

Unusual Experiences and Voices

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Psychosis (CBT-p)
Self-Help Workbook

RECOVERY

What do you believe about your diagnosis? What is the possibility of full recovery?

RECOVERY INFORMATION

The following information is based on science and the writings of many people who have experienced altered states.

VOICE-HEARING IS A COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

1. At least 1 in 50 people hear voices that others can't hear. 1 in 5 hear or see things that others can't at some point in their lives. For example, after the death of a loved one, many people hear or see the person they lost. Almost everyone has heard their name called or the phone ring and found they had "imagined" it.
2. Voice-hearing is even more common in some other cultures and in our own history. Most of the great prophets of the Bible, many ancient Greek poets, and the followers of a variety of religions heard voices &/or saw visions that others couldn't perceive.
3. Only about one third of voice-hearers hear troublesome voices. Two thirds feel supported by their voices.
4. People who hear disturbing voices often had difficult experiences or severe stress around the time their voices started.
5. People in different cultures interpret voices in many different ways. Some believe that voices represent a spiritual force, a connection to ancestors, or a message from deeper parts of the self.
6. The percentage of people who start hearing and seeing things when all stimulation is closed off (in a dark, soundproof room): 100%
7. Many people believe that disturbing voices or uncommon beliefs are a coping skill or a survival mechanism, not symptoms of an illness. They are normal reactions to abnormal experiences.
8. There are many ways to look at voices. You have the right to develop a way of understanding your experience that makes sense to you.

UNUSUAL BELIEFS ARE A COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

1. One person in every 4 or 5 has fearful or suspicious thoughts on a regular basis.
2. Proportion of combat vets with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who experience voice-hearing or fearful thinking: 1/3 to 1/2
3. Situations in which voice-hearing, visions, or unusual beliefs often develop:
 - the death of a person close to you
 - being too isolated or lonely
 - traumatic experiences, such as being in combat or surviving child abuse
 - sleep deprivation
 - drug use
 - a diagnosis of panic, anorexia, depression, OCD
 - trauma flashbacks

4. Unprovable ideas seem to be the norm. Human beings are naturally creative and imaginative. Just about everyone believes in things that are not scientific or provable: astrology, past lives, angels, demons, ghosts, aliens, numerology, political theories, superstitions . . .
5. People in every culture spend much, if not most, of their free time in imaginary worlds: storytelling, reading, fantasizing, watching TV, playing games . . .
6. Being wary and alert to danger helped our species survive. This style of thinking is more common in dangerous places—with high crime rates or political turmoil for example.
7. There is new science confirming a link between creativity and a diagnosis on what professionals call the 'schizophrenia spectrum'.
8. Difficult life experience, from discrimination or poverty to childhood abuse are very common in the lives of people diagnosed with 'schizophrenia'. It has not been proven that a chemical imbalance or genetic problem contributes to 'schizophrenia'.
9. Famous or gifted people who heard voices or had suspicions or unusual ideas: Friederich Nietzsche (philosopher), Edvard Munch (painter), Buddy Bolden (inventor of jazz), Vaslav Nijinsky (legendary dancer), Kurt Godel (logician who was Einstein's best friend), John Forbes Nash (mathematician), Joanne Greenberg (author), Syd Barrett (founding member of Pink Floyd), Brian Wilson (founding member of the Beach Boys), Shulamith Firestone, (eminent feminist thinker), Nathaniel Anthony Ayers (musician)

FULL RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

1. Full recovery from 'schizophrenia' is much more common than is usually thought.
 - In many parts of the world, over half of the people who get a diagnosis of 'schizophrenia' recover fully within a few years.
 - In Vermont, community support helped over half of the people leaving a state hospital recover without disability, even those who had been hospitalized for 10 years or more.
 - Millions of people worldwide have recovered, even after years of serious difficulties.
3. It is likely that thousands of people have recovered with the support of friends, family, Hearing Voices Network, and other self-help methods.
4. Many experienced therapists and recovered people believe that extreme altered states can be a path to growth and wholeness.
5. Aaron Beck, the psychologist who pioneered Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), wrote his doctoral dissertation about a man who recovered fully from disabling suspicions ('paranoid schizophrenia') using talk therapy alone.

