

Original Paper

The Paradox of Fear in Schizophrenia

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Schizophrenia is stress induced and so people are thought to have got the illness because they are too weak to cope with life. Yet there is some potential understanding of the stressful causes of the condition here and to bring this to the fore we need to get across the stigma that we are not to blame for going mad through being too weak to cope with life and the dog-eat-dog culture of capitalism. It is true that anyone subject to enough stress will crack up and anyone can get the illness themselves. So we need to be getting across this stigma of being too weak to cope is just prejudice and ignorance, as with the stigma surrounding a much more common illness like depression. Then by showing the courage many people exhibit in dealing with the condition this should paradoxically help expose the underlying misunderstanding and generate some empathy with schizophrenia. We can show we can be brave enough to tackle schizophrenia even when we have been too weak to avoid getting it in the first place.

“You will drive me mad” is a common understanding as is the thought that with too much stress anyone will snap. Yet this is taken as a sign of weakness so there is a lack of compassion. At the same time people will also learn that we are not to blame for our own problems as there are positive media images where people are seen to have been driven mad by extreme stresses and it is explained that it is not their fault. For instance Sandra Bullock in the movie *Demolition Man* says that a person frozen in the “Cryo prisons system” having a forty year nightmare would “go insane.” This sympathy creates an opportunity to get across how brave people can be with schizophrenia and reduce associations of weakness.

What has got to be explained is that strength needs proper training and how many normal people will experience too much stress and will have a breakdown. Normal work and relationship stress could cause this as with losing your house. So the situation requires help as we cannot just deal with it on their own. There is no shame in asking for help especially when we are being more compassionate. Also anyone can go through such a crisis and like Alan Milburn might still end up being successful.

We need to be receptive and empathize but the stigma is a barrier to understanding what schizophrenia is like so we are not sympathetic and we turn a blind eye to the suffering. We need to place ourselves in the position of being mental ill ourselves and that requires getting across how frightening it is and how

emotionally painful it can be. Some examples of its severity are needed here so people can begin to understand what you are up against when trying to cope with it.

One answer here is that one in three people will experience depression at some point in their lives and we can many of us *know* what it is like to experiences some suffering. We can all suffer from anxiety and will know what a difficult problems this can be too. That should open the door to some empathy with schizophrenia and help remove the stigma of being weak. We all need coping strategies with life. Life can be a struggle for many people and we can recognise this will be the same with schizophrenia.

Many people have their limits to what they can cope with but having schizophrenia the illness is much more extreme and overwhelming. The idea that not coping with it as a sign of weakness is going to be rejected once people realise what is happening. It will be realised that when people think of what they cannot cope with that knowledge is going to make them understand what it would be like if they had to cope with the schizophrenia themselves. So we can begin to get some idea of what is involved.

Yet what is going to be another problem to being sympathetic and changing societies attitudes is that we are not at first receptive to this suffering involved with having schizophrenia. We see it as crazy or eccentric when it is not very funny or else as dangerous because we associate the symptoms with being disturbed or unstable. At the same time we know the symptoms are extremely severe like walking alone through the valley of the shadow of death which this should reduce the comedy or will even in the face of the danger generate sympathy for the condition.

Once we understand that schizophrenics suffer through no fault of their own and display much courage we can begin to empathise what they are up against. We may become respectful of and receptive to the struggle and recognise the daunting fear and pain involved. It is often said you cannot know what schizophrenia is like unless you have had it yourself but much of this experience will still come through so far as in this account of my personal experience below.

We know that madness is so overpowering that it also defies description even when society stigmatises us like the illness is our own fault. The answer here is to marry these two perceptions so that we realise the extremities of the condition are worse than weakness that first caused it. If it is thought we are to blame for our own problems we may begin to understand that the illness is far worse than problems that initially triggered it. So, we may realise that we cannot all conform to the underlying social values in the case of schizophrenia and this should help remove the stigma.

So it might be that some people will sense the suffering is their own fault and so will not be sympathetic. This is where the courage paradox is needed. In order to explain the paradox of fear in schizophrenia we need to understand it better. We need to know its severity, but this is difficult to explain. Some graphic examples are needed. To do this we also need to appreciate the scale of things with a mental illness so that we can see the terrifying delusions would frighten anybody. This is not just terror but involves being tortured with it and from here we can see there is going some further sympathy.

Once we get past the outward appearances of the illness as weakness we may begin to emotionally understand what it is like in terms of how constantly particularly frightening it is and the emotional pain

involved, both of which can allow little possibility for rest. The fear is painful and courses through your body. It can cause screaming in terror, inability to breathe, loss of sleep, palpitations, passing out, panic attacks, put you in and out of shock, multiple nervous breakdowns, freeze you in fear and give you terrifying nightmares. You live with trying to endure constant nerves including adrenalin and cortisol rushes. This is exhausting yet at the same time the fear combines with an intense and shattering emotional pain, the terrible responsibility of which can create suicidal feelings of negative self-worth. These realisations of *torture* which happen together with critical vices can deepen our sympathy with the condition which again will increase our understanding of what happens.

The symptoms are so severe that they can make you want to commit suicide and in my case I thought I was going to be tortured to death by the CIA for causing 9/11. This involved terrible moral responsibility and kept me hiding in a room for ten years. Then I tried drinking bleach to burn a hole in my stomach but didn't dare go through with it. The scale of the illness can seem like the end of the world and we can begin to see why this should be so. The extreme hell of the illness would frighten anyone.

Anyone subject to enough pressure will snap and we need training and support from others to cope with life which is also true with schizophrenia. If everything happens at once it may cause system overload for which we may not be prepared and then we could snap. Yet it is not true that if we cannot cope thus we are to blame for not being tough enough. So although the social ideal of self-help is correct sometimes, we will need professional help to do this. We can then build up strength and courage gradually. We can teach what went wrong in the first place and to cope with the stresses that initially drove us mad. This should also prevent a relapse. Thus the truth is not that we are, as it turns out, not too weak to deal with the initial stress but it needs proper training before we do. This will also help overcome the initial stress and even the schizophrenia too.

What we need is some social knowledge of what this caring involves and why it is necessary. We need to get across how dedicated mental health nurses and doctors are to doing something about the suffering and that professional image should set an example for more humane social treatment. We need to be enlightened in this process so a more compassionate society could help here and be more inclusive. To do this we need a personal story that really gets this message across.

Because of its otherness we need to be receptive to the suffering as we cannot image what it is like. Yet even though you cannot explain the illness unless you have had it yourself some of it can still be got across. Once they see it in real terms people are going to be impressed with what you are up against and will then agree no one could face this on their own. We can begin to understand the need for help as tales of courage are commonplace and we can see the illness in these terms. We may begin to understand it better through this and explaining the scale of things we should be a start to being compassionate. With compassion there will then be some connectedness. Again, a lot of people will be emotionally moved by learning that the illness can drive you to suicide with this and it should generate much understanding of the struggling involved that many people face with the illness. We can begin to get some idea of the suffering involved. We will not apply blame.

Much also depends on knowing that there are many other things which can help us face up to schizophrenia where it is stress induced. We can practice things like yoga and meditation which can help us face up to life with the illness. Again, these are things that can strengthen us and is a further caring approach. There is a need for help at day centres where we can learn to deal with these terrifying problems. Everybody needs a hand to hold on to. There is some deep empathic and emotional cognition here beyond the notional label of schizophrenia. It takes both courage and emotional strength. Some graded exposure will toughen you up for this. This will cause some character building and service users are advised to confront things.

Then we can also show ourselves we are challenging the condition which should reduce self-stigma and reduce that of society to just been born of ignorance. We might not be so alienated when it seeks us to be responsible for going mad as we will know this just ignorance. Further societies provision of mental health care will reinforce this as it shows help is needed and provided. Indeed it may generate some self-esteem for what we have achieved when coping with it.

Much depends on explaining that we do not let ourselves go mad and that people with mental illness subsequently display a lot of courage in confronting the symptoms. That can lead us back to the challenging the values of the big bad world stigma as they are not as bad as the struggle with schizophrenia. With proper compassionate care in the mental health system there is much that that can be done with this so that we can be stronger with it and outlining this will demonstrate the paradox of coping with the fear and pain in schizophrenia.

A narrative should help demonstrate how difficult this is. Then we can begin to get an idea of what the illness is like so we can start to empathize and then sympathise. It needs to be brought to life so we can understand all of this together so what follows involves much personal experience and the courage and pain involved should come through. We can more easily relate to a story and we readily read tales of courage in other areas of life which should chime with this account.

Getting Life Back to Normal

The things that drove us mad in the first place like emotional stress, moving house or losing your job can be learned to be dealt with so it doesn't happen again. The key to understanding this is know how things progress on the Maslow tree as well dealing with the schizophrenia at the same time. Both problems can be tackled in the same way and can restore our functionality in the face of criticism from people outside of the mental health system.

