Some other helpful resources

Information leaflets available in this series:
- What is psychosis?
- Hearing voices
- Disturbing beliefs and thoughts
- Psychosis and recovery
- Knowing someone with psychosis – carers’ leaflet

Samaritans (www.samaritans.org.uk)
Offers a 24-hour telephone service.
Tel: 08457 909090

Scottish Recovery Network
(www.scottishrecovery.net)

NHS Direct
Offers a telephone help-line.
Tel: 08454 242424

MIND (www.mind.org.uk)
Offers a telephone advice help-line.
Tel: 0845 7660163

Breathing Space
Offers a free confidential help-line for individuals experiencing low mood or worries and wanting to talk to someone (especially males under 40).
Tel: 0800 838587

Psychological Therapies and Social Interventions for Psychosis

Psychological Views on Psychosis:
a leaflet for anyone with psychosis or who knows of somebody with psychosis

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Clinical Psychology

One of a series of leaflets about psychosis written by psychologists for service-users, carers and professionals within NHS Lothian
Psychological therapies and social interventions

Just like other health problems, psychosis is treatable and a lot of people recover. However, it can be a distressing experience, so it is best to get help as early as possible. There are various treatments available, including psychological, medical and social interventions, so going to your GP can be a good place to start to find out about what is available.

People with psychotic symptoms can be reluctant to get help—they may think nothing is wrong even though their friends and family are worried about them. Alternatively, the symptoms may be frightening but people may hope that the symptoms will go away on their own. People also worry about what treatment will involve, such as being hospitalised.

Why can psychological therapy be important?

Talking to somebody is an important part of recovery and there is good evidence to suggest that psychological treatment can reduce distress related to psychotic experiences. Psychological therapy may help you to understand why the psychotic experiences have persisted, and help you to develop ways to cope in the future.

Narratives

Here are some narratives about other people’s experiences of psychological therapy:

“I have found personally that cognitive behavioural therapy is what’s worked for me. It doesn’t work for everyone … it’s hard work and it takes a long time … but it gives you that sense of ownership over yourself again. I think that’s what you need, because I agree that the principles of recovery are that you live well, and you live with your symptoms.”

“I got a psychologist for the first time, and started cognitive behavioural therapy; CBT. And the combination of that and the day support and the individual support I got from a voluntary sector organisation. I think that’s what did it.”

“I think that psychotherapy is the only thing that could help me.”

Staying well - relapse prevention

We all experience set-backs in our lives. However, there are certain things we can do to avoid or minimise these setbacks. Relapse prevention is an approach that considers the factors that can help you recover and help you stay well.

Relapse prevention often involves two key aspects:

- Reducing stresses in your life which may lead to a setback
- Enhance your ways of coping - e.g. exercise, relaxation and talking to friends or family.

Social interventions

Talking to other people can help reduce feelings of loneliness and increase self-esteem. Having meaningful activities or interests and returning to work are all important parts of recovery. Joining a group for people who have had similar experiences can also help to reduce feelings of isolation.

Different ways of coping work for different people. Some common ways of coping are:

- Remember that thoughts are not necessarily fact- they are your interpretation of what is going on around you
- Remember that having paranoid thoughts, unusual beliefs or unusual experiences is common
- Talk to someone you know about your thoughts and feelings
- Minimise stress in your life
- Keep good sleeping and eating habits
- Avoid drinking alcohol or taking illegal drugs
- Keep doing activities that you find enjoyable or relaxing
- Distract yourself by listening to the radio, watching TV or playing music.

Assessment

Everyone with psychosis has the right to request a psychological assessment, as psychological therapy can be an important part of treatment. A clinical psychologist will often carry out the assessment, but you may also meet with other properly trained staff who will ask you questions such as:

- What are your main worries or problems?
- When and how did these problems develop?
- What triggers or stress may have led to your difficulties?
- How do you cope with these problems?
- What makes your problems worse?
- How have you been feeling recently?
- When did you start to feel this way?
- What was life like when you were growing up?
- Have you had any major life events recently or in the past?
- What would you like to be different?

Treatment

There are different types of psychological therapies available that aim to reduce the distress of having psychotic symptoms. The exact approach will be chosen on an individual basis to best suit your needs at that time. Key therapies include:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- Anxiety management
- Family therapy
- Mindfulness
- Relaxation
- Relapse prevention.
Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
CBT aims to reduce the distress caused by psychotic experiences rather than trying to get rid of the experiences directly. Your therapist will discuss how you think and feel about your psychotic experiences, other problems in your life, and how you cope with those symptoms and experiences. CBT is based on the theory that the way we interpret a situation can influence the way we feel and what we do.

The following example shows how different interpretations of the same situation can lead to very different outcomes. We know from research that 10% of the population hear voices that others cannot hear, but by no means all of those 10% will be distressed by the experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretation A</th>
<th>Interpretation B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation:</strong> You hear a voice calling your name</td>
<td><strong>Situation:</strong> You hear a voice calling your name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretation:</strong> “I’m day-dreaming because I’m tired”</td>
<td><strong>Interpretation:</strong> “They’re out to get me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feeling:</strong> Relaxed</td>
<td><strong>Feeling:</strong> Anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behaviour:</strong> Have an early night</td>
<td><strong>Behaviour:</strong> Lock the doors and hide away</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CBT for hearing voices suggests that it is the interpretation as much as the voice itself that causes distress. Your therapist will explore why it is that you have developed an interpretation that leads to distress and unhelpful behaviour, and help you analyse the validity and helpfulness of that interpretation.

Anxiety management
Everybody gets anxious but when these feelings stop you doing what you want, they become problematic. It may be that anxiety is an important factor in your difficulties with psychosis. If so, it can be helpful to understand how anxiety persists and how you cope with anxiety-provoking situations. Anxiety management is often a key part of CBT (described above).

Family therapy
When a family member becomes unwell, it can be a stressful time for everyone. Family therapy can be a useful way of working as it encourages family members to identify what is helpful and what is unhelpful for each member of the family by focusing on the ‘here and now’. The aim is to improve communication and minimise stress for everyone. There is evidence to say that family work can also enhance a person’s recovery and reduce the chance of relapse.

Mindfulness
The term ‘mindfulness’ describes a process of focusing attention on the here and now, without being critical or judgmental. It is a form of meditation that involves becoming aware of your thoughts and actions. It can be used to enhance awareness of your reactions to psychotic experiences and enhance your ability to cope.

Relaxation
Learning to relax is a key aspect of maintaining psychological well-being. Relaxation skills can help you cope with stressful times in life and manage experiences of anxiety. Learning to relax takes time and practice, so working with a therapist, in a group or with a relaxation CD can help you to develop these skills.