



Dealing With Symptoms

The main symptoms of psychosis involve problems with knowing what is real. These symptoms include:

- **Hearing or seeing things that aren't there**
- **Unusual thoughts that won't go away**

Medication should provide better control over these symptoms. However, medication doesn't always make the symptoms go away completely. Many people with psychosis continue to have these types of symptoms, even though they are taking medication. While the medication helps a lot, it may not be enough.

Here are three additional strategies to help you deal with symptoms.

- **Distract yourself**
- **Perform a reality check**
- **Challenge unrealistic thinking**

There is no special order for these three strategies. Pick and choose which strategy you would like to start with.

Don't be disappointed if one strategy doesn't work. It might not be the right one for you. Stick with it for a while to give it a chance, then try another strategy. Also, remember that decreasing stress is an important strategy (see the *Managing Stress* section on page 27).

With some time and effort the odds are good that you will develop an effective way to deal with your symptoms.



Understanding

Distract Yourself

While this strategy sounds simple, it may require some effort on your part. The technique is to ignore the symptom by distracting yourself in some way. Distracting yourself from an imaginary voice that you are hearing or an unusual thought you are having is not that easy. Finding a successful way to distract yourself may take time and effort. The effort can be worth it, though. If the strategy works, then you have a handy way of reducing the symptom quickly.

One way to practice distracting yourself is to try and get an obnoxious tune out of your head. Sometimes you will hear or remember a popular song or advertising jingle that you can't stop singing or humming. Rather than be frustrated by the experience, use it to try a *practice round* of distracting yourself. Hum or sing a more enjoyable song. Most people find that the better song successfully distracts them from the annoying one.

Note: **Distracting yourself might not make the symptom go away completely. It might only reduce how much it bothers you.** Consider the reduction a step in the right direction.

You can also try a *distracting* strategy if you have problems with hearing or seeing things that aren't there (hallucinations) or if you have thoughts that distress you. When the symptoms start up, do something to distract yourself from them.

Here are some ideas for distracting yourself.

- Watch TV
- Listen to music—try listening with and without headphones
- Read a magazine
- Talk to a family member or friend—try talking on the phone and in-person
- Pursue a hobby—painting, gardening, playing the piano, etc.
- Do something active—go for a walk, bike ride, swim, etc.

You can also combine two or more distractions. You could listen to music at the same time that you engage in a hobby. You could wear headphones and listen to music while going for a walk.



Understanding

It's best to try different ways to distract yourself. Reading might not work for you, while listening to music might. Continue your technique(s) for at least several days. If your symptom only occurs once in a while, then you will need to spread these techniques out for a longer time. Try different ways of distracting yourself to see if one particular method helps more than others.

If you hear voices...

People who hear voices sometimes report that wearing earplugs helps. Earplugs can be purchased at most drug stores. The next time you hear voices, try the earplugs in one or both ears and see if it helps.

Other people who hear voices report that sometimes quietly humming to themselves is helpful, too.



Your Turn!

Your Turn!

Use this worksheet to keep track of your findings. After each attempt to distract yourself fill in the worksheet to record how well you did.

Try different ways of distracting yourself and write them down in the worksheet. Look over your findings to see if certain methods help more than others. You can use these new skills to reduce future symptoms.

Don't be discouraged if you don't get immediate results. The *distract-yourself* method doesn't work for everyone. Even with a less-than-perfect record it is still worth the effort. Put a star by the methods that worked.



Write Down

My Symptom: _____

METHOD OF DISTRACTING MYSELF	EFFECT ON SYMPTOM	STAR* (IF METHOD WAS SUCCESSFUL)
Start singing or humming a song to myself.	Symptom diminishes.	



Understanding

Perform a Reality Check

With psychosis, you don't always know if what you just experienced was real or not. You may wonder, "Was that voice I just heard really there?" or "Did that thought really make sense?"

Psychosis can get in the way of your grasp on reality. You can quickly become confused and fearful. In this sense, psychosis can be similar to having a bad drug experience.

Performing a reality check can be a useful strategy to help you regain your grasp on what is real.

Contact your Support Person as soon as you have an experience or thought that seems unconnected to reality. It can be helpful to have more than one person supporting you. If one Support Person is unavailable, you can contact a second Support Person.

Tell your Support Person what you have just experienced or thought. Your Support Person will help you determine whether or not this was real. Remember, you chose this person to support you because you felt you could trust him or her. If that person says your experience is not well connected to reality, trust your Support Person's opinion.



Understanding

The important purpose of this strategy is to perform a reality check *as soon as you are not sure if something is real or not*. Start on the conservative side. Contact your Support Person if you have the slightest doubt. With time and practice you will get better at recognizing the difference. Performing reality checks is a skill that can help prevent you from panicking and making your symptoms worse.