We need to start at the beginning and living in sheltered accommodation will prepare us for independent living and allow us to look after our level one needs. Here not coping at level one can be answered by the preparation for independent living where we are supported in looking after ourselves with eating sleeping and keeping the house in order. We may learn the emotional strength for this and if we are happier with our lives so we will feel more motivated to look after ourselves.

Then fear of the big bad world especially can be helped by graded exposure to schizophrenia, including courage, compassion and strength. Then eventually taking on a challenge like this might even make us into winners and we may get a lot more out of life. Rather than being weak you will be able to compete. Graded exposure to the fear should help us cope with fear the dog-eat-dog side of life. This is necessary to finding job security and overcoming an anxiety which should reduce the depression. Next using these skills, it takes courage to talk about the illness because of the stigma and self-blame.

This is best done through the provision of day centres and sheltered accommodation. Then emotional support can help us cope with emotional abuse from the voices and provide ways of emotionally engaging with people. Then after an emotional breakdown through divorce or separation you can then form new relationships. Feeling depressed through failed relationships, being down about losing your job or house can be replaced with new emotional attachments through support from the mental health system. This is in the form of counselling and emotional support from staff at housing projects and day centres. We can relearn our happiness in life as emotional contact is the most important side to it.

Coping with critical voices can restore our self-esteem. Then feeling bad about yourself from losing your job and house or because you are being labelled weak can be overcome by finding your own voice. This will in turn stand up to what society thinks about you when you are so labelled. Climbing the Maslow tree is itself an achievement and should add to our self-esteem. Then being too weak to cope with work stresses could be answered by contributing to society through voluntary work which could lead to a part time job while training at day centres will remind you that you are not completely useless.

Finally, just being yourself might then be possible and you can avoid the depression that caused the stress in the first place. Learning to cope opens doors that allows some self-determination and provides finances to live the way we want. We can be ourselves if progress through all these levels on the Maslow tree which should create some further self-esteem and feel like our true selves again. We will know our place in the world and how we can fit back in.

If it is the big bad world that causes the schizophrenia in the first place then learning to cope with schizophrenia will mean not a lot will scare you after that. You can tackle the paranoia step by step in the way we can take steps to get our life back on track and this in turn help us cope with both. Then if we can get over the climate of stigma and the dog-eat-dog society that creates it we can stand up for ourselves as when just being ourselves can lead us into conflict with other people. We will need to fight the voices and what they say about us in the way other people might criticises us for and this should make us stronger socially. We can stand up for ourselves more as we will have learned to fight and fend for ourselves. We will have engaged in a struggle from which we could learn a lot and life too is not easy so this experience maybe very useful. Life often involves a struggle and schizophrenia may teach us that it is worthwhile as eventually we will grow in the process of coping with the different areas of life. It will not only overcome the self-stigma of being weak but also allow us to be happy just being ourselves regardless of the what the society stigmatises us as and how it labels us. Maslow has a lot more to say here as we shall now explore.

First Steps

To self-actualise we need to believe in ourselves and this can be taught the way we overcome the fears and depression at other levels of the Maslow tree. Inspirational figures like John Nash may encourage this. Overcoming the illness can at first seem very daunting so the first step is to realise nothing is hopeless and the answer lies within. Then what is also what is encouraging is that there is help and when at day centres we can see other people getting more functional and some eventually find employment. Instead of just hope we can begin to believe in ourselves more and more and this should help us self-actualise. More and more the sense of hope should build and things should become more realisable.

At first the symptoms will be severe as we will not have learned the strategies to cope with them to be outlined here. This when it makes you feel your strength is sapped and you feel the situation is hopeless. Often you will have to endure these symptoms until they wear off. This involves keeping a grip on yourself and learning to hang in there against nearly impossible odds and it may take some time before things can improve. Medication is the most likely help at the early stages of the illness and you may need to be in and out of hospital a lot.

The first step is to realise that we may have in our own minds that we might have given up and have just let ourselves go. We need prompting to wash, cook and keep clean and overcoming the self-neglect should make us feel happier. We may have to push ourselves to do this as you can get into a rut where you cannot help yourself. This however is the first step as it means we have been strong enough to do this and having help is effective. This is not easy but is more manageable with support. It shows us we have some control over what is happening to us with the illness and having supported strength is effective in overcoming its challenges.

It is just as well that looking after your basic needs is difficult because the next step of confronting the fear is terrifying even if we take it step by step. Once in the mental health system we realise we are not alone in doing this and it takes someone on hand to instil some belief in ourselves that we can do this. Getting positive reinforcement along the way means that if someone else believes we can do it we might believe it ourselves and believing in ourselves is what is needed to get our life in terms of employment and relationships.

The key to all this is that we can see it happening so there is something tangible to believe in and the more steps we take the more our confidence will grow in that we have met a challenge and overcome it. Once we have calmed down about problems we can think about them more coherently and that should allow us to think about the big bad world and any other problems that life may throw at us. We will become more functional and cope better with the initial stresses that made us ill.

Even though schizophrenia can seem overwhelming we may learn techniques that can help calm things down. These can then be practiced outside the mental health system and help personal independence. The usual techniques like breathing and safe place imagery can be very effective but as the levels of fear go up and down with schizophrenia so some short-term relief from a benzo-diazepine may be needed. These may help us move on from sheltered accommodation and allow us to live in our own place.

That does not mean things won't still be difficult but in particular living on your own will mean you will have to find a way of dealing with a mental health crisis on your own and there are ways of doing this. The problem is that you cannot go to day centres or get therapy to cope with life through socialising or getting out and about since going into crisis will mean ending up back in hospital. Having help on hand to being admitted is essential otherwise you may be stranded somewhere.

The illness can be so frightening you could pass out with it and living independently will mean overcoming this and where a Valium is not prescribed this need specialist training. You will have to build up to it by taking steps to overcoming things less scary first. Then this should give you your life back so you can do what you want with it again. Otherwise you might end up back into hospital or sheltered project where you may get institutionalised instead of self-reliant.

Getting out to being around the people who make you paranoid and who you think may be spying on you means you will run from that situation until you realise you don't have to. Having someone to go with you and talk you through it can be distracting so that you can refocus the mind on who is with you. Concentrating on the reassuring things they nurse or social worker is saying about the situation can then allow us to confront the danger once we have calmed down a bit.

The nurse can tell you that it is possible to cope with the fear by coexisting with it instead of having to run away physically or mentally and that you can be aware that the frightening people are there without having to do this. Starting to look at the people with your peripheral vision will bring home that you don't have to be afraid that they are there and being able to look at them directly really brings this home.

Doing this helps us with getting out and leading life for ourselves on more normal terms allows us to do more of what we want which will increase our sense of self-reliance. Being able to go shopping for food and clothes means we are less dependent on other people for this and is another challenge we have overcome. It also allows us to travel on public transport so we can get ourselves to day centres and the benefits that will bring.

Being able to travel means we can get out socially with friends and do leisure activities together and have relaxing times at the coast or go to restaurants to enjoy life more. This will provide more motivation to get on with the struggles in life ordinarily and with schizophrenia at the same time as this is what makes life more worth it. We also know we will be rewarded for the effort we put into it as with work and that should help the struggle and the illness can teach you this.

Courage and Strength

So the illness takes both courage and emotional strength. In my case I had a lot of emotional pain believing I had caused 9/11 and I had to have the emotional strength to believe I was still a good person. In particular I was also hearing voices criticising me about it, made worse by hiding away at home which concentrated my mind on things. Otherwise the fear of the punishment was terrifying and I deal with that to keep functional to do something about it too.

With my schizophrenia the danger was I might allow myself to go under with the illness and this forced me to realise something had to be done to survive it as it would only makes things worse. I had support with this but in the end it was up to me. We can sink or swim with this as when I was walking around the countryside at night in a blizzard. Then my survival instincts took over and I had to get home before I froze to death. This was how I survived before learning less stressful coping strategies.

We are encouraged to confront and distract yourself with the illness. This is easier said than done. This being distracted can calm you down a bit so you might be better trying to confront things. This will give you the chance to develop emotional strength to tackle the responsibility for 9/11 and handle the critical voices. Any insight could help here and allow us to grow emotionally through contact with our friends, family and partners also preventing any suicidal feelings.

We will still be loved by friends and family and partners even in spite of what we may have believed we have caused as with the pain of 9/11. This will provide a way of reminding us that you are valued as a person and as a human being despite the feeling of worthlessness caused by still delusional about the atrocity. We can still be who we are despite what has happened and loving relations can help this outcome. We may not dare look at ourselves believing we are capable of such things but being loved as we are may restore some emotional feeling in our lives and this can strengthen us to cope with the voices criticising about it. We can use what our family thinks about us to answer the voice and some of the shame the voice is causing might have an answer which again will reduce the emotional pain and abuse. From this point we may engaged with life on a more emotional level and become more developed and stronger for it.