DISCUSSION: Reactions to normalizing information: Surprises? Feelings? Thoughts?

BOOKS & FILMS ABOUT RECOVERY:

Living With Voices: 50 Stories of Recovery (Romme, Escher, et al.)

Recovery: An Alien Concept? 2011 Edition (Ron Coleman)

I Never Promised You a Rose Garden (Joanne Greenberg)

Rethinking Madness: Toward a Paradigm Shift (Paris Williams)

Eleanor Longden on YouTube and at workingtorecovery.co.uk

Take These Broken Wings (Daniel Mackler): free on YouTube

GETTING STARTED WITH CBT-p

We all think about the things that happen to us. We are the most imaginative, creative species in the world, which has brought us fantastic technology, works of art, and cultural diversity. Imagination, by definition, gets us into the realm of the imaginary. We don't have any automatic way to tell the difference between what's real and what's invented. All human beings have to figure this out for themselves with the help of others.

Inaccurate thinking can lead to unnecessary fear or discouragement. The good news is, very often if we're feeling down, worried, or panicky, we're worrying about things that aren't realistic. Exchanging negative thoughts for more realistic ones can help us feel much better.

CBT-p has been examined in 22 scientific studies, more than any other intervention for people bothered by voice-hearing or uncommon experiences. It has been found safe, effective, and easy to learn. Thousands of people with problems like yours have used CBT skills to increase control over their lives and well-being. They have fewer worries and get stuck in miserable thinking much less. CBT-p gives you a way to practice supporting yourself by creating new, encouraging inner voices.

Learning to use CBT-p

- with patience
- one step at a time
- with a helpful ally

has enabled many people to:

- feel better
- achieve their goals
- stay out of the hospital
- reduce the severity of problems if they do recur

A basic CBT method is to learn to support and encourage yourself when you're feeling anxious or down.

Example: A common thought reported by people who use mental health services:

"I'm afraid to stay in and afraid to go out."

A rational response to this idea might be:

"Well, I haven't actually gotten hurt when I go out. And I've never had a break-in at my apartment. Maybe I am safe."

Another common thought:

"People with schizophrenia have nothing to offer. I might as well give up."

A rational response:

"John Nash and Joanne Greenberg recovered fully & achieved a lot. Millions of people have recovered around the world. Maybe I can get better, too."

YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

Connection & encouragement are essential in the recovery process. It's part of our biological make-up: the brain doesn't even grow properly without supportive relationships. Loneliness is one of the most common problems that people deal with and also one of the most painful.

Many of us have felt unsafe around other people at some time in our lives. It takes courage to work on building your support network when you feel unsafe. When Joanne Greenberg left the hospital, she perceived ordinary people as being much stronger than she was. She thought she could never measure up. But she worked as an EMT, wrote 16 books, won major awards, and taught college for 40 years. Her belief that she was much less competent and capable than other people was completely false.

Since no one person can meet all our needs, we need a group of people around us who are reliable and kind. What qualities draw you to other people?

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Science shows that most of us underestimate the number of friends we have. We also underestimate how willing others are to help out if asked. People usually like to be asked to help. When you reach out for support, you honor that person with your trust and faith in them. You are offering someone a golden opportunity: to feel needed and to be helpful. How do you feel when you help someone else?

You are a source of help and support for others. List some of the things you can offer others, ways you can be helpful and contribute to their quality of life:

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HOW DO YOU ASK FOR SUPPORT?

KNOW THAT IT'S OKAY TO ASK

It can get to be difficult, sometimes unthinkable, to ask for help. Were you taught as a child to “be seen and not heard”? People who go through neglect often get false messages: that their needs are not important, that they shouldn’t “bother” others, or that asking for what they want means they are greedy. These kinds of rules are based on false assumptions and are destructive to health and well-being. In reality, we have a lifelong human need to give and receive support, reassurance, acceptance, and recognition. Having a sounding board, someone who “gets” you, who is on your side, is not a luxury in life, but a key part of health and wellness. Most people understand this and are responsive to others’ needs.