Even with your best efforts at performing a reality check as soon as possible, sometimes things get worse, and you find yourself afraid and unsure. Contact your Support Person. This person can help you through the bad experience you are having.

Challenge Unrealistic Thinking

Psychosis can cause your thoughts to become distorted. You may find it difficult to think in a realistic way about certain situations. This technique teaches you how to challenge these unrealistic thoughts.

Note: Challenging distorted thoughts is extremely difficult when your psychosis is severe.

Use this technique when:

- Your psychosis is already *well-controlled with medication*, but you want even better control over your symptoms.
- OR
- You think the psychosis is *possibly starting to come back*, and you want to prevent it from getting worse.

Challenging your own thoughts can be difficult, even when you are healthy. It is crucial to have your Support Person help you. You may have a thought that isn't realistic and not know it. Your Support Person is there to help you look at things in different ways.

The goal of this strategy is to replace *unrealistic* thinking with *realistic* thinking. Realistic thinking is consistent with reality and gets you back on track with what's really happening.



Understanding

When your thoughts become distressing or start to preoccupy you, challenge them to see if they are realistic.

This is easier to do if you write things down.

FIRST: Use the worksheet to describe the **situation** that led to the thought as objectively as you can. Don't insert your opinions about the situation here. Just write down the facts.

SECOND: Write down the **thoughts you are having at the time**. Don't censor these thoughts. Write down whatever is distressing or preoccupying you.

THIRD: Write down **more realistic thoughts**, thoughts that fit better with what is really happening.

Special Thought-challenging Worksheets

SITUATION: Ray and Joey were talking on the phone and I heard them laughing. Ray and I then watched a DVD together, but I couldn't focus on the movie. I went home.

MY THOUGHTS

They were laughing about me. They are planning to do something bad to me and they were laughing about it. They're not really my friends after all. I better not go out with them tomorrow.

MORE REALISTIC THOUGHTS

I have known these two guys for five years. They have never done anything bad to me. It would be completely out of character for them to do something bad to somebody else—they are both very nice guys.

Joey's always cracking jokes. He probably just said something funny to Ray. I have no proof that they were laughing at me. I could have asked Ray right away what they were laughing at. I still could.

If I don't go out with them tomorrow, I'll just feel lonely and bored. I'll go out with them tomorrow and have a good time.

It's not easy to challenge your own thinking, especially when your thoughts can lead to negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or fear.





Understanding

Take a closer look at your own thoughts before trying to come up with thoughts that are more realistic. You can do this by asking yourself questions about your thoughts. Don't forget to have your Support Person help you with this.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

My thought:

What evidence is there to support this thought?

What evidence is there to contradict this thought?

Can I get any more evidence? For example, perhaps I can talk to somebody else who was there at the time and see how he or she viewed the situation.

What are the odds of this thought being true?

If this thought is true, then what else must be true in order to support it?

Where does thinking like this get me? Does it help me at all, or does it just make things worse?

Would other people agree with my thoughts? What does my Support Person think?

If other people wouldn't agree, what might they say is a more accurate way of thinking?





Understanding

If you hear voices...

Use the same types of questions if you hear voices. For example, if you hear a voice that tells you “You are a failure, you are nothing” you might end up thinking that what the voice says is true.

Ask similar questions to evaluate what the voice is saying. For example:

- Note down what the voice is saying:
- What evidence is there to support what the voice is saying?
- What evidence is there that contradicts what the voice is saying?
- Would other people agree with what the voice is saying?
What does my Support Person think?

Thinking about the voices in a more realistic way helps take away their power over you. They won't be as able to affect how you feel about things.



Your Turn!

Your Turn!

Use these questions to come up with more realistic ways to think about things. Pick a thought that is distressing or preoccupying you and ask yourself the *Thought Questions* on the next page.

Be patient and have your Support Person help you. Challenging one's thoughts is always difficult, but it does get easier with practice. You may find that realistic thoughts will even happen automatically when you start having unrealistic thoughts. You'll end up "talking back" to any unrealistic thoughts. This is a great thing! Be patient. Remember, you have to work at it.



Write Down

SITUATION:

MY THOUGHTS

MORE REALISTIC THOUGHTS



Write Down

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

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If this thought is true, then what else must be true in order to support it?

Where does thinking like this get me? Does it help me at all, or does it just make things worse?

Would other people agree with my thoughts? What does my Support Person think?

If other people wouldn't agree, what might they say is a more accurate way of thinking?

Congratulations!

*Congratulations for taking the time
to learn new skills!*

We hope it has helped.

Learning new skills isn't easy.

Keep working at it. Your skills will get better and better.

BE PROUD OF YOUR EFFORTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS.