

Original Paper

Schizophrenia, Hearing Voices and Personal Growth

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Abstract

This article looks at the various challenges for personal growth posed by schizophrenia and Hearing voices, as they are experienced together. It uses Maslows Hierarchy of needs as a model for personal growth and details techniques and strategies for climbing the pyramid whilst experiencing these problems of mental illness. It contends there are therapeutic advantages for people with these symptoms which will improve their quality of life.

Keywords

schizophrenia, hearing voices, personal growth

This article looks at the various challenges for personal growth posed by schizophrenia and Hearing voices, as they are experienced together. It uses Maslows Hierarchy of needs as a model for personal growth and details techniques and strategies for climbing the pyramid whilst experiencing these problems of mental illness. It contends there are therapeutic advantages for people with these symptoms which will improve their quality of life.

Methodology

This article is based on personal experience. It uses Maslows hierarchical model of personal growth and looks at ways to climb this tree when a person has schizophrenia. The illness creates problems for doing this so various solutions are explored. It contends personal growth is possible with schizophrenia.

Level one: Basic needs and safety

Fear and pain can stop your appetite and make too tired to cope with life as you will lose sleep. You will be unable to look after yourself being so tired out by paranoia and voices, again especially I you lose sleep. Escaping the spying neighbours meant I had to run off into the night so there was no warmth or shelter. Doing this you will then be too tired to be afraid and your survival instincts will take over. Then you make it back to the house to be safe form this.

I wasn't completely sensible of the danger I was in when out on the road even when it was winter and I got caught in a blizzard. Then my survival instincts took over again and I was distracted by the

imperative to get home safely. So, at least I was safe from the elements and had somewhere to sleep. Being on the move all the time meant I couldn't sleep rough so I had to get back.

Back home there was no warmth in the shelter but it was a bit safer than being frozen out on the road. I thought the neighbours were CIA informants and so was still scared once again. This spoiled my appetite. I was often able to eat when the thoughts wore off but still lost a lot of weight and sometimes became emaciated. So my basic needs were often not being met and this replaced fear with a more physical suffering. Then when having both together I was completely exhausted.

I thought the neighbours were banging on the wall each time I was thinking about 9/11. They were trying to play on my nerves about what was going to happen to me. Yet as long I kept being distracted, I wasn't thinking about 9/11 so again this allowed for some safety.

I couldn't control my thoughts altogether so when they drifted back on to the subject of 9/11. I started to get frightened again. So I had to get away from the noise as people were passing information back to the CIA. This was more frightening than being out on the road as I thought the CIA were going to torture me. So, it prompted running off again. When I got back, I was so worn out with the physical experience that I wasn't afraid to go back in the house.

So having just made it home there was no time to think about being unsafe as I crashed out asleep with exhaustion. There wasn't time to think about the neighbours. So at least I got some sleep though with being frightened I was still going for long periods without rest.

When I woke up the whole thing began to happen again. The thoughts were still there and were the first things on my mind. Often I would be out walking for days without rest and again my safety needs were not being met. I was frightened about being out in the night and at the same time about people reporting me to the CIA. So trying to escape was only making things worse.

When out on the road the banging was following me which kept me on the move. I tried practicing breathing exercises and safe place imagery. Yet even if I calmed down, I still thought I was in danger. So that still made me run. In the end these techniques even when combined with some compassion. This didn't work as I still thought people were passing on information back to the CIA so I still had to escape.

It felt like the whole world was out to get me. Then the fear reached terrifying levels. So it was no wonder this prevented the other fear of being out in the night. Anything could have happened to me but it was the thoughts about the CIA that were still uppermost in my mind.

When the delusions wore off it was possible to eat and stay warm indoors, away from exposure to the elements. This allowed me to keep my strength up for the next time I had to run off and helped get me through the fear it caused. With these basic needs being met I could be more exposed to the fear again. The problem was I couldn't get these thoughts about 9/11 out of my head. So there was no way of stopping the banging noise. The only hope was distracting myself and to put them to the back of my mind. Yet they were still there and that kept me frightened.

Another way around the problem was instead of running out into the night was to take some anti-depressants. These had sedatives so you could get to sleep. This avoided the banging noise and stopped me having to face the winter elements.

It also allowed for some rest as although the subconscious overload from the paranoia sometimes gave me nightmares. These kept my mind of the paranoia as I would dream of my experiences of being out in the night which was reliving it all. Being so realistic they were just as frightening so I didn't feel much safer. In the morning I could be frozen with fear after them

If these woke me up they could have triggered off the symptoms. So getting back to sleep would be much more difficult. Fortunately this only happened now and again so I wasn't too worn out with it all. Otherwise the reoccurrence would have severely affected my functioning. Yet I found that eventually I could pull round and look after myself better afterwards.

I tried to stay awake at night when the neighbours would be asleep so they couldn't bang on the walls. Yet the noise went on through the night. Initially I thought they were staying up all the time so they could persecute me. Then I began to realise that they had to sleep at some point and I tested this out by being awake at different times during the day and night. Still the noise continued which convinced me it wasn't real. I began to have some insight.

I began to have some insight that although the neighbours were passing information back to the CIA nothing had happened to me. I came to regard the banging noise as a hallucination. Yet the insight was only partial and I was still getting paranoid sometimes. All the same I started to calm down from time to time which helped me eat and sleep more. That helped keep my strength up as the fear was still exhausting.

At first I tried to hide away as I could not stop the banging noise by distracting my mind from 9/11. Again I couldn't explain why nothing had happened to me. Having some insight I dared to watch people out of the window and saw they were just going about their normal basis. I decided to test out the paranoia by going out into the shopping centre where I would be surrounded by them

I began to wonder if people could read my mind and when walking into the village centre I noticed people were not reacting to me. This didn't dispel the thought as I still thought I was being watched by some people. Yet it allowed me to leave the house which was concentrating my mind on the paranoia. I felt an immediate release from the confines.

Walking out into the village life was continuing as it always had and it all seemed so normal. Yet I thought my thoughts were being broadcast on the television so everyone was going to know I was responsible. So I didn't understand why I hadn't been assassinated. Then it began to dawn on me I might be hallucinating things on the screen.

Media was a form of distraction I could do at home to stop me thinking about 9/11. Yet I was cut off from this by the visual hallucination. So there wasn't much I could do to take my mind of the voices I was hearing talking about 9/11. Once I could get out of the house during the day my mind wasn't so

concentrating on what I was hearing. Then I sit in pubs and relax with a few drinks during the day to take my mind off things.

All this calmed me down so far. Then my basic needs were still being met in terms of food and shelter. I couldn't do this all the time. Yet the insight meant I could stay at home and periodically eat properly. There was long enough to do all this. So eventually I could cope with safety needs better and use my insight to do something about these.

The problem was the insight was not all the time and even when thinking about it logically didn't always continue. Having been sheltered and fed properly I started to be more aware of my safety needs. Then the periods of paranoia actually became longer and more problematic and still the insight was only partial. Yet having my basic needs met meant I could become a bit more stronger and bear up to it better.

This time the insight overcame the banging noise with the evidence I had collected. Yet the remaining paranoia meant I still felt I was being watched. This even if they could not read my mind. The thoughts about 9/11 were still there but I didn't react to the noise. I still hallucinated things on the television screen but could now know I was just seeing things.

Another symptom at this point was that I kept hearing voices about 9/11. This together with the delusion about it meant things were still terrifying. So once again I could not often eat or sleep. In between even when the insight got reduced there were still periods when I could question it. I still wondered if people were spying for the CIA why hadn't I been found.

There was no distraction around the house as I was unable to watch the media. It was only when the insight periodically returned that I could get out and do things outside. Yet once the symptoms started again I had to go back home. Then being confined with the voices and delusions still just made it worse again.

At this point the breathing exercises and safe place imagery were not effective as the paranoia was so overwhelming. I wasn't getting out enough to make any difference to it. Yet with practice I found I could control the lesser anxiety levels of the fear and using these techniques I could get over the door step.

Yet getting out meant I still did have some rest. Then that allowed me to find some strength to resist the more moderate levels of the fear. I was able to avoid a breakdown with this and to practice some graded supported exposure. This required insight to reduce the fear first but it got me out the house more. So, I could eat in town and keep my strength up for going back home.

With the new insight I didn't run off into the night. This time I thought I had nowhere to go if everyone was spying on me in other places. That kept me indoors this time so my basic needs were no longer compromised in this way. Either way I felt I could end up dead. So it was better to hide than being out in the elements as then I could have been killed a lot sooner.

It also helped that the anti-depressants I was on had sedatives. This meant I could sleep through the

night without running off into it. If I was getting paranoid at these times I could take my tablets early and knock myself out so there was no need to escape.

Also during the day I could then get out and about close to my house when at these times when I thought it this was safe to do. The insight I had helped with this but there was not enough of it to avoid the worst peaks in the terror. This only happened now and again but they stuck in my mind so I lived in fear of them too.

I began to associate the house as a place of suffering with the paranoia and again this could have affected my functioning. Yet sometimes in there my insight into why I hadn't been assassinated began to reoccur to me. Then the breathing and safe place imagery had more chance.

Slowly these association of pain began to change and I came to regard it as similar to when I was going out. I could use the house as a safe haven when practicing this. So the negative associations began to go and my functioning returned. My house became my safe place.

All the same there were good and bad periods with the insight and in some phases basic needs were still being affected. The answer was again that I had to get out of the house more to stay functional. Yet to do this I had to learn new techniques to deal with the fear the paranoia this was causing.

Getting over the door step and the thought of this got to be a psychological barrier and the voices were reminding me of this. This part took some courage and thinking through about what would happen when out. Eventually I could test out being around the other people and with some practice this got to be a bit easier.

One way was to clear my head of the paranoid thoughts when out and to act normal when the voices got to be terrifying. Yet without the partial insight this got to be more difficult. I had to be careful of not staring at the people when I was paranoid about them. Then they seemed none the wiser about me being there and my unusual behaviour was not being noticed.

Another answer was to take a Walkman with me when out and about. So, I could plug into it to distract me from my thoughts and voices. Then I couldn't hear the banging noise and I didn't need to run off into the night again when the insight about this was lost. Unlike the television I wasn't hallucinating things in what I was listening to and this provided a bit of a life line when at home and cut off from other distractions. I could cook and eat doing this and this again helped to keep my strength up a bit more.

This only worked so far and it became apparent that I needed someone with me. To stay strong I had to have a rest from being in the house. So, I was more capable of tackling my safety needs. Being exhausted all the time without my basic needs prevented this. I needed some help for being distracted when confronting the paranoia. Then I could then think about dealing with the fear.

The supported graded exposure allowed me to handle the fear so I didn't become visible. Having someone to go with me like listening to a Walkman meant I had a voice to focus on their voice in the same way. Yet this was not just a voice as there was a face to go with it. So, it captured more of my

attention. The conversation was interesting in the way the music was and I became engrossed in that too. Of course going back home alone meant I would lose this focus but it still provided for another longer rest.