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU WANT

Check the type of support you need right now:

- Company—someone to hang out with
- Acknowledgment of what you’re going through
- A specific need: “Can you drive me to the meeting?”
- Reassurance about a particular worry
- Encouragement toward a goal
- You just want to vent and be heard
- An ally to help with a specific task you’re working on
- Other:

ENCOURAGE YOURSELF

Reaching out to others does involve a bit of risk. You have the right to turn down any request—and so do other people. What tends to be your first thought when someone refuses your request? Here are some examples of discouraging thoughts that people have had in response to hearing “No”:

- *“See, I was right, no one likes me or has time for me”.*
- *“I tried to tell my worker this would happen. She just wants me to feel humiliated”.*

Dot down the thoughts you might have: **“When I hear ‘No’ I might think:”**

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If you do not tend to draw negative conclusions when someone turns you down, that's great! You may find it a little easier to build your support network. You may choose to be a source of help to others who find the process more challenging.

Now, imagine again that you made a request and were turned down. What are some reasons for getting turned down that do not involve negative judgments about yourself (or others)? Try to think of as many as you can. **Other reasons people might say 'No' to a request:**

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STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Write down your request. Be specific about what you want. Needs and wants can range from things (a book or a meal) to time and attention (Meet me for coffee?) to an emotional need (I feel anxious, do you have time to listen?) to problem-solving (Can you brainstorm with me?) to motivation (Let's get together at the rec center) to support (Would you go with me to my doctor's appointment?). Needs are very diverse—only you know what your needs are. **Write down an important want or need you have right now:**

Next, think about who you will ask. It is very helpful to have in mind 3 or 4 people, in case someone is unavailable. It's likely that there are people around you who are willing to share support: church or temple groups, 12-step connections, Facebook friends, therapy groups—be thoughtful about who you will contact.

List some people you will reach out to for support:

Decide how you will make the contact. It is essential for your friend or supporter to have an easy way to reply to you. Phone (call or text) and email are good ways to reach out and get a quick response. If you're requesting a phone call back, be sure the person has your number and times you are available. Then, keep your phone with you, charged and turned on, the voicemail cleared out and turned on. (This may be something to ask for help with!)

It is helpful to **ask someone if they are available to hear a request before launching into it.** “Hi Emily, this is George. Do you have a few minutes right now to talk?” “Emily, could you call me back when you have some time to talk?”. When you call a friend, you don’t know if they’re in the middle of a family discussion or watching the end of an intense movie. Give them the choice to call back if it isn’t a good time.

Keep your reasons why “people might say no to a request” (previous page) to look at in case you feel disappointed with a response. Remember, you are practicing a new skill. Give yourself praise and encouragement for taking these very important steps in taking care of yourself. Just making each request is a big accomplishment if you did not have support in the past.

Take notes on the supportive conversations you have, below or on separate pages. If you get positive email, copy & paste the good bits into a diary you can review. Take notes on voice mail or copy down positive texts or Facebook messages. Cut and paste encouraging written notes into a collage. Look at these comments every day, early and often. It may take a while to get used to feeling supported, but you will find it makes a big difference as your comfort zone expands and gets stronger.

Work support into your daily routine. Until reaching out becomes second nature, it can be helpful to set goals and track progress. How many times per week do I want to practice asking for support? _____ How long do I want to take to get to this goal? _____ How will I keep track of my progress? For example, I could circle days on the calendar that I plan to make calls, record the length of the conversations I have, and put a Mood Scale number rating how I felt after the call on the calendar. How will I reward myself for working on this goal? _____

Enjoyable Activities Log: Another way to support yourself and your recovery is to have more enjoyment in your life. People often think that they need to “earn” fun activities by first accomplishing some goal. In reality, if you run your battery down, the way to jump start it is to first do things that are fun, relaxing, and enjoyable. A log is a good way to get started—it helps you keep track of how much you enjoy your time and what activities you really look forward to. A sense of accomplishment can be very rewarding, so that is written down on the Enjoyable Activities Log as well on the next page.

