

Relaxation Breathing

Using breathing to reduce stress, panic and anger.

High stress means that your body is getting ready for action.

When stressed, you breathe in more than you breathe out.

This gives you a simple way to calm down:

Breathe IN – 1
 OUT - 1 and 2

Breathe out more than you breathe in!

And – you do not need to breathe in straight after you have breathed out – you can have a little rest:

Breathe IN – 1
 OUT - 1 and 2
 AND R--E--S--T

A bonus is that, as you breathe in you naturally tense your chest muscles, so you naturally relax them when you breathe out.

So – it is very easy to....

Relax your muscles on the out-breath!

Breathe IN
 OUT – AND R---E---L---A---X

Keep practicing this so that it is easy to do when under stress.

BREATHING WILL BRING DOWN ANXIETY IF YOU CATCH IT EARLY. NOTICE WHAT YOUR BODY IS TELLING YOU. PICK UP YOUR FIRST SIGNS OF ANXIETY, AND LENGTHEN YOUR BREATHING. THEN THIS BREATHING SHOULD HELP YOU TO THINK MORE CLEARLY.



Measures

Name:Date.....

Measuring what you would like to get out of the group

Now you know what is going to be covered in the group, and how this might apply to you. Think what you would like to be different by the end of the group - something that the group help with.

Write that down in the first space (C) – describe how it could be.

C. What you would like to see different by the end of the group?

.....
.....
.....

Then fill in the other lines, comparing this with how it is now, and thinking about how you would know that some change had taken place in the right direction.

A. Where are you with this now?

.....
.....

B. What would the half way position be?

.....
.....

Important! A, B & C need to be easily identifiable things you do (or don't do).

This bit to be filled in during the last group session

Make a mark on this line to represent how you have managed this week in relation to your goal.

	A	B	C
(worse than before)	(where you started)	(halfway to goal)	(your goal)

Name.....Date.....

CORE-10

Please read each statement and think how often you felt that way **IN THE LAST WEEK**. Then tick the box which is closest to this.

Over the last week.....		Not at all	Only occasionally	Some times	Often	Most or all the time
1	I have felt tense, anxious or nervous					
2	I have felt I have someone to turn to for support when needed					
3	I have felt able to cope when things go wrong					
4	Talking to people has felt too much for me					
5	I have felt panic or terror					
6	I have made plans to end my life					
7	I have had difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep					
8	I have felt despairing or hopeless					
9	I have felt unhappy					
10	Unwanted images or memories have been distressing me					

Name.....Date.....

Mental Health Confidence Scale

We would like to know how confident you are in your ability to help yourself deal with those things that commonly influence our lives. For each item, indicate **how confident you are that you could do something to help yourself right now**. Rate your degree of confidence by ticking the box from very non confident to very confident. **How confident are you right now that you can:**

	Very non-confident	Non-confident	Slightly non-confident	Slightly confident	Confident	Very confident
1. Be happy						
2. Feel hopeful about the future						
3. Set goals for yourself						
4. Get support when you need it						
5. Boost your self esteem						
6. Make friends						
7. Stay out of hospital						
8. Face a bad day						
9. Deal with losing someone close to you						
10. Deal with feeling depressed						
11. Deal with feeling lonely						
12. Deal with nervous feelings						
13. Deal with symptoms related to your mental health diagnosis						
14. Say no to a person abusing you						
15. Use your right to accept or reject mental health treatment						
16. Advocate for your needs						

Name.....Date.....

Voices Questionnaire

Please say how you have felt in the last week...

I hear voices....

0. less than once a week
1. at least **once a week**
2. at least **once a day**
3. at least **once a hour**
4. **all the time** -stop for only a few seconds or mins

When I hear voices they last....

0. nothing in the last week
1. for **a few seconds**, fleeting
2. for **several minutes**
3. for **at least one hour**
4. for **hours at a time**

The voices sound like they are....

0. No voices in the last week
1. **only inside my head**
2. **inside or outside my head, but close to my ears** or head.
3. **inside or close to my ears AND outside my head away from ears**
4. **only outside my head**

The loudness of the voices is....

0. No voices in the last week
1. Quieter than my own voice, **whispers**
2. About **same** loudness as my own voice
3. **Louder** than my own voice
4. Extremely loud, **shouting**

I think the voices come from....

0. No voices in the last week
1. **inside my body**
2. the outside world - but I'm not sure
3. the outside world - I'm fairly sure
4. the outside world - I'm 100% sure

The voices are unpleasant or negative....

0. never
1. **occasionally**
2. **sometimes**
3. **mostly**
4. **always**

The voices make abusive or unpleasant comments about....

0. no one - my voices are never unpleasant
1. **other people** e.g. 'the milkman's ugly' but not about me or my family.
2. **my behaviour** e.g. 'you shouldn't do that or say that'
3. **about me personally** e.g. 'you're lazy, ugly, mad, perverted'
4. **about me & my family and make threats** e.g. to harm me or my family, or tell me to harm myself or others

The voices can make me feel....

0. fine- they do not upset me
1. **a little upset**
2. **quite upset**
3. **very upset**
4. **the worst I could ever feel**

The voices make me feel upset....

0. never
1. **occasionally** but not usually
2. **sometimes**
3. **most of the time**
4. **all the time**

I can control the voices....

0. **all the time** - I can bring them on or dismiss them
1. **most of the time**
2. about **half of the time**
3. **occasionally** - but most of the time they are uncontrollable
4. **none of the of time** - I cannot bring them on or dismiss them at all

The voices...

0. do not disrupt my daily life
1. **occasionally** disrupt my daily life
2. **moderately** disrupt my daily life
3. **severely** disrupt my daily life
4. **completely** disrupt my daily life

Name.....Date.....

Beliefs Questionnaire

Please say how you have felt in the last week...

My thoughts or beliefs can make me feel...

I experience unusual thoughts or beliefs....

0. less than once a week
1. at least once a week
2. at least once a day
3. at least once an hour
4. all the time – continuously

0. fine- they do not upset me
1. a little upset
2. quite upset
3. very upset
4. the worst I could ever feel

My unusual thoughts or beliefs last....

0. none in the last week
1. for a few seconds, fleeting thoughts
2. for several minutes
3. for at least 1 hour
4. for hours at a time

My thoughts or beliefs make me feel upset....

0. never
1. occasionally
2. sometimes
3. usually
4. always

My unusual thoughts or beliefs are....

0. not convincing at all
1. occasionally convincing
2. sometimes convincing
3. usually convincing
4. extremely convincing

My thoughts or beliefs...

0. do not disrupt my daily life
1. occasionally disrupt my daily life
2. moderately disrupt my daily life
3. severely disrupt my daily life
4. completely disrupt my daily life

Satisfaction Questionnaire

1 What was most helpful about the group?

.....
.....
.....

2 What was least helpful about the group?

.....
.....
.....

3 Has it made you think differently about anything?

.....
.....
.....

4 Please tell us what, if anything, has changed in the way you think about your mental health since attending the group?

.....
.....
.....

5 Please tell us what, if anything, has changed in the way you view yourself since you attended the group?

.....
.....
.....

6 What kind of things did you learn in the group?

.....
.....
.....

7 Do you have any other comments?

.....
.....
.....