Eventually I had to do this by myself and my mobile phone came in handy here. Talking to editors and academics captured my whole attention. So, I wasn't so aware of the people around me. I was completely absorbed in this. Then the talk from the voices just merged into background chatter of the people around me when out and about. This then continued at home and I could distract myself in the same way. It meant that when on my own with the voices there were ways of ignoring them.

Medication helped with basic needs. It stabilised me so I knew things were not going to get any worse. Then I could size up what I had to do when confronting things. I knew what my goals would be. These came more into sight as I practiced the exposure therapy. So, I could get a sense of making gradual progress towards them. This in turn made going home easier and I could practice what I had learned in there too.

Once I began to calm down through going out the more extreme fear of being indoors could be tackled. This time the breathing and safe place imagery began to be a bit more effective. Things still got to be very frightening at times. So now I was given some Valium. Then I didn't have to run and hide in the dark and at this point my basic needs for warmth and shelter were going to be met. Again my appetite returned.

With the partial insight and supported courage another problem began to interfere with my functioning. The paranoia was causing some depression. I was sick of being frightened a lot of the time and this was affecting my ability to cook and clean. That again lowered my mood a lot more and I had to find a way of motivating myself. The answer again was to get out of the confines of the house and that helped my mood for going back.

As I began to feel a bit safer so the house didn't seem to be such a hell hole. Then without the associations of suffering I began to cheer up again. I could enjoy the getting out and about more and was able to use the various distractions that this offered for this. I began to feel the mood benefits of distraction and exposure therapy. This allowed the possibility that the anxiety and depression were not combined. These had prevented me from keeping busy and dealing with the delusional symptoms. I had to force myself to keep busy with this as the inactivity makes you lazy.

In the end these techniques had to be combined with some compassion. This meant that with some training I could soothe some of the fear that was stopping me getting out and about. Then with being calmer and stronger I could combine it with other approaches like distraction and confrontation. So I could get some further rest from the terrifying symptoms stopping me functioning.

With the compassion I wasn't so frightened and it was easier to confront the delusions. I could concentrate better. So when hearing voices I could focus more on the music I was listening to on my Walkman or the conversations I was having with the support worker. I wasn't so aware of the people

around me and stopped staring at them. I felt less visible and could merge into the crowd by acting more normally. This allowed for getting out more and increased opportunities to rest.

Another benefit with the compassion was that when afraid I could use it to calm down and put the thoughts about 9/11 to the back of mind. This allowed some distraction when the delusions resumed and when thinking about something else the spying neighbours could not notice it. So in turn it stopped the banging noise and I didn't have to run.

With the compassion there was more hope for the supported exposure as finding the courage needed for was very gradual. I stopped being daunted by what I was up against and again the goal of tackling the terror episodes came into site again. I began to feel more hopeful and then with some practice more confident that I could achieve all this. Again this was very good for mood.

In the end all this allowed the possibility of finding an emotional footing with life. It created the possibility of replacing all the pain I had experienced with something happier. Then I could enjoy these phases in between the symptoms more and to build some further strength for tackling the paranoia. Again it allowed for more rest when confronting the symptoms alone and in the house.

Conclusion

Until we meet basic needs for sleeping, shelter, warmth and eating we are unlikely to the strength to tackle the fear caused by schizophrenia. The impact of schizophrenia as it affects our lives in these ways is shattering and prevents normal functioning and emotional regulation. There will be much fear and emotional pain with what we go through here and we will be exhausted.

Various techniques interrelated techniques such as partial insight, confrontation, distraction and compassion can help with this. Then we will be in more of a stronger position to feel safe from the frightening paranoia and threatening voices. That should allow for climbing the malsow tree to the next level so that we can get back some normal emotional relations in life with this illness levels.

Level three: Emotions and schizophrenia

Once you calm down and have the courage to overcome the fear in schizophrenia the emotional pain will start. This is out of the frying pan and into the fire. Yet much depends on what you are being criticized for and how badly. It varies from hurting your feelings to being very intense. It can be particularly severe in how much it hurts, especially when emotional pain combines delusions and voices. In my case I thought I had caused 9/11 and started hearing voices criticizing me for it. You can end up committing suicide but with the right approach you can come through all this.

You might have to start with insight then use your emotional strength to distract yourself. This is a three-stage process. This may be better and less painful than hanging in there. It increases the times in between episodes where you can recover from the emotional exhaustion, especially if the symptoms are a bit too frequent to begin with.

The voices try to punish me emotionally by negative reinforcement. The threat of punishment here causes emotional pain as well as what you think you have done. So positive reinforcement with the

insight is the answer here and can be used with voice dialogue approaches. If you remember the good things, you have done in your life and you use your self-knowledge or your own voice for this you will reduce the pain.

Anything else the voices say about you which is critical also hurts. It is not nice to be criticised you have to stand up to the voice. This should stop some of the pain. Usually, you can get over this sort of thing in life. Yet with the voice you might get it all the time. Here you need your inner voice and some insight. Your inner voice will say you are not capable of 9/11 as according to the voice and delusion. If you cannot hear the voice self-knowledge might be another way. This will stop any doubts about yourself here.

The pain needs balancing with pleasure. When the paranoia is reduced by insight then with family support you can soothe the pain and the pleasure stands more chance. So, the pleasure may soothe it further. This might help with the anxiety which may be happening at the same time.

Insight can also help with emotional regulation. It allows the possibility of counterposing the good in you to the bad you believe you have caused. This will also reduce the fear and give you a rest. Then it might allow for some graded exposure to the pain which will be further helped by voice dialogue. If you are getting fear in between periods of pain, there will be less opportunity to rest so you will need insight for this.