Families will love us unconditionally for who we are and will help us self-actualise in that who we are has been spoilt by stigma and the delusions of 9/11. If we come to realise we are still worthwhile people and can be loved by family we will be more likely to engage in loving relations and friendships which will further deepen the feelings that could help us being who we are. They will esteem ourselves and we can further calm down with who we are. We will not feel so emotionally drained.

Given the extent of stigma which may also get to be violent people are going to be impressed with having to cope with this at the same time. Again, we can still be who we are in spite of being labelled weak and being to blame for our own problems. These feelings of shame will also be proven not to be true once we start to develop strength with the help of the mental health system and we can see that they are just ignorance. We will come out the situation much stronger and a lot of this will have been done a lot of this ourselves.

Overcoming the illness perhaps with *compassion* means you might find a way back into work and meeting a new partner. Things are going to get back to normal stresses in life. Then compassion allows connectedness with other people so we can form new attachments and relationships. This provides added strength to what is provided by supportive social relationships in the mental health system. So we can show ourselves that not coping with schizophrenia can be further overcome which will help reduce self-stigma.

Graded exposure is also needed. This may be difficult if you have had a breakdown before the onset of the illness and the symptoms of schizophrenia might cause another. Here the illness may sap your strength so you may be more susceptible to further breakdowns. Some CBT or CFT may be needed again here and so is very important. You have to practice the coping strategies slowly and at the early stages of exposure a sudden relapse could be caused before you are ready to handle the stress. If you might snap some Valium may be needed here even though it is often not prescribed.

People are often dumped by friends and family so sometimes there is little emotional strength. Help is needed as no one should have to cope with life with the illness on your own. Yet with schizophrenia we often are alone as the paranoia can isolate us. This makes sheltered accommodation very important as it provides 24/7 distraction from the fear and allows you to spend more time to establish new found friends. This also helps with the added worry of becoming depressed along with everything else. No one should have to deal with depression on their own, especially when psychotic.

One problem with learning all of this is that at the beginning the illness can seem so overwhelming that it is too insurmountable to do anything about it. Our strength can be so drained with fear and depression that nothing can be heal it. This even when we see other people coping with so that we don't feel strong enough to be like that. Even with help it is in the end still up to the individual person. This is where compassion can be most helpful as it can develop strength and resilience before we start down our path. Having a nightmare is very similar to the experience of schizophrenia and is a problem in that you need to have some rest to develop the strength to confront things. Here the better we feel ourselves during the day the more we can reduce the subconscious overload so this dreaming should improve eventually. It will then mean we can have a refuge from the symptoms during the day as we can take our tablets early and get off to bed when we are too ill on an evening. Again this should reduce the times of stress during the day allow a restful escape so we feel better the next day.

Relationships can be taxing but will also be a source of strength. Yet you will still need to have the strength to come through a breakthrough for this when ill. This worry should also be progressively dealt with the stronger we become emotionally and at first you don't feel strong enough to find a partner or friend. You need to be strong for other people which can also be taxing when you are ill yourself but you will be able learn this too. You will need to rebuild your life and getting all this back to normal will ease a lot of the stress here with the illness.

Once we see things starting to get better we might remember our dreams in life and want to pursue these too. It is important to set goals and then get on with achieving them. All of this will help keep us motivated. The struggle with schizophrenia as when our progress comes to be more difficult can make these things seem out of reach. So, it is often important to remember how far we have come and to keep looking ahead but not too far ahead.

Courage is also needed in confronting the stigma. This can isolate you and make you feel rejected by society for feeling weak again and may be another cause of self-stigma. Living with the hostile attitudes society has toward schizophrenia is terrifying and has to be dealt on top of the other problems that cause

fear like the paranoia and voices. This is where the mental health system can come in as you can meet other people at day centres where there is no stigma and live in sheltered housing which is a refuge from the society.

The presence of stigma it should be noted does not stop us climbing the Maslow tree even if society thinks we are social outcasts. You can meet new friends and partners within the mental health system. Then we can use this as a basis for getting out and about and doing all the things normal people enjoy without anyone knowing you are schizophrenic. Again going out for leisure opportunities like shopping, eating out and travel are all possible and will help us climb the Maslow tree.

With the onset of the schizophrenia the psychotic stresses are harder to deal with than all the initial life problems and will cause us to focus on the delusions and voices more. Yet the initial problems will still be there in combination with the schizophrenia and can make the illness worse. In tackling these life issues first should be a step-by-step approach to dealing with the schizophrenia in the end. It is important to understand how this works in that there will be a virtuous circle in the more we will cope with ordinary life we will be better placed to deal with the schizophrenia and vice versa.

In the case of slumming it there may be difficult finding the physical strength for house work which can be taxing and at first will add to the challenge. It might be necessary to employ a cleaner at first, but this is expensive. This should get easier over time and some exercise could help with this before the feelings of accomplishment with it can start. It will build up our physical strength which may be sapped by fear and we may enjoy the activity as distracting so we are not so worn out.

The fear can make you lose your appetite so taking a few deep breathes can help you eat. This will keep your strength up and the sedatives will mean you can get back to sleep. Then in between episodes we need to make the most of the good times and with some motivation in life we may overcome the constant anxiety which again will drain our strength. Keeping busy will allow us to do things like housework which will calm us down so we can look after ourselves better. All of this will keep us functional.

Having being washed in the morning and getting spruced up should provide a motivation for getting out of bed. We can then enjoy having breakfast in a tidy house and having washed our clothes we will feel better being in our own home, so that we do not let it revert to a slum. We will begin to realise the value of this to our state of mind with the schizophrenia. Catching sight of ourselves in the mirror we will see the changes in us and will makes us feel a bit more lively.

From this point on once we are more motivated from being a bit happier with life at home we might want to cheer up further by getting out and about. The obvious first port of call is day centre which can be a hive of activity. The feeling of being more alive will be helped by the social atmosphere and doing the courses on offer. This can help from everything to do with supported exercise to very academic things. Someone will instruct you in this so if it seem too difficult we can learn at our own pace.

Emotional pain can make looking after ourselves difficult and we need ways of generating strength. Then we can be functional in spite of the constant criticism of the voices which may stop us focusing on what needs to be done around the house. We have to be mindful that this needs to be done which can be difficult

when we are so caught up with what we are thinking and some mindfulness training can come in useful here. Focusing on courses as at day centres should also help with this.

All the same the time in between symptoms provides an opportunity to get things in order so we can still keep eating and look after ourselves. Relaxation techniques like Yoga and Meditation are relevant so when we see the symptoms beginning to deteriorate we can keep busy with something relaxing. Often though in between the worst phases when the illness is manifest as anxiety these will be more effective and allow us to build strength and practice courage ready for the next more serious episode of paranoia. It is not just about reducing the fear as you will still need to confront other things head on doing the things that make you more resilient. You will begin to understand that emotional strength like courage is a gradual process and that both reinforce one another. Then you can watch them both grow together combining the steps in each area which can mean have can come a long way. Then instead of thinking what is the point in suffering with the illness seems so overwhelming you feel less helpless as you can by taking each step at a time you can significantly improve your life.

One example here is that even the housework has to start with a number of approaches before it can be tackled. On the emotional side you may be too depressed to be motivated for it especially as it requires some physical effort. With emotional pain we may be too weakened to take on the physical challenge and it has to be built up by doing a few things at a time which in turn will stop you being too depressed for it. But the fear saps also your strength for it and is worsened by adding to the depression and anxiety caused by seeing yourself giving in. Some courage is a factor too to taking on this challenge.

Another way of feeling better is that you need to get out of the house for some exercise and fresh air. Yet this may be difficult if you think the neighbours are spying on you. The fear can snap your strength again and makes it difficult to do on your own. Relaxation classes can help calm you down to help make you the physical effort but support maybe required and crucially day centres can provide you with some one to go with. This will help you train for doing other things like housework.

We can feel in touch with life once we calm down and know how we fit with the world. We will be open to positive influences which will help shape our identity and will get back control over the life that had thrown us so many problems. We will feel in charge of our future and can start making decisions to solve and improve things. Eventually we should self actualise either within or without the mental health system and begin to relax about thing in life which had been such a struggle before. We can show ourselves and society that we have not only overcome our weaknesses but can achieve being ourselves by overcoming our problems with being schizophrenic.

The more we engage with services the more we will feel resilient to the illness and we should be empowered to take on the fear it causes and life's other challenges. We can feel this empowerment within ourselves after taking some initial steps there will be something to build on. It will also give us confidence to continue the process until we become self-efficient when we can then feel self-empowered to do this without help. That is a good feeling.

Being empowered and feeling self-reliant lets us know we can achieve things and that feeling is good for positive thinking about life. We will slowly have the strength to hold down a relationship and a job which will further develop these feelings so we will think achieving our goals and dreams will now not be such a distant prospect. Our achievements will multiply and our goals will develop beyond just trying to be more functional with the illness.