My ‘encouragement diary’: supportive things people have said to me:
Include your own voice and positive things your voices say, if you want. See if you can fill both sides of this page in the next month or two.

ENJOYABLE ACTIVITIES LOG

**rate your sense of:
enjoyment accomplishment
(1-10) (1-10)**

time	activity	E =	A =
7 am		E =	A =
8 am		E =	A =
9 am		E =	A =
10 am		E =	A =
11 am		E =	A =
12 noon		E =	A =
1 pm		E =	A =
2 pm		E =	A =
3 pm		E =	A =
4 pm		E =	A =
5 pm		E =	A =
6 pm		E =	A =
7 pm		E =	A =
8 pm		E =	A =
9 pm		E =	A =
10 pm		E =	A =
11 pm		E =	A =
12 mid		E =	A =
1 am		E =	A =
2 am		E =	A =

Date: _____

TIMELINES and LIFE STORY

Excellent workbooks for doing timeline and life story work, written by voice-hearer Ron Coleman, are available at workingtorecovery.co.uk: Working With Voices II and Working to Recovery: From Victim to Victor II.

Many people, from members of the self-help and recovery movements to CBT and psychodynamic therapists, recommend putting uncommon experiences into context—what is happening in your life when distress or voices increase? What have you been through, what struggles have you had in life, and how did these bring you to where you are now? Exploring timelines or personal history often reveal:

- the “backstory” in which confusing experiences begin to make sense
- how unusual experiences serve as coping skills or survival mechanisms
- ways to improve your self-care and peace of mind

LIFE STORY: How it works

This is done with a trusted ally or in a supportive group. A partner-listener you feel safe with is invaluable in helping you tell your story. You may want to write your story down as you talk it through.

You may remember things that are hard to think about (which is often the case for people with a ‘schizophrenia’ label). Mental health workers are trained to help people cope with difficult experiences, but a trustworthy friend who is a good, interested listener can accompany you just as well. It is very important if you look back on your past & it seems to hold mainly dispiriting failures or you feel a sense of worthlessness, to share your reactions with someone who can help. Many people are burdened with a sense of personal fault or futility that is completely unwarranted, yet they believe it wholeheartedly. Feeling very discouraged is often a situation that calls for professional support.

Understanding your life story can be liberating and enlightening. Gaining new insights into your motivations, struggles, and decisions can build your self-esteem, energy level, and hope.

It’s up to you how to record your life story—if you want to put it down on paper at all. Some people write and draw their story on one large piece of paper, others keep a journal, some transform their story into poetry, some prepare a witness testimonial or video to share with the community. Some talk over their experiences with one or two listeners. How do you like to express yourself?

The first step in Life Story work is to make a list of your strengths, skills, accomplishments, and positive qualities. Your ally or support network may help you get started, but being able to identify and “own” your abilities is an essential skill. Notice how you feel afterward: most people get a lift when they take the time to remember their positive qualities.

The second step is to get a good, clear picture in mind of the life you want, your goals and dreams. You should also talk over your fears about recovery with an understanding ally.

STRENGTHS, GOALS, AND SUPPORTS WORKSHEET

SOME OF MY STRENGTHS:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS I AM HAPPY ABOUT:

MY SKILLS:

SOME OF MY POSITIVE QUALITIES:

MY GOALS AND DREAMS:

MY SUPPORT NETWORK & THEIR CONTACT INFORMATION:

TIMELINE WORKSHEET

Events or changes happening in my life during the 2-3 months leading up to my last "slump" or relapse:



What was going on during a time when I was doing well?

TIMELINES: How they work

Timelines help you sort out problem areas in your history so you can see patterns that may be helping or hindering your recovery. A problem timeline is a detailed snapshot of the events leading up to a time of high distress. A recovery timeline compares this with events during a period of time in which you were doing well.

TIMELINE QUESTIONS: Ask yourself the following questions about:

- times in your life leading up to periods of difficulty or crisis
- times in which you were doing well

What were you doing during that time?

What goals were you working toward?

How were you feeling emotionally?