Thinking you have caused 9/11 there are terrible feelings of responsibility reinforced by the voices. Thinking you need to take responsibility is terrifying. So, you might think you need to build up and overcome the fear with supported graded exposure. The fear of the punishment also needs tackling. The pain of all this will need some insight too.

There will be much emotional turmoil. You will get worn out by this. So again, you need a rest. You need to impose some order on it. You will know you are not capable of 9/11 and any partial insight might solve it. Yet you will be at war with yourself. You might first have to calm down to think about this. Some breathing exercises and then safe place imagery might help. Then you can examine if it really possible you could cause 9/11.

During the emotional turmoil it is good to have positive reinforcement from friends and family. Then you will be stronger to deal with it. Positive emotions and our good qualities should be helped by talking things through with your family at these times.

There is also the possibility of falling in love with schizophrenia. This might be soothing too. Love is strong and might help you cope with severe pain. This before it goes long enough to be traumatic. You will be a source of strength for each other, and you slowly build this strength up. Relying on someone else will help build your own strength up too. Then the insight will be people still love you even if you think you have caused 9/11.

You have got to put the thought causing the emotional pain to the back of your mind. So it doesn't overwhelm you. Again, this might avoid some pain. Then with the thoughts at the back of your mind it

will be easier to distract yourself and concentrate. So, you can think about any insight. Yet ignoring these thoughts can be quite difficult. You might also calm down enough to focus first.

The insight will stop the voices causing the pain at the same time. Solving the two together will reduce the pain down to more moderate levels. Then you can use other coping strategies such as the distraction which will deal with both problems. Again, this can stop things getting too serious and avoid the possibility of trauma.

Being distracted from the thoughts first before the pain happens might be done with insight. you can then think about them more logically and will stop the emotional pain before it gets a grip on you. This works for a while as you cannot do this all the time as the insight may get reduced. Yet if there is still some pain left then you can continue to distract yourself from the voices and thoughts. The pain will eventually wear off. Sometimes distraction is very difficult, and you have to be strong for it.

You can talk to the voice about the emotional pain. Persuading it to stop the critical punishment is going to be harder if the voices think they have done something wrong. Yet you can tell the voice you have some insight which will mute the voice and reduce the pain.

I could practice the insight to avoid the emotional pain by watching the 9/11 video. Again, this might help develop insight before the emotional pain starts. Having already practiced the insight confronting and questioning the delusion means when hits you can use it to question things before the pain starts. You can nip it in the bud. After that it might be too late.

So, if you are in so much pain can you concentrate on the distractions. Then other coping strategies might allow the possibility for this. You will need some strength for them first. This might be more possible at lower levels of pain as there is more chance of soothing it then too. At these times insight and distraction might go together.

The voices will also make it difficult to concentrate on any distraction. They might stop you thinking about the insight. Often listening to a Walkman can distract you. The same can happen by talking to your family emotionally or to a therapist about insight. In my case I found I can write while listening to music and the observing voices tend to keep quiet when being so absorbed.

The question is also whether you concentrate enough to think the insight through at these points. in my case I had to think logically that if I was responsible for 9/11 and it follows why hadn't I been assassinated for it. You will need to remember what the cognitive therapist said. I recorded it so I could play it back. You have to have to focus on this instead of the voice and delusion. Then you might be able to still question what you are thinking and will also be distracted from the symptoms while thinking of something else.

The voices can be agonising and worse still they can be abusive and traumatic. Strength on its own might not be enough here. Insight is then needed if you are not strong enough to stop it and failing that you something powerful like compassion. This might need a therapist. You can also voice dialogue the abuse like you don't deserve it.

Then some more processes can come into play. Other things in life can be traumatic like marriage and war. Here the trauma may be ongoing and not episodic. So you might get over schizophrenia the same way. You will also have to be emotionally strong for war and divorce to avoid this. It will take time to come through and heal the abuse or trauma. With schizophrenia much depends on the time in between episodes and how much there is. Then with having a rest the trauma can be dealt with.

Keeping busy might take your mind off things so you can build emotional strength. Yet taking your mind off the pain when it happens will be more difficult if you hear voices about it at the same time. So, you might have to silence the voice as it may all be too much to build the strength. This particularly so if the voices are abusive.

With moderate levels of pain, I can immerse myself in the writing or do some housework to take my mind off things. I can force myself to do this. Then once I have forced myself to take my mind of the delusions the pain stops. As you get stronger you can build this up to different levels of pain.

It might possible that I am able to atone for 9/11 and this will reduce some pain too. This from both the voices and delusions. Atonement has a calming effect on me and allows for much distraction. Then once I can concentrate, I can write to do this. So, I can combine the atonement and distraction at the same time. This is most effective at more moderate levels of pain when eventually I get so absorbed the pain stops.

We might think we deserve the pain though we will still want to stop it. You can come through the pain by soothing or enduring, but it is best to overcome it. This might depend on how painful it is to do this, and you might have to find the strength to be emotionally tougher. Then you will have another way of dealing with it.

Your family will also protect you from the pain. Again, this soothing might allow some distraction or hanging in there. You can come through the episodes using this. Some pain might still be there as often you cannot get these thoughts completely out of your head. Yet you can endure it better.

We know with schizophrenia that distraction and confrontation are easier said than done. So even with loving soothing from family people are still committing suicide. The support and soothing may not make you strong enough. If one doesn't work, you can try the other and maybe things combine them again as in the three-stage process. Then at least it stands more hope and chance.