Day Centres and Sheltered Accommodation

In sheltered accommodation there is emotional support to people who have mental health problems and having people who care about you can be soothing. Yet being in love can be more profound than having support from staff as can having family support. In particular family occasions can help with relaxing and the emotional side of family life and will remind us that not everything in life is composed of anxiety and depression. We may feel more lively on these occasions and we will look forward to them. As Whitney Houston sang “lets us understand we are here to handle things together.”

We will all be less frightened by stigma as living in sheltered accommodation should help protect us and allow a context of emotional support. Living with people 24/7 allows us to get to know our new friends very well and there will always be someone there when you need it. This should help calm you down. Meeting new friends and partners should be a source of strength with the fear and happiness with the depression, allowing courage and emotional strength. The next step with coping means you can eventually live independently. You can live the way you want then and this will help agency, self-determination and increase the feelings of empowerment so we can be more ourselves when trying to self-actualise.

Doing day centre courses are very enlightening as you can learn new skills and may lead onto doing courses at a local day Further Education College. This will then help provide more choice and let us train for the jobs that attracts us and study is a bridging step for getting back into our kind of employment. The college will even have staff that can support students with mental health problems and can even classroom assistant who will sit in class with you to provide support in the new social environment. Again, this is important to self-determination which can be increased by having new qualifications behind us. Then we can grow our self-confidence particularly if we learn something new and overtime, we can build on these to quite a high level. We may feel also like we have succeeded in life rather than having failed when we first snapped and looking ahead it may even help us on the way to achieving our dreams. All this again will helps self-actualise and may help us get what we want materially which can also be a very empowering thought.

Lots of things can build your strength before you can confront the schizophrenia and we need ways of relaxing and reducing stress. One is. having a friendly chat and some food (provided you don't lose your appetite through fear) and a cup of coffee can bring you round to start getting to the point where you feel ready to do courses. Not having the illness all the time can help provide rest too. Then once we have relaxed and got our energy back we may feel better able to focus on a relaxation course and the improving

concentration may lead us to doing a more academic course. This should help generate feelings of accomplishment if we pass the exams and will increase our self-esteem as we realise we can still do things and are not completely helpless in the face of the illness.

Making new friends and meeting partners in the mental health system means we will bring out the emotional side and being loving and caring will give a life a meaning and so there be motivation to find work and engages socially. This should help with the step from the day centre into work. Then you will feel more apart of things and may become more balanced and harmonious so you will find your place in the world. We will feel we belong somewhere and his should help you cope with life's stresses better and will bring out your emotions and better. Finding your own place in life you will also relax about where you fit and this should have a calming effect.

One issue with the emotional side derives from the fact that looking after yourself can be very difficult and if you cannot look after yourself how are you going to look after other people? There may be problems with meeting friends and partners. You can dig yourself into a hole you cannot get out of with this or may get too lazy to take on the challenge. So, some support maybe first needed from the mental health system and this is the first step standing on your own two feet. So that after that you may rely on support from the mental health staff in sheltered living until you get back on track with this and are motivated to get over the laziness. It is also again important to have graded exposure to fear so that it doesn't sap your strength to allow this first step and you will feel better not to live in a slum and as you can look after yourself better. Then it may seem that if you can look after you self and house you can now look after a partner as if you have taken that first step other things will seem possible. In turn meeting friend and partners will act as a source of strength so the that the fear does not stops you being functional. Then it will also motivate you so you are not ending up lazy which will mean you will not revert to having the same problems.

Thinking of coping with life with schizophrenia should be similar in terms of what you are up against in normal life and once we start getting our life back on track and have achieved a few things that we first thought difficult we will start to feel a bit more resilient. If there are relationship problems and work stresses we will be prepared for each so we will feel more confident we can deal with them as we have been through them before. Also, the more we particate in the society both for work and leisure we will start to enjoy life and we will feel we can take on more challenges which should also help with stress and we will even know stress is good for you if you can cope with it. If things do go drastically wrong so losing your job or partner again life will not generate the prospect of fear as it did the first time round so the anxiety and pain can be answered, and the mental health system will still be there if needed.

Positive reinforcement also makes us feel better emotionally, restores our self-esteem, and lets us be who we are. This will make us emotionally stronger in our lives. Yet it needs someone on hand to provide the reinforcement and somewhere to live that is a safe context for it before we can strike out again with life. People you meet may accept you for who you are and it is easier to be yourself, alternatively if anyone criticises you can find your own voice to defend you. So instead of being vulnerable to what other people

think and the stress or pain this may cause we will be in a positions not to depend on support for dealing with this. We can live without the need to be sheltered.

Finding Work

At work you can find your own niche in the society and may have support from new people you meet in the mental health system who will care about you. You will have met friends outside the system who can support you at work and with life in the society when your other friends are too ill. They will be there to help with the other challenges in life and will be more a part of your social circle being derived from the job you do. Any problems at work can be answered as your friends can act as a source of advice. Over time we may begin to learn we are not on our own with these pressures of competition and can feel more secure in our job the more experienced we get with it. We may find a stable place in the big bad world so we will lose fear of the rest of it.

If you can cope with schizophrenia there is not a lot of things in normal life that will frighten you and as we have noted this will mean employment might be possible. This perception will increase as with the added strength provided with supported courage. We will know such things are gradual so we will first need a job that isn't too stressful. This might have to be part time at first, doing something more simple than a day centre course and from there the more knowledge and experience we get will help us climb the ladder of progression. Over time it will also reassure us we can keep our job and find new positions if necessary if we have to later change employment.

Holding down a job is stressful on top of the schizophrenia and you will remember the work stresses that caused the illness in the first place. Finding a less stressful job has to be balanced against the added stress of the illness. Doing nothing is stressful too so some work may be needed by many people. First we need to test the water here and see what day centre courses can be dealt with. Then to consider later the choices available and where this might lead us. It may help with a change of career which is a very motivating thought and will help build further confidence.

Compassion can give us the strength to soothe the illness and once that has been overcome maybe the question could become is the pressure of a job is not going to be so daunting? More than this holding down a job requires some strength of character which may have been shattered when having schizophrenia. So again, the opportunities of employment such as they are will not be available to many people with schizophrenia but can be helped with supported courage in addition to the compassion.

We may get asked difficult question at the job interview? The perceived values of not coping in life are going to reappear because if we cannot cope with the stresses in life which have driven us mad then how are you going to hold down a job? Again, looking ahead we are going to need some way of getting the stigma across and that we might be strong enough to deal with the illness with compassion? It needs explaining just because we have been weak to get schizophrenia and had to give up employment with proper support this too can be answered. Advances in medical treatment are also relevant in this situation as well finding your strength of character will come across.

It is the stated aim of our local day centre that the provision of its services are designed to help you find your own way back into the world. Yet although only a few members have managed to do this it has only been possible in a few cases. That means that we are doing courses for fun or therapy is one thing but to take it any further we still have to be strong enough to take on the challenge to employment. The problem is that doing courses may only be for a few hours a week and doing a job may require longer periods of effort and concentration.

The way this seems to work is that learning new activities provide distraction from the symptoms so we get to be a bit more functional. Yet that distraction does seem to work and in less severe cases the activities might be possible for longer. All the same there may be great hope here with developing more effective coping strategies and some amount of permitted work is often allowed if it is thought to be therapeutic. You can then try the work environment out before you decide what to do about it.

It may be difficult to get motivated to work but we learn at day centres that the social contact cheers you up and makes you feel more like it. You will get socialised back into the way of things with working and that will lead to further experience of the work environment such as having work mates. That socialising can make you feel part of things in your job and will help with self-blame of feeling weak as we begin to be accepted by our work mates.

John Nash managed to hold down a job despite severe symptoms and the important thing about him was that he was a high achiever. That means we don't necessarily have to give up on the jobs we were doing once they became too stressful. We can get back to where we used to be in our chosen profession and maybe get further on with our careers, even beyond where we used to be. This thought is inspirational in terms of motivation and the challenges we face and is important when things seem too gradual that we might still get there is the end.

Job security is a worry for many people but receiving housing support and being properly financed can help with this and will cushion the blow of being unemployed. The more you get financially established with life living it independently and the more your house starts to feel like our own home and means we will have got somewhere to live without losing it again. Moving house is one of the most stressful things you can do there should be less worry about job insecurity and of losing your home again. The compassion therapy may also make you more reliable in your job with less risk of losing it which is very reassuring and can be relied upon to soothe any further experience of joblessness.

Standing on your own two feet and providing a service to society is all good for your self-esteem. We may take a pride in this and really enjoy your job and your chosen way of life. Instead of feeling alienated by societies values we will find or remember the values we had before we got ill. Again, this is important to know we will fit in with other people and is another way we will feel connected with things and more self-determined.