What significant events occurred during these months?

How were your relationships going?

What were you doing to take care of yourself?

AS THINGS BECAME MORE DIFFICULT:

What actions did you take to help yourself?

How did others respond when you started having trouble?

What help did you receive?

How did you feel about the help?

How did you get back on track to your regular life?

An essential CBT-p idea: once you know what leads away from problems, do more of that. Likewise, once you know what leads up to periods of difficulty, do less of that. Building your timeline can be a little like solving a mystery or putting together a puzzle. Knowing your own patterns can help you get into the driver's seat and back in control of your life.

NOTES:

WORKING WITH NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Another key CBT idea is to pay close attention to the thoughts, beliefs, and inner dialogue that accompany most of us while we're awake (and sometimes during sleep). Some people hear pessimistic, nagging, or critical voices that seem to come from outside the ears. Others hear negative thoughts inside their heads, while some people feel put down or demoralized due to ideas that are barely conscious.

Whatever form they take, negative words or thoughts can lead to discouragement, chronic anxiety, or giving up. Positive thoughts create the opposite: feeling more confident, creative, and active. Our 'prophecies' or predictions have so much impact on the results that we really need to know how accurate they are. Testing out ideas can be hard work, but imagine the relief of finding out that ideas which fill you with dread or anger may not even be very realistic. Thought diaries can be used to track thought patterns over time as well as practicing more supportive ways of looking at things.

SAMPLE THOUGHT DIARY

DATE & TIME: 3-7, 3 pm

EVENT (What was happening?)

I called my friend Alice, but she hung up on me.

THOUGHT (What was going through my mind?)

She's mad at me for not calling for 2 weeks.

EMOTION (What was I feeling?)

Sad & nervous

ACTION (What did I do?)

Tried to watch TV but I couldn't concentrate.

SUPPORTIVE THOUGHT/RATIONAL RESPONSE (What new thought did I come up with?)

Maybe the call got dropped or Alice pushed the wrong button. I don't think she'd hang up on me even if she was mad--that's not her style. Maybe she can't find my number to call back--she told me she couldn't afford caller I.D.

EMOTION (Any change as a result of my new thought?)

Relieved--I should try calling her again. She's an important friend.

THOUGHT DIARY

DATE & TIME: _____

EVENT (What was happening?)

THOUGHT (What was going through my mind?)

EMOTION (What was I feeling?)

ACTION (What did I do?)

SUPPORTIVE THOUGHT/RATIONAL RESPONSE (What new thought did I come up with?)

EMOTION (Any change as a result of my new thought?)

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DATE & TIME: _____

EVENT (What was happening?)

THOUGHT (What was going through my mind?)

EMOTION (What was I feeling?)

ACTION (What did I do?)

SUPPORTIVE THOUGHT/RATIONAL RESPONSE (What new thought did I come up with?)

EMOTION (Any change as a result of my new thought?)

QUESTIONING THOUGHTS

We are all affected by self-fulfilling prophecies, the tendency of strong beliefs to actually come true. We all tend to act in ways that *make* our beliefs come true! For example, if I think my next door neighbor doesn't like me, I will probably avoid her—look away when I see her, maybe even pretend I don't hear her if she says hello. How will she respond to my stand-offish attitude? She may genuinely not like me after being treated in this unfriendly way. (Self-fulfilling prophecies create such a powerful bias that scientific studies have to be carried out by people who don't know what the experiment is about, or the results will be rejected by other scientists).

Questioning ideas and beliefs is the next step in working with thoughts before they become self-fulfilling prophecies.

WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE FOR AND AGAINST

First, troublesome events and thoughts are written down, as with the Thought Diary. Then, you make two ratings: how much do I believe this thought (between 0 and 100%) and how unhappy do I feel when I have this thought (using a "Misery Scale", where 1 means no misery and 10 means loads of misery).

Next, you weigh the evidence for and against your thought. Write down all the evidence you can think of that your thought is true. Then write down all the reasons it may not be true. Spend some time thinking this through, until you're sure you've given both sides a fair hearing.