You will need some emotional strength for this, and family could help here too. You could rely on them as a source of strength. Their love can help you cope with the fear and pain. Family support might get you through schizophrenia as you will be more resilient when you feel that love.

The pain might stop your basic needs as Maslow called them as might the fear. You will often get the two together. Then you might lose your appetite. You might need some Valium to eat. Then eating will keep your strength up in the face of the fear and pain. So will rest and proper sleep.

Pain is emotionally exhausting with either the struggle or the impact. It takes it out of you. You can get worn out by this. You will need a rest. My illness came in episodes. So, there was more of a chance to

recuperate. Then the soothing and strengthening was more possible in between. Then you can try to prepare for the next episode. This might also help reduce the anxiety in between.

Sometimes the pain is only there when the fear wears off. It is not clear which is worse. Yet you can have both together and both at extreme levels could make you snap. This may also add to the danger of trauma. So, something stronger like compassion maybe the only answer for the two combined.

Often you will need strength and courage at the same time. You will need to build both up. If you can quieten the voices that might lessen both. Yet fear can sap your strength like the pain does. Again, at the same time. Having a rest can give you the strength for milder levels of all this. So eventually the periods of rest will get longer and longer, and you will grow in strength. This causes less fear and pain and allows for graded exposure.

You might grow with the emotional pain and emerge stronger. You end up with some life experience and can call yourselves real people. This might help in life after the illness. It is not all negative. If you can learn from it, you won't be so depressed with what you are going through.

The next question is what if you still cannot cope with it? The pain might be too much. Then you need to tell yourself in time you will learn to cope, and it won't always be that bad. It won't go on forever being like this. You can do this. So, you must try to find the strength from somewhere.

You need to try to think positively with it as that you might get through it. So even if you don't think you are strong enough you might surprise yourself. You can try thinking about all the positives in life again when it hurts your feelings. Again, this will help you get through the pain.

The pain is not all the time so you can hang in there with it. Yet much will depend on how long it lasts for. If it is only for a couple of hours, it is more bearable and doesn't require as much endurance. It is easier to tell yourself that it will eventually pass.

So, time and severity are important factors here. It is less traumatic if it is not all the time. Alternatively, when severe if it goes on for long enough it could become so. Then there are ways of building up to the severe pain by hanging in there to cope with the fear before it happens like this.

You still have to find some happiness somehow. Often this means meeting someone. Then you can be loving despite the pain. You can remind yourself of this when it happens. So, you might hang in there and be able to way up if life with the pain that it is still worth it.

You can come through emotional pain using these techniques. Then the more you practice this you increasingly know you are going to be able to hang there. This provided it doesn't get any worse. Then you have to start again having confidence using the same methods.

If you are too weak to hang in there are going to be serious problems when there is no strength for this. Thinking about being responsible for 9/11 might be too much for a lot of people. Even family support might not be enough help here. Then you might still break emotionally and thinking about 9/11 is shattering. You can be emotionally fragile, and it may cause a nervous breakdown. You need another strategy here.

Once shattered you will have to pick up the pieces. Again, many things in life are emotionally shattering like a divorce. There is pain and suicide with this too. If the pain continues you might need the coping strategies first before you can pick up the pieces. This might take some time but that is true of divorce too. Time is a healer for divorce, but schizophrenia is more ongoing. Yet you can come through a breakdown with it and start over with life.

In my case I had to see what else there was left in my life after my breakdown. I found I could still write so it started to have some therapeutic meaning. To pick up the pieces here was helped by my families care which soothed the pain from the delusions. I could still engage with it on an emotional level which was very therapeutic.

To hang in there with this you need to think to yourself of something meaningful. Then when in pain you will need to remind yourself of the meaningful part of your life. This comes from your families love and something purposeful. You will be stronger with the pain and in between episodes.

So, it hurts you are going through this. Emotional pain is a very common experience and life can be painful. Again, like in a marital separation time ensures you come through it. You can tell yourself in the same way you will come through delusional pain. It is not easy, but you will do it.

You must remember any pain you have been through in life and say to yourself the psychoses as at the lower levels of pain is no different. You will come through in the same way. You need to keep focused on this thought when delusional. So, with practice you might believe in yourself more. Then you can tell yourself if you have done it once you can do it again.

You can use your positive emotions to soothe the pain. You are nice, friendly and loving. Again, this will cause some pleasure as will getting these soothing qualities back from other people. I remember what Roxette sang that there is a time to kill the pain in life using the good things in it.

Thinking you are responsible for 9/11 means you will feel no one will like you and this thought too causes much pain. You will have live life as an outcast and be on your own. Then your friends and family will be with you and you won't feel completely isolated and rejected.

We need a feeling of belonging as Maslow called it and not to be an outcast. Your family contact is the answer to this as can your friends. Despite the pain there will be something to connect to. Instead of being cut off from people there will be a sense of attachment.

You can get paranoid about your friends and family or lose them through stigma. There may be no possibility for emotional soothing here. It might be you can make new friends at day centres. Yet this may take some time so a therapist might be the best answer here.

You might have to reconnect with your emotions and find them to relieve the pain. It might be all we can think about is the pain and that is all we feel. Then it might be too much for friends and family to make any difference and we cannot connect with them either.

With the gravity of what was on my mind thinking of something else that might be distracting was difficult. The feelings of guilt and responsibility are terrible and added to the pain. You will feel you

have done something terribly wrong. The voices will maintain this focus and criticise you.

So, what if it is still too much and you cannot endure it or cope with it. You maybe still subject to the psychoses, and this runs the risk of suicide. Some compassion will be needed here, and I think this also puts the emphasis on medications for both psychosis and depression.