It provides another emotional platform for meeting new people and you may end up dealing with the general public so social skills at day centres is going to be very important. These skills may have been lost with the paranoia so we can get a chance to relearn them. We will need confidence to deal with other

people and this may have been damaged by life being ill and integrating as at a day centre which has a very social atmosphere will help that self-confidence will grow. There being around people from all walks of life will increase our knowledge and understanding of people in general and will generate interesting conversation about our different experiences with life and as we progress into work that interest in things will continue to develop further.

It is a reason to get out of bed on a morning and stops the boredom in schizophrenia as there is often time on your hands. Again, this prevents the symptoms being so bad as there is no distraction and in many ways a job is what you need for this. The more we take on these challenges of getting a more stressful job a further series of gradual steps is then possible. You can ask yourself where do you want to be in five years time which is a very motivating thought and then we make plans to get there.

Finding a job then is going to be very therapeutic. There will be some esteem in standing on your own two feet and not being dependent on benefits. Work is good for you and is therapeutic in keeping you busy, while the mental health system can train you for this. Finding for yourself is going to feel good too and add to all the other therapeutic feelings we have been experiencing as we become aware we are not totally reliant on others to cope with our lives, even though there is no shame in this.

Although we may be inspired by successful people like John Nash and Elyn Saks nobody pretends that success is easy and we will know that it is difficult under normal conditions even without a mental illness. They may think well I cannot be like that but at least I have under things in my life like friends and family. The point here is that we must learn to win and get service users to the point where this is possible however daunting it may seem.

One way of doing this is that the illness forces you to struggle and not to give in to it so reflecting on how difficult it was to just stay alive and from there to getting life back to normal has been an amazing achievement. From there we may begin to look at other challenges and view them in the same way. We need to see the illness not as a problem but as an opportunity though of course this is easier said than done.

One way of changing these perceptions is not to look at people who have achieved highly which may seem out of reach but to set our sights lower as we will find inspiration there too. We can visit the disability employment advisor where we learn some employers are sympathetic to schizophrenia and who have met people have actually found jobs. Then we know we are not the only ones following this path back into work and also can access support and learn from meeting other people in these situations that have cope with it.

Still the problem with employment is that it is going to take more help from the government to find it. Once an employer finds out you are schizophrenic the stigma is going to resurface. This will be a bar to achieving our full potential. Again, the system tries to provide some opportunity which again reflects its underlying caring attitude. Having a mental health problem in the UK means a lot of job opportunities will still allow a guaranteed interview under the scheme of being positive about disabled people. The

employment service can link in with employers sympathetic to the illness. There will always be hope here for those who are well enough to contemplate work.

Conclusions

In sum it must be noted again that although the prejudice of weakness and self-blame in schizophrenia are so deeply rooted in our traditional values it isn't necessarily going to go away overnight. Yet there is growing evidence from charities like MIND and RETHINK that things are slowly changing. Gradually this will provide more and more opportunities as we realise about the paradox of fear with schizophrenia. These attitudes are the result of ignorance and prejudice but can be educated against.

Creating a space which allows service users to narrate their stories of endurance and courage will allow people with schizophrenia to talk and educate about their problems and challenges they face. People will be able to say how courageous they have been and so others may learn the illness is not their own fault. That space will educate about the paradox of fear with schizophrenia and help against the stigma.

Here with supported courage we can again take on the big bad world and end up being a part of it to the point we can get our relationships and independent living back to normal. There is even the theoretical possibility of finding employment as we learn to cope with things more and more. The whole problem is to understand we still need help with finding the strength to cope with schizophrenia and that self-reliance needs to be taught rather than being stigmatised as a form of weakness.

This still leaves the problem that changing things with the stigma are gradual. We are just going to have to put up with it in the meantime and try to enjoy life within the mental health system such as it is. This is very possible as it has been argued here allows for possibilities for coping with life so it will get back to normal. Here we have provided a pathway where such people can get help very effectively which will make this a reality. We can in the end learn to stand on our own two feet and regain our sense of independence and self-determination.

Situational Responses to Schizophrenic Anxiety

The anxiety associated with schizophrenia may be controlled depending on the situation that is causing it. This article will go through a variety of places and problems where it is manifest. The outcome of these circumstances mean I can put the anxiety to the back of your mind. This has been possible as there are various ways of doing this as by frequenting and using places you can go to or be in which allows the mind to control the anxiety rather than confronting it head on. In doing this has been helpful to use graded exposure to the fear so the chances of trying to distract yourself from it are more possible. The article will detail this from place to place and situation to situation as they have happened to me. Then by describing the two main situations with it: either getting out and about for distracting or by staying at home and thinking about things.

Waiting to calm down with the fear takes up a lot of time and puts the mind on hold still thinking about the paranoia. You can go through some fear rushes while doing this, but the answer is that you have to

hang onto something mentally reassuring until it passes. Often there is no way of stopping the anxiety though it can sometimes get distracted at these points even when you are still focused on the fear to some extent. Here breathing exercises and safe place imagery are very important but I cannot get them to work. Often too they don't always prescribe you Valium. Then there are other ways of dealing with it either by telling yourself you have just got to put up with it or while trying to think of something less or by getting out and about. The fear varies in how bad it gets from mild anxiety, to fear rushes of differing intensity or intimations of terror. Then certain situations can help with controlling the anxiety and keep it at reasonable levels.

Anxiety is an ongoing effect of schizophrenia but with the imperative to survive with it means you can be motivated to overcome it by forcing the paranoia to the back of your mind. This avoids the full-blown fear I get from time to time. This until you fully realise, I had actually caused 9/11 and that that might also bring some punishment on. This account details my reactions to a lot of such things when out such as thinking other people might be reading my mind about the atrocity which then further activates the voices. This is helped in that there are ways of dealing with the threat involved by mentally absorbing it. Then you can put these thoughts to the back of your mind and concentrate on something else more distracting.

The first situation is when out I keep thinking I am causing bad events like shutting down the economy or causing wars. It is difficult not to catch sight of newspapers telling people about this. Yet there are ways of rationalising your behaviour that distracts the voices in that suffering from all the bad things I believed I have caused makes us better people. Believing I am causing suffering in the world makes it a better place and I believe I am responsible for bad things so that we can arrive at utopia. This keeps the voices quiet as anything new that happens bad has a reason the voices accept.

Yet the catastrophes I believe I am responsible for are a bit detached from the rest my thoughts. Most of this thinking is at a subconscious level as it goes over my head and the voices don't seem to react about until it becomes visible and at the forefront of my mind. If it looks to the voice, I have guilty feelings about 9/11 and have done it to harm instead of helping people then I feel I might be punished. The danger here is that I cannot control my thinking to prevent this.

I also believe I can trigger off other catastrophes with my thoughts when out. Fortunately, this rarely happens as the situational techniques work so well. Since this thought is rarely at the front of my mind it might be safe so then I can eventually forget about the catastrophes which also stops the voices. When calmed down it is possible to dialogue with the voices for example about how good your writing is which is a way of atoning that also keeps them quiet. Then also on occasion I believe I can cause good things like saving the environment which is reassuring. I eventually let the delusional catastrophes become subconscious again and life gets back to normal. This is the background to the situational anxiety when out and about and I can tell myself that if I can get through life as quickly as possible using these circumstances, I won't be held responsible.

Initially there is a lot of anxiety getting psyched up for going out and I keep putting off doing it. I have to coerce myself to do this. It helps here by getting cleaned up earlier which takes some time and is a distraction from the voices while doing this. At this point I feel a bit better though there remains some anxiety as I still know I am going out. Yet it often happens that keeping busy for going out takes some hours after I have woken up. The reason is that anxiety often combines with laziness and a lack of motivation. So, it is more difficult to get pulled round on top of the early morning fear. Then forcing yourself in taking that first step of getting ready overcomes this too though on some days this can take hours. The next step involves car travel, and this can help the situation too.

Being a passenger in my mother's car can have a positive effect on me as a car represents defended space and I feel safe in there. It means I can watch people out of the window with some seclusion which calms me down though I sometimes still feel they react to me. I get entranced with what is happening which takes my mind off things, so I regard it as safe. Then the safety and detachment allow me to settle in so I can talk with my mother. Though here again the paranoid thoughts do not always go but I can relax enough dialogue with the voices once I am calmed down in the car and show them my good points. This all means I can pass some time without being held responsible.

Driving in the car means brings back memories of driving and journeying during times before the illness which means I am calmer and more reassured. It is like being in a safe place which is a taught anxiety management technique. When going passed people I can watch them in ways I cannot do when out walking and passing them along a path. When being a passenger this becomes more of a distraction than a problem and in contrast to walking it means I can get past people a lot quicker. Then I don't flip out. It is a form of safe hiding which gets me out of the house and is a first step to getting out at the destination where the anxiety is more pronounced.

So when in the car the situation is more relaxed and the mind can operate differently. I can talk with my mother about my life, get absorbed into analysing the delusional thinking or focus on the internet on the phone all of which absorbs the thinking in a way which are distracting. I can keep moving in and out of these absorbing things, so I am sometimes aware of the observing voices and sometimes not. This allows some rest from them. I gets used to doing this, so I associate it with much safety. Then as with being at home there are no bad memories of being in the car which could trigger off a negative reaction that might bring on the delusions and voices.