To restore a normal emotional state, we need to have self-esteem. It is possible we might still esteem ourselves so there isn't so much pain. In my case whether this will make up for something like 9/11 I didn't know. Then I found some people were sympathetic to my plight which helped me greatly.

So, even if it was true, I had caused 9/11 it maybe we still don't deserve the punishment. Some people and especially family will even take your side about 9/11. This will help with the pain it has caused. Then having someone on your side about it can be a source of strength.

You can also voice dialogue about your emotions with this support. You can tell them about how you how you feel about 9/11 and some people will defend you. So again, they might become less painful which will double up with feeling better about your delusional thoughts.

At this point you will still need emotional support from friends and family, and you might be more receptive to it. Their love will be more soothing. It will become just as powerful as the feelings of guilt and responsibility or the fear of the punishment. It should be a source of strength with it all.

Yet the fear can also shut down your emotions. Love like friendship this is a good feeling but might only be possible as the fear comes and goes. You may be going from pain to fear so there might be less time to rest and connect with your family. You might have to tackle the fear first sometimes.

Anxiety goes with depression so you will need a lot of love here too. Pain can make you depressed. You don't want to feel like this. You will need to be happy. Yet at moderate levels of pain you can use strategies for overcoming depressed thoughts. It should help with mood to know you can get through the pain. This will make it more bearable.

Pain will still cause some depression, so you need ways of hanging in there with it too. This will be difficult to do if the depression is combined with the other more severe symptoms. Yet low mood might only happen at the lower levels of fear and pain as when terrified and in agony we will not be able to think about being depressed.

Finally, as we have seen you have still got to feel you like yourself and some self-esteem will still ease the pain. This will also answer the depression but again might be very difficult if you think you have caused 9/11. Yet again this feels possible when you have people on your side about it.

Conclusions

We need a way of healing. Yet thinking you have caused 9/11 is going to take some healing. All the same with the right approach life may get back more to normal. This even when still having the pain from delusional thoughts and critical voices. It can ease so far using a number of interrelated strategies including emotional support, building strength, distraction, hanging in there and partial insight.

The emotional pain in schizophrenia will prevent us prevent form climbing the Maslow tree from the

emotional to the esteem tier. Using these therapies this will become more possible depending on how far they work. They may only work so far so this will not happen for everyone.

Level four Voice Dialogue and self-esteem

It is common for people with schizophrenia to hear voices criticising them about their delusions. Often to the voices will criticise about other things to. Voice dialogue can improve our self-esteem and help us climb the Maslow Tree. This issue is also serious as voices can lead us to commit suicide.

The voice dialogue approach can be used alongside existing strategies such cognitive behavioural therapy and compassion focused therapy. Yet these therapies may not be effective as when there is no insight or the never loser psychology is involved. Then there is another way of solving voices.

Much depends on what the voices are criticizing about. Often this can be something we have done wrong but as in my case they are also prompted by the delusion I had caused 9/11. Some things make us feel worse about yourself than others. So for me the impact on self also depended on the voice content and what else was being criticised. It wasn't just about 9/11.

The voices can convince you that you are a bad person. You need to argue with them and formulate reasons to challenge what they say. The voices can criticise in different ways though each of these can be answered in their own fashion. This account will outline what happens with this.

Reducing voices by standing up them will restore your self-esteem. Yet this might be more difficult if the criticisms are very true. In my case where this is connected to the delusions about being responsible for 9/11 getting rid of them will be much harder as there is so much more truth in what they say. Other things were less certain.

We all carry around with us our own internal critic and the voices can latch on to this and reinforce it. Yet it is possible to ignore the critic most of the time so this should help keep the voices quiet. The same thing can happen if we are overly critical of ourselves, so we need to stop thinking like that.

You must examine your feelings about the voice. You can be compassionate in the way the voice isn't. There is truth here to challenge the voice in that *it* is not being compassionate. That means you can answer. Still the voices can be very convincing and may spoil your sense of compassion.

Then you can use your *self-knowledge* to speak out against the voice. Your family can do this too. The bad stuff is easier to believe so this might require some soul searching. Yet with a spoiled identity this might be harder. Your family's knowledge of you will become very important.

Insight into your delusions as about causing 9/11 will help your self-esteem and can help answer the voices criticising about it. If you are not so sure you have caused it this will mute the voice. Yet as long as you believe it so far it won't go away. Then it will still be easier to stand up to its criticisms.

So, other approaches can help alongside with using knowing yourself. Having insight might question this so far. We can use this knowledge to emphasize your good points. Then when the voices start to calm down about things you can concentrate more on yourself.

Voice dialogue about this might also mute the voice again making it easier to resist with your own

thinking. If this is combined with some insight which as in my case made me doubt whether I had really caused 9/11 this will quieten the voice further. It will take less courage to resist it.

Having family on your side might be hindered by the stigma of being schizophrenic. Where emotional contact has been lost there will be less people on your side to challenge the voice. That puts the emphasis back on the psychologist who will be a bit of a lifeline here.

Looking at all the wars and revolutions there have been in history I tried to use that to answer what I was hearing about 9/11. Also all the other bad things I thought I caused like poverty and cancer were also having a positive effect on society making us better people. The voices still didn't accept this as it thought I had killed all the people.

So initially believing I had killed all those people I thought I had deserved the criticism. Then I got to thinking about all the atrocities in history again. So, if I couldn't get rid of the voice in this way at least I could restore my sense of self-esteem. I was no worse than a lot of famous people.