When driving to places I have associated with danger getting out of the car means I have to launch myself into situations where thinking about it or the thought of doing it would put me off. Sometimes I feel stupid doing this but not confronting the fear means it might build so I might not be able to get out at all which would make things worse in other ways. With a car though you can quickly get back to your safe place. Then the situation of sitting in the car park makes me feel safe enough to think about my delusions in a more positive way and with insight which also keeps the voices quiet. At these times I can reflect on my delusions and build up confidence so eventually I am calmed down enough to leave the car and re-enter the shopping mall or retail park.

Once out of the car and feeling in danger everything is in a rush and full of adrenalin. This is driven by the subconscious threat drive, and I have programmed my mind with these thoughts that might help. This thinking allows me to get through dangerous situations like queuing as I can focus on the rush to get out of them. Speeding things up creates a situation which makes me less paranoid about the people in cafes, supermarkets etc. I can then look at the food on offer and this distracts me from the people in front of me in the queue and I can keep my back to those behind. Focusing on the anxiety and what to do about it allows me to create a situation where I am not so affected by the paranoid thoughts that create it. So being in a café has become a natural environment for me allowing me focus on other things than the anxiety. When out I try to avoid eye contact with cashiers and keep focused on a credit card machine. This too switches the mind off to affecting other people in the queue and I try to pick a seat and table away from the others. It is a case of out of sight out of mind as If I do not look at them and look guilty it doesn't trigger off the paranoia which again keeps the voices quiet. While in a café I can focus on the coffee and what I am eating which this helps further with the anxiety. My brain allows me to be distracted enough to use the mobile internet and this also takes my mind off other people sitting around me. It is easier than the supermarket as I do not look at the people since in a supermarket I have to look where I am going, and this means some accidental eye contact.

Feeling part of a crowd in the aisle part of the shopping centre or mall I can look around myself at the people going past and do not react to them. This too is because there is no eye contact or feeling visible. It calms me down a bit as I don't get such negative reactions to the people. Then I feel a sense of freedom which calms me down further and makes me feel safe. Yet there are problems as that if I think I have caused 9/11 then what else could happen? So, I think I might have also caused economic recessions and have been closing down the shops I am visiting with my thoughts. Then I have to get through areas where there are cheap shops without looking at them and the feelings of just being part of the crowd helps here. Often too other shops come along to fill the gaps in the market replacing the closed ones. So, although there is always some anxiety about this at the back of my mind there is some damage limitation which has a calming effect.

Sometimes when out my avoidance strategies for getting through the situation and getting past the people don't work and I become aware of them. I wake up out of the immersion and look guilty at them. This can cause some nervous damage and puts me off going out as it might be safer to stop in as there is less chance of dropping myself in it about 9/11. However, the imperative soon takes over again so I keep trying with it to get out of the house. The situation is helped that going back to the car to limit the damage caused is something which doesn't happen very often. I can also blame what I am thinking about 9/11 on the schizophrenia so the other people will just think I am being delusional. Then I soon sink back into the immersion of being part of the crowd.

Sometimes I have to get out of the city centre crowd and walk down by the river. The river is like the railway line walk I on near my home and you have to get past people on a one-to-one basis. This is more difficult than being in a crowded street but there are other ways of doing it. I think I have got to get out

and do this too as it no life sitting in the house all the time which is also not therapeutic. It also gets me away from the observing voices a bit and while out walking I can take the internet with me. Being in my home area I can settle into my surroundings more again which is again a bit reassuring. Although doing the walking also needs music on a Walkman. That it keeps my brain thinking of something else similar to using the internet when at home. The result is that I cannot hear what passers-by are saying but I still have to be careful not to look at them. This is not always effective and sometimes I feel more visible. Then my threat system flips out when passing people and my mind tries to divert my attention from the situation and thinking of distracting things to say like hello to passers. This only partially works as this gets me noticed. This is less of a problem with people on cycles who go past me quicker though after that I can get past them and remain calm.

As I launch myself into dangerous situations, like wandering round the supermarket, I need coping other strategies to blend in. Sometimes I just have to ignore the situation of passing people who I become visible to, and this works better than the railway line. At these points I can keep telling myself to focus on the shopping aisles for things I am looking for which will avert my gaze. Yet this is not always possible, and people react to me, so I have to pretend to myself nothing had happened.

I also have other ways of getting past people in supermarkets as I can keep focused on the thought that the bad things, I have caused about 9/11 makes us better people. This keeps the voices quiet so at this point and my mind can ignore what is happening so that I don't react with paranoia or build up negative associations of place being in the shop. It is then easier to go back there. Finally, on coming out of the shop this allows me start to calming down sometimes and my mind does not feel in danger as I can then get back to the car.

As I got into a habit with launching myself into dangerous situations so the damage to my nerves is not so great each time I practice it. That is reassuring for both supermarkets and walking where I know these thinking strategies will work. After a while the force of habit means I am a bit more relaxed when I go in there and going through the door means the anxiety is at the back of my mind even though it might still visibly affect my behaviour.

There are other situational problems as I cannot be around telephones when out as I think the line must be tapped. When out walking with my mother she is often called by someone which means at this point the anxiety takes over and I have to run off to get out of ear shot. It is not always possible for my mum to ignore the call, so I have to get out of the way but once the call is over calm descends as if nothing has happened. The problem is that thinking I have caused 9/11 leaves me wondering what else might happen including people I care about. Sometimes the only answer to the anxiety here is to ignore the problem and hope nothing happens though I am still anxious again at the back of my mind as something might. These thoughts occur to me from time to time and especially when I am with my mother but at other times when thinking about the delusions, I forget about them.

When out if one place gets strong associations of paranoia there is always somewhere else to go. So, even if this happens a lot there are still feelings of being generally safe in a lot of other places which

means you can go back to dangerous ones to break the association. It also stops you being housebound with it. Sometimes though the whole thing can make you feel anxious and stop you confronting it by going out. That just makes you feel more anxious sitting round the house and so the usual thought methods of dealing with it indoors works less well. Then you have to persuade yourself to keep trying with going out either coercing yourself into it or having support so that someone comes with you. Then with help you can break the associations of place again and things might not be as bad as they seem though it might take a push to make you believe this.

Forcing myself to go out walking or shopping takes my mind off things and provides a rest from paranoia. It gets through life with the voices and provides some positive emotion which might click cause pleasure feelings (this also opens up your brains which could be used to atone for 9/11). I feel an imperative here not to give into the voices and keep active. This gets me up in the morning and gets me cleaned up. After that doing things other become natural and it is easier to get on with the day. It just takes that initial push. Then the anxiety sets in and focuses the mind on it but having been motivated to keep active during the day helps with being distracted. Next, I also have to coerce myself to go out but again I feel better for it. Slumming it and staying in all day just makes you lazy and depressed so it is easy to fall into a trap of doing nothing with this and there is less distraction. You need to overcome the laziness and lack of motivation if you are to deal with the anxiety in these ways.

My family have the same loser psychology as I do so shopping is very important to us all. It means when out we have something in common to talk about and we can be both immersed in doing this together which stops much anxiety and keeps the voices quiet. The voices will agree that much of what I am immersed in at these times is important enough to divert my attention. Then when out also talking on an emotional level or getting family support with the schizophrenia further quietens the voices. This because it shows a good side to your character which the voices have at times endorsed this so then I feel a bit safer. I also get the same reassurance from my daily contact on the phone which is very supportive with what is happening and have the same experience when going home or visiting other relatives, although some of this had to stop with the paranoia about what harm might happen to them in the way I caused 9/11.

When out with my mother I can link the conversation in with talking the loser psychology that overtly values material things and we can go shopping together. Being supported in this has meant that over the years I have accumulated a lot of possessions so that the loser threat psychology is satisfied and so I feel better for it with my mood. This is important since as the band Magnum put it not having all this "is something we all appear to dread." That again can help your threat system and so the more you accumulate over the years the more this happens and the happier I feel.

I am also into other things that take up some time getting out and do not revolve around writing to satisfy the voices. In addition to shopping, I am interested in archery, guns, travel, eating out. This improves your quality of life so that it is not all suffering. It also helps keep the voices quiet as it shows I am not so worried about my abilities and what could happen to me that I cannot spend time and enjoy other

things. Often, I don't get a negative reaction to the situation and once in that threatening environment the mind can focus on what you are doing or what you are eating so I come through it. I can pay attention to the menu or product instead.

Again, this acting normal is good for the brains threat system. The problem is this is also dangerous, and I still have to launch myself into these situations. If the coping strategies do not work, then I am in a rush to get home which might take a taxi ride. At other times I may still have rush through the crowd and avoid them by going down the river which is always quiet and has relaxing natural surroundings. Yet as long as I don't draw attention to myself this works for doing all these other activities and I am reassured by the experience as if I buy or eat something that helps reduce the threat reaction.