Still the voice can be very intelligent in criticizing you morally. It said the other atrocities in history were also not acceptable. Yet taking history into account you can match this and you can get into a philosophical argument about things. This didn't cure the voice but at least I could stand up to it.

The key is to have positive reinforcement especially from your friends and family. Their care and love will soothe the criticism of the voice and calm you down enough to meditate on your good points. Knowing your good qualities will then lessen the impact of what you are getting from the voice.

Once we esteem who we are we can be ourselves. Our friends will esteem us for ourselves in the same way. It is a common feeling to feel bad about yourself and you normally get over these things. You can talk with your friends about what people have said about you in such instances to reaffirm your self-esteem.

You must remember your good points and focus on these to distract yourself from what you are hearing. That too should have a soothing effect on what you are experiencing as well as taking your mind off the voice. You can then use this focus more to try and answer them.

Your friends will like you so you will feel better about yourself despite the voices. You can use this to dialogue with what you are hearing. You can point out to the voice that your friends will take your side with this. You will have best friends and lifelong friends to support you in this.

The voices will know you very well but so will your family and any long-standing friends. You can draw on this direct knowledge on what they have said about you as a good person. So you can try to introspect an answer to what you are hearing. You can meditate on these emotional relations to reinforce this and answer the voice with their existence.

My CPN suggested 9/11 was a good thing from a certain point of view. Such political acts can be both criticised and defended. Then it was also suggested again that the harm I was causing to people in other ways as the cognitive therapist said makes us better people. Still that didn't satisfy the voices about 9/11 or anything else.

The voices criticising me were very convincing and powerful. It took a lot to stand up to them. Here the force of the ultimate *truth* about you is more powerful than the voices you hear. There will be more truth to the thought that you are not such a bad person and his should be clear to the voice.

The voices of friends and family if they do not silence what you are hearing might still make it more mute and less frequent. To do this I was possible that I was able to regard the voice of what I was hearing as just another person's voice and different to anyone else's. Then it was easier to show the voice that it was no different to those voices supporting me from friends and family.

If the voices take up much of the day you may be so overwhelmed with fear that a rational dialogue with them might not be possible. You will need to calm down first. A number of approaches may be used including breathing when you hear them and distracting yourself with a safe place image. This will become less of a problem the more muted they get.

So you might also need help to confront them before being able to hear you own voice. Some supported graded exposure might aid this as the voice varies in severity and does not always instil the same level of fear. Else you could coexist with the fear. Some Valium could also help with this. Your family could also do this for you by taking your side which might also calm things down.

You can be so caught up with thinking about the voice that you are not able to be mindful of your good points. So you might need to practice this. In my case I set an alarm on my phone for me everyday to remind me to focus on my own voice. This was an effective as I carried it everywhere so I couldn't forget about it.

We all have faults but family, friends and partners will forgive them. Dialogue with the voices about this might do the same. Yet often we may need this to challenge the voice which can be very unforgiving. We can show we are loved despite our faults even if he voices hate us for them.

The voices will see more of our faults than other people generally would do. You can tell the voice that most people don't behave like this to each other. Yet the voice might think it is right to do this and so may ignore this point. All the same you can use it against what you are hearing.

The voices will be unduly harsh about what they are criticising. Your faults may not be so bad as they make out. They will magnify our thoughts out of all proportion to how bad they are. The voice might be persuaded about this and will become less punishing.

We can always feel bad about ourselves at times in life and our self-image can get tarnished. Yet generally we come through this and cheer up. It is just a part of life. Knowing this the voices can be talked through with your friends who will remind you these feelings will pass. When they wear off the voices will be quiet again.

You are not supposed to be bothered about what other people think of you. Generally you can ignore the problem when it happens as this is just fact of life. Yet it is harder to ignore the voice. You can tell it you are unconcerned with what it thinks of you. Yet thinking I was responsible for 9/11 the voice thought it still had good reason to criticise.

You can remind yourself of all the good things you have done in in life and keep a diary of nice things people have said about you. This should remind you of your good side and act as a further source of positive reinforcement. Again you can counterpose this to what the voices say.

Frequent contact with friends and family are especially important as the loving conversation about you will distract you from the focus of the voice. It will also focus on something very supportive. If the voices don't like you then how is it you still have the love of family and friends that do.

The voices might refuse to engage in a dialogue saying you don't deserve to be listened to. This can be handled in the same way as you will have things to say about them. Yet under certain conditions they will talk to you and the dialogue can be resumed.

You might get the chance to rectify your faults so the voice will have less to criticise. You could do something useful like voluntary work. You will also remember your individual acts of kindness like buying your friends and relatives Christmas presents. In my case I took writing about mental health. So I could dialogue with the voice about this too and the point was acknowledged.

Yet in my case the voices still think all this doesn't make any difference as being a writer doesn't make up for killing people. Yet if your motivations are genuine that you want to help people this might provide an answer to them so far. At least you won't feel so bad about yourself.

We may sometimes make mistakes in life and do things we shouldn't. This is something else about which the voices can criticise. Yet this could be true for anyone. So maybe the voices have made a mistake again in criticising you for something that doesn't really deserve it.

The voices can make you doubt yourself. Then as it is natural for us to doubt ourselves the voices can reinforce this. They can also prey on the fact we are doing it. It may take some more reassurance from our friends. Yet this an experience that is also very common and we all come through it.

Often too we will have negative thoughts about ourselves and this can also trigger off the observing voice. Again this is a very normal experience and we often are able to ignore it. If we don't react to these thoughts in a negative manner this keeps the voice quiet.