I am good at archery but the anxiety of going there is sometimes electric. This has an indirect effect on my nervous system which I can put up with without completely flipping out. Talking to the other people in the club is possible as archery is something we all have in common. This means I can feel a part of things and more at home there. This feeling grows as the years go by and I feel more relaxed by being there. This allows me to concentrate on the shooting and target and dampen down or stop the anxiety taking over so I only feel it peripherally in the body. Again, this allows some enjoyment from competing in the sport which is then possible and further diverts my attention from the fear. I got used to these extremes of being nervous to the point I enjoyed the fear and being able to work round it which was an achievement. I could also show the voices I wasn't letting my anxiety get in the way of achieving things in life. Then as with doing some further education it also meant from the point of view of the voices that being good at the sport showed I wasn't thick.

Holidays are another situation for getting out that can be helpful. At these times you get into the idea of the holiday and absorb the homely feel of the place you are in as it has a holiday feeling. Then going back to the same place again and again makes it feel safer though it is still best to go out of season when it is a lot quieter. Where we go isn't ever that busy and at the coast, I can breathe more easily with the sea air and quiet beach. It helps that I can go with a friend or family so I can rely on them to get through the anxiety and being quiet it is easier to appreciate your surroundings. Unlike the railway line at home, I can distance myself when walking past people on the beach which means I don't flip out in the same way. Then the anxiety is much less pronounced and gives the mind a rest.

Going abroad on holiday had another effect on me as it needs to be organised right so the imperative to not mess it up takes over which puts the anxiety to the back of my mind. Thinking you are responsible for 9/11 means an airport is the last place to be but the need to organise the travel right takes over and forces me to concentrate despite the delusional anxiety. This reaction continues on arrival as there is a need to travel around the resort sightseeing. Then on the return journey you must negotiate a foreign airport and catch the flight home including the transfers back. Things can go wrong with this, so you have got to have your wits about you. In my case for example once on holiday we had to ring the emergency help line. We were dropped off on a street corner without any instructions to find the villa and how to get the keys and again that put any paranoid thoughts out of my head.

In contrast with the anxiety at home it is often there from the first thing in the morning as the voices are always watching so I have to be thinking about things all day long from morning until night. I am often caught up thinking about the how the suffering I have caused makes us better people and going over such things that might atone for this and reduce threat. Constantly reiterating this makes me feel safe like academic study and I can be very creative with it so there is always new angles to try which takes up a lot of the day. Running out of these means the last line of defence against the voices will have gone. Otherwise, there is no getting away from the anxiety at home and I would just have to accept whatever delusional fear or terror I have. Then try to get on with things as best I can.

At home the anxiety gets tiring during the day so that I often have to go back to bed. Yet this helps get through the time and allows some rest though this can disrupt sleep patterns which means you cannot get to sleep at certain points when you most need it. Getting to bed earlier the next night may not be possible if you start getting symptoms late on though after a while the sedatives in the clozapine knock you out so mostly the anxiety doesn't keep you up too long.

Constant anxiety means I often don't get such bad nightmares as compared to the terrifying dreams schizophrenia can cause. Usually with anxiety I only tend to dream about the movies I was watching just before I go to sleep but they can still be a bit disturbing at the same time. So anxiety and not sleeping can drain your energy even though most of the time some distraction is necessary to calm down. Then after a couple of hours you pull round.

When the day begins, and more anxiety sets in this isn't so tiring as being anxious can be remedied by getting out and doing something. So, the feelings of being worn out wear off by being active. Then you pull round so the next night you might sleep better, as long as a nightmare doesn't accidentally return. The following day these things leave you in better shape for coping with being anxious again. That means you can get into a cycle with doing this so you can enjoy life in between and tell yourself the tiring times will pass.

Also, at home I am constantly deliberating about other things and I spend a lot of time thinking about how my life has turned out and my life plan. The loser psychology is complicit with this and playing its "game of life" as Roxette called it offers much hope for distraction. The problem is that thinking about the loser psychology itself can be damaging as it prompts thinking about societies attitude to it and negative images of it in the media. With it I spend a lot of time thinking about organisational things like arranging the house or my finances and the thinking is very similar to organising academic materials and shows the voice I can do other normal things again. Much the same happens when using the internet and this goes along with having a lot of information technology qualifications which is absorbing with the loser psychology and keeps the voices quiet. Often too I am deliberating about my writing and posing myself questions all the time and answering them which gets through much of the day.

Another reason I can calm down with things and regard the place I am living it at home is because I have had friends or family round which gives good memories of place. This has been helped since I have had the money to spend on it personalising it so it feels like my own place. It is an enjoyable place to be since

I have done it out the way I like, and those associations carry me through the worst of the psychoses. Being able live a bit with proper financing helps me enjoy life at home as the good associations of affording life outside of it all go together so that I am much happier with life. Thus, when I get back and all this has a soothing effect on my nerves and stops any stressful depression which again keeps the anxiety at bay.

Also, at home talking on the internet with my online friends engages my emotions and having people who like me further helps with the anxiety. It engages my emotional intelligence and absorbs me for a while which passes some more time. I can also get these emails and these positive feelings when out walking. I am not on my own with the anxiety at this point and can rely on this when I am around the house a lot. Yet this feeling when indoors however homely still means the mind concentrates on the symptoms so that being in what I associate as a safe place doesn't always allow for keeping the voices at the back of my mind. There is no way of stopping the fear at these times which means it often goes over my head, so the anxiety sets back in again.

Also being trapped at home can cause some depression as it may also focus the mind on the anxiety which can affect your mood. Anxiety can go along with the depression so not calming down and stopping the depression means life with both will be very stressful. Importantly the depressed thoughts are often linked to the anxiety and vice versa. So not focusing on the depression can make you less anxious which then helps keep these thoughts away from the forefront of your thinking.

The neighbours are another source of worry when at home. It means putting the bins out has to be done carefully as there are associations of danger as when I can look at them in a way that gives my culpability about 9/11. The front door which is in a cul-de-sac is nearer my neighbours and so will trigger off these reactions but the back door wont. I can use this entrance to go walking or for getting into my mother's car though there is still some anxiety if the people out the back are in their windows or gardens. This situation can be helped by not looking at them or by crossing the street in avoidance. There is still some anxiety from time to time as I cannot guarantee I will never bump into the people living next to me, but I am so caught up thinking about my delusions all day this only occurs to me now and again. All the same this has happened once or twice when parcels have been left with my neighbours for delivery and they have been banging on the door. Sometimes I answer it and sometimes I don't, but I have been lucky that it has not triggered off an episode of psychoses which means the associations of danger when living at home have been less pronounced.

Also, when being around the house I can combine my thought processes with housework and I keep remembering things I have published and got right. This is possible if I keep the blinds drawn so that I am that caught with thinking about 9/11 I forget about the surveillance form the neighbours. This strategy is not always possible as I can get caught when I occasionally look out the window and see people outside. Then the same the paranoia soon reverts to 9/11 again which causes fear rushes.

It also helps at this point that being round the house is much less anxious if you have got out and about to confront it at some point. This means you feel safer from other people with the isolation of catching

sight of your neighbours as when being inside your home. Then you can calm down in there after a bad experience with the anxiety outside. So, your mind soon reverts to thinking about other important things such as how your life within the mental health system is turning out.

My friend comes to the house once per week and I move in and out of a situation of engaging in conversation with him. Even at these points I can withdraw into thinking about the psychoses and writing about it. Being around a friend means I can settle down to the conversation more and my mind drifts back into the writing. Having a friend round and being at home allows this to happen as a lot of other things drift into mind to talk about with my friend. This keeps the anxiety at the back of my mind though a serious relapse I still possible.

This situation is a bit less anxious than confronting the anxiety when out and about as it helps that I can play music to listen together too. Conversationally we can talk about important things like going on holiday which have to be thought through properly. This allows something to discuss that forces my attention on things the voices will not comment on or interrupt. As with being out with my mother the conversation flows naturally and lasts for a couple of hours at time. This situation makes sure the anxiety stays at the back of my mind for quite some time.

Having friends also allows someone to go to local pub with me but this situation is more difficult with the anxiety even though I have got someone with me. In contrast to the retail park shops the associations of being anxious are much stronger at the pub. This is because the same staff are there all the time and may notice my strange thought about 9/11. This again and so will trigger off an episode unless I can keep the anxiety in check. All the same something that helps even in these dangerous situations is concentrating on the internet and food. So, after a while of being there I can get through the situation though the anxiety levels are still very difficult. Having a few drinks at the pub is a good way of keeping the anxiety in check so that the mind is doing something else instead of being paranoid.

At home the anxiety can last all day, so you have got to get on with it as there is no choice. It means not giving up thinking all the time which can be exhausting as that would only make you descend into terror. The paranoia is frightening and leads you to keep functioning intellectually which might be the only solution to the voices. There is always hope with it that you might do something useful with your mind so get through it by having ideas telling yourself that helps you get through things and is a bit of a distraction for passing the time. Then you can atone for 9/11.