Something else that provokes the voice is that we have done things in life we regret. Again this triggers an immediate action within us and this is again when the voices start to criticize. We need to remind ourselves we have all done things like that and that nobody is perfect.

They also criticize me about supporting capitalism and that you have been oppressive. Yet I can remember Peter Gabriel's lyrics that "you did nothing wrong". Then you can esteem what you have achieved in life even though you can be criticised for this. This despite the fact that there is political opposition to it.

You have got to be able to see yourself for the dialogue to begin and to have the courage to see your faults. Again nobody is perfect and your friends will reinforce this again by liking you for who you are. Then you can also further correct some of your faults so the voices will have less to criticise about.

You have got to be able to hear your own voice and you might need a therapist to dialogue with the

voices you hear before you can do this. Then you can self-forgive your faults using your own voice to reinforce this. You can show the voices this is very possible. So that they might do the same.

You will learn to dislike what the voice is saying. Yet disliking the voice might antagonise it. So instead you need to show it that it is being unfair. The voice may think it is being perfectly fair so this might take some persuading. In my case this was only possible so far.

In life we oppose things we don't agree with and think are not right. We should all have experience of this to draw on and this useful for standing up to voices. The accusations made about us often aren't just which is a powerful thought in that we will deserve justice in the face of them.

If we can overcome the fear of what it is saying we might be able to challenge it more. The voices criticise me about being responsible for 9/11 and to reach self-esteem you first have to overcome the fear of this. This is possible in many ways and as in my case by using supported graded exposure.

Sometimes what the voices say is so very general in that you are a bad person that they lack specific examples of the kind examined here. In these cases, you will have general sense that you can oppose to this without getting into more detail about things.

Often you will have to consult yourself about the criticisms and see what you think. It might take time to think it through but you may come up with an answer to them. What you are hearing may not be the whole story about you. Then you might come up with ways of stopping its influence.

So you will have to stand up for yourself. You don't take abuse from other people so you shouldn't from the voice. Sometimes in life you are brought into conflict with other people. So you have to fight and having learned this you can do the same with the voice.

You have to visualise who is talking to you and use the authority of your family to challenge the voice. These people will also have their own faults and you can point this out to them. Then your family can take your side in addition to using your voice so there is more than one person defending you. Yet it will take your friends and family to add to the chorus here.

The voices can be nasty about your faults so you will need to show them you are nice. Again your friends and family can reinforce this by talking about you doing acts of kindness and caring. This will as you note them down in your diary will add to the positive side of your feelings about yourself.

Some people may hate you in the way the voice does. You have to say to the voices that is up to them. You can tell yourself that you are a caring loving person to answer the voice. Hate is a very common phenomenon and as for many people they simply have to leave it behind.

Sometimes the voices were nice and were going to allow me to atone for 9/11. They esteemed my academic writing. So, I didn't feel so bad about myself. I could use this to dialogue with the voice when it was critical to increase my self-esteem. Sometimes the voices accepted this and sometimes they didn't. Overall they remained highly critical.

You need ways of cheering up after the voices have stopped as what they say will stick in your mind. Then you can restore your self-esteem more. Spending time with friends and family can soothe any

remaining criticism from the voice. Having a wish list also works here. So you feel less depressed.

You need to tell yourself you deserve the best in life and to be happy. The voices will contradict this so you have to keep reminding yourself. You can use this as a maxim in life and tell yourself the voices are being very unfair. You can tell them that though they might not accept it.

The voice may find your weaknesses and try to exploit them as a punishment. This in my case for causing 9/11. You need to tell the voice you don't deserve to be punished to stop this. Again having family on your side will carry as much authority as the voice does. So they can help to persuade it there is no reason to punish which will also make you feel safer from them.

Sometimes the need to be a good person can cause too much remorse. You need to be aware of this. The voices might try to take advantage of this and try to criticise you further. Yet again this too will have an answer. So we don't beat ourselves up too much about it.

Losers suffer from self-hatred which can be reinforced by the voice. So they are unlikely to see themselves or develop self-esteem. Voices can also criticise being a loser too. Yet learning to like yourself to answer this will also be very difficult.

It is often said in life just be yourself. Trying to do this will allow you to stand up to the voice. Yet losers have a problem with this too as being yourself is not enough. You may need to change this psychology somehow if you are going to answer the voice.

You have to learn to like yourself so you can develop your self-esteem. It helps to make a list of your good points and your faults. So, you can make an overall assessment of yourself. You can then develop new good points and add to the list. Then try to correct the bad things you don't like.

You also need not to be submissive to the voice and just like being submissive in life you have to learn about this in the normal way. You will need to learn to stand up for yourself again and to have the courage to do this. Where there has been learned submissiveness in childhood this will be more difficult. The voice can criticize you for being weak. So this may have an answer to them here.

You don't let people criticise you and get away with it. You answer them back and defend yourself. So you can say all this with some power. This will match the power of the voice. Yet you have got to find the courage for this. So again it helps to build it up gradually. It helps to have someone on your side when you stand up to things. Then eventually you will have to learn to stand up for yourself as in life and to be answer the voice in the same way.

In the end the voices will be silenced, less frequent or quieter. That should allow long periods in between where you can learn to like yourself more. If the voices are there nearly all the time this will be much more difficult and may require a psychologist to get you started with it.

Conclusion

If we can esteem ourselves this will help us self-actualise and not to have our identity spoiled by the illness. We are going to be a lot happier with ourselves and our lives. This will end the suffering which

is inflicted by the voice and help us grow as people. This should be the goal for service users and clinician in dealing with schizophrenia and voice hearing.