I also spend a lot of time thinking about the material side of life as this has a pleasurable impact on the brain. As Led Zeppelin sang "there is a lady who is sure that all that glitters is gold and she is buying a stairway to heaven." This often keeps me very focused and absorbed in buying things on the internet and I can debate with myself a lot with what to buy or can get preoccupied with browsing as I have a purpose in doing it. Being absorbed in material things works because with the loser psychology this acts as a distraction which is immersive. Then I can self-forget with it when thinking about this so there is no consciousness of the observing voices. Yet there is a problem as the loser psychology can be erased so this might not always work. Often people that are critical of it which comes into mind, and it is frightening

to watch it being erased both in itself and as a defence from the delusions. This is particularly difficult with the paranoia because my intelligence is built on the psychology and may be the only hope for surviving punishment for 9/11.

Inevitably at home I very get distracted by thinking about life in general and also my own life. You cannot avoid these questions and I try to find ways of being happier with things. It involves trying to be content with life such as it is within the mental health system together with what might improve it. So, I often consider whether it is possible to be happy again and what might improve life with schizophrenia. Often this raises questions like going back into education, getting used to the material side after my family business went bankrupt and whether pursuing my interests could help with the changes. Here it has been important that there is always hope here and that I might get back to where I was by pursuing the writing. Yet I find it hard just accepting things as they are and haven't fully adapted to my new circumstances yet which I might never do.

Looking back on my life I often think of people I have met, including friends and girl friends who have had a high opinion of me and again I can show this to the voices. I can look at what have I have learned about life from the world and the diverse places I have been in. This is what I have experienced socially and culturally so I can look at how I have grown with these experiences. All this is important in my life to determine where I might be headed next and again makes the anxiety take a back seat. Looking back, I understand things a lot better in the light of new experiences and helps me find out who I am. This is also important as I can think given my identity and history all of which has made me a nice person and so can show the voices this too.

I also think a lot about the loser psychology and the dangers I am living in with it. It is important that I might find a way of protecting myself as a loser and the intelligence built upon it as this can answer the voices. This brings to mind songs and movies that stigmatise being a loser and they can have a damaging effect on me by causing much anxiety. Yet this anxiety is another distraction from the psychoses which is made worse as I cannot often try to find ways of mending the damage it has caused. Yet it is also reassuring to have this psychology as I have seen many successful people who have had it and again, I can show this to the voices as the basis that I might do something useful with it.

Often at home I can look at television to see if I am understanding things and this again keeps the voices happy. Focusing on the television screen allows me to absorb what I am watching and provides an intuitive understanding. I can follow the plot, remember and articulate the story and have even been able to write about the depictions of mental health in the media. I have movies on all day long and they engage my mind with what is happening on the screen. This also shows the voices I know about what I am watching and displaying some intelligence. Then the more I watch the same films the more engrained they become on my mind and the safer I feel.

Sometimes the anxiety is mind numbing and is all you can think of which cuts out the feeling you are merely being observed by the voices. Yet other times the anxiety is useful to keeping the voices quiet as it produces a drive to do something about the situation: it is natural you feel frightened if you think you

have caused 9/11 but this means you not giving into it by trying to atone. The voices go along with this, so it allows me to calm down enough to do something either intellectually impressive or socially useful. This has led to doing courses at my local day centre and from there at a further education college.

At the day centre you become part of the group and it gets to be a familiar place which again helps you settle in. Being surrounded by such people who you get to know is very reassuring and I don't get such paranoid thoughts about them. I can make these frequented places feel like home from home, so I am very absorbed with getting on with the people there. Then being liked by them is something that tends to keep the voices quiet. As these good associations of place are gradually learned by adapting to being there, they also stop any associations or memories that might trigger off a psychosis. This situation also allows a distracting focus on the educational courses on offer.

One obvious option was to do anxiety classes at my local day centre. Yet these were not working at home because I could not switch off from the paranoid thoughts. The problem was that if you are not thinking all the time in order to get through life by being distracted in these ways then as we have seen there are less ways of keeping the voices quiet. This means your head is full of thoughts which prevent another mental focus. You have to be thinking all day long to do this and cannot risk stopping it all as it might mean having less distraction from thoughts about 9/11 This thinking makes the voices less punishing so is preferable even when practicing relaxation might prevent a stress induced psychosis. In the end the situation puts the emphasis on education, which is more acceptable with the voices, allowing this to be done in the day centre and home environment.

Going to a further education college to do this had a calming effect on me. It showed the voices I can do something else and learn new things. It first helped to watch the promo video for the further education college and to focus on what I want to study. There was some anxiety here in that at the back of my mind I worry whether I could do the course or not. Yet the danger was electric and caused a system overload which meant I could keep the fear at the back of my mind and multitask with it.

Before the first lesson I could meditate on the video to get psyched up for this and imagine myself being in the class before attending it. This was helped by having already being to university so that education should be a natural place for me. Then the associations of imaging being in a safe place were reinforced when initially getting to be there.

Once I settled in with the teacher and my new classmates it felt very similar to the education on offer at a day centre. Then I had a smoke screen with the voices so that I could think of other things and concentrate on the lesson. So, while at the college the imperative to do well in case the voices react badly to me doing which meant there was an imperative that I was focused on the course subject matter instead of the voice. Afterwards when I found I was good at the subject (Maths) I could show the voices I had some versatility with education as I could tackle different subjects. It also showed my memory still working which was reassuring for sitting exams.

There has been a question raised by the voices that they might think I am thick and so they criticise any atonement when thinking about 9/11. What made this difficult was that I had lost my understanding of

certain concepts most of which I learned at university. These had either been erased either by the voice or the stigma connected with loser psychology. This was terrifying as I couldn't rely on thinking about them all the time in order to distract the voices. Then in addition to my brains keep coming and going there is no way to put the anxiety at the back of my mind. Finally, they began quote a Nirvana song saying "he don't know what it means" and the voices accuse me of this. My fear of 9/11 began to grow at this point and help was needed.

I had to get aid of a professional psychologist to counteract it all. She recommended starting with Soduku which I leaned on the difficult level, and then with crosswords in the national newspapers together with some MENSA puzzles. I learned to do all this like my newfound IT skills and the city and guilds in maths which I learned at the Further Education College. Yet the voices do not seem to think this is quite enough even. This even though they do go along with endorsing some of my writing which has also clocked up academic citations. The answer has been in writing new stuff all the time which keeps the brain working and distracts me from the voice.

It helped to reflect with the therapist what the mind was doing with all this as by analysing my intelligence and abilities. Once again it stopped the voices criticising me and provided a direction where I completely immersed by starting to think about it all. I felt it acceptable to ignore the criticisms until the intellectual study produces an answer. Once my mind has latched onto some problem solving then thinking about it gave me a further sense of security so I can be even more immersed in this. Afterwards I am free to think about something else.

Eventually though it could have still been serious if nothing I write, or study was ever good enough and I couldn't get any reassurance with the voices. At the moment everything remains up in the air and there is no self-confidence which might derive from the voices thinking things are intellectually enough. So, I keep writing and studying until they are satisfied. So far, no success has ever been enough and so I am never satisfied until the voices are. Yet this provides a motivation for further improvement which is what is needed until I eventually get to a level which the voice will accept.

As I am always thinking about all this the years fly past. I am 53 now and have been in the system 25 years. My situational techniques for dealing with the voices have worked very well and have kept me out of hospital. I get so used to living in these situations that this also helps keep the anxiety and voices in check. Over time the force of habit means I automatically go into these thinking modes avoiding the harmful thoughts which activates the voice. I can mostly put the symptoms to the back of my mind though I still get the occasional realisation I might be held responsible for 9/11.

The hope is that I might get through my whole life as these beneficial situations they have gone on so long it seems possible to work in a way it did not in the earlier years with the illness. Looking at the ways I have of getting through the time that is left they seem to suggest this will continue to happen in the future. Yet I cannot guarantee it will work out. So that still leaves the thought of still being held responsible for 9/11. The consequences of this are so severe I cannot think about them logically so at certain times a lot is down to a leap of faith. All the same the longer I distract attention from the voices

by thinking about other academic things this the more I think it might work out and has gone on so long makes me feel a bit safer.

Conclusion

The more these situational distraction techniques are used to control anxiety the more chance we have of forgetting about it and stopping the worry it will never wear off. This will be a gradual process and will need to be combined with other usual techniques like graded exposure, breathing and safe place imagery. Being able to put the anxiety at the back of your mind will help such techniques which can calm you down and enable some distraction from the symptoms. So, then we can be involved in therapeutic activities which again will reduce the anxiety and put it to the back of your mind. Eventually the periods of forgetting about it will get longer and longer and will make life with the illness a lot more tolerable.