Now you're ready to make your ratings again, to see if there has been any shift in your thinking. First, how much do you believe the evidence that your thought is NOT true? Now, how much do you believe your thought IS true? Check your Misery Scale again, too. If your belief in your original negative thought has gone down, even a little, your mood probably improved a bit as well.

ASK A FRIEND

Another way to check out negative thinking is to imagine what a friend would say if they heard this thought or to actually ask a friend for their reaction. People often tell themselves terrible things or call themselves names they would never say out loud to another person.

NOTE: If voices are the source of negative beliefs, use Voice Dialogue to welcome and befriend the voice. If you create an accepting environment, even an abusive voice may begin to trust the situation and relax. A negative voice may become more cooperative and even recover from the stress of trying to control (and protect) you with abusive language.

QUESTIONING THOUGHTS WORKSHEET

DATE & TIME: _____

EVENT (What was happening?)

MY THOUGHTS ABOUT IT:

How much do I believe this thought (percentage belief): _____

Misery Scale (worry, depression, hopelessness, etc.) on 1-10 scale: _____

EVIDENCE FOR & AGAINST

What is the evidence that this thought is true?

Is there any evidence that it may not be true?

How much do I believe the evidence that my thought is not true?: _____

How much do I believe my original thought? _____

Misery Scale (worry, depression, hopelessness, etc.) on 1-10 scale: _____

ASK A FRIEND

IN MY IMAGINATION:

If I told my friend the unsupportive thought, what would he or she say?

OR, If my friend had this thought, what would I say to him or her?

IN REAL LIFE:

Call a trustworthy friend to share your thoughts and ask your friend's opinion. Do you see it the same way? Does your friend have another point of view? If you can, ask more than one person for their take on the situation.

WORKING WITH FEARS AND MISTRUST

Common aspects of fearful thinking:

1. Worries that others might be hostile or against us are very common: over half of us have ideas like this at least once in a while. At any given time, 4-10% of the community have had recent fears that would be considered out of touch with reality.
2. 'Paranoia' is valuable—one reason it is so common among people is that it increases survival in high risk situations.
3. Suspicious tend to increase when we are stressed, not sleeping well, when we're anxious, or using substances.
4. Suspicious are more likely when we don't have the chance to check out our concerns with the person we're anxious about.
5. Once fearful thinking starts, we become more alert to possible signs of danger and do more checking and scanning. Being on high alert increases the probability of noticing odd details—and then feeling more anxious or suspicious (snowball effect).
6. Feeling anxious or frightened can make the world appear more dangerous.
7. Dr. Aaron Beck, the developer of CBT, believes that anxiety has two ingredients:
 - Magnifying the amount of danger or threat
 - Feeling oneself to be unable to cope with it

The down side of fearfulness:

- feeling scared, anxious, or tense all the time; never feeling safe
- avoidance of feared situations can restrict life too much
- fears can create a barrier to getting needed support from others
- fear tends to prevent learning, especially learning that some frightening situations are actually safe

What are the benefits for me of being cautious, watchful, or not very trusting?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Are there any drawbacks for me to feeling worried or on guard?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

People with an “observant skeptic” personality style are very good at noticing details that others miss, uncanny events, or possible ill-will. This can develop into a “people phobia”, which unfortunately cuts observant and wary people off from necessary feedback and support. Observant skeptics often have lived in physically or emotionally dangerous situations where threats were common or the injury of unfair treatment, shaming, or rejection was much too frequent.

Checklist: Am I an observant skeptic developing a “people phobia”?

- I often doubt that people can be trusted.
- I see special meaning in small events that I didn't notice before.
- I feel like people are keeping an eye on me.
- There are messages meant for me on TV, in films, or on the radio.
- My view of people has changed—I doubt people I used to trust.
- I keep more to myself—I don't share things with friends the way I used to.
- When I talk with people about my ideas, they sometimes appear puzzled or confused.
- I'm frustrated that others don't agree with my interpretations.

Those who experience “people phobia” have very good reasons for their reactions. If you have worked on your Life Story, you may have some idea of why you are more skeptical or wary than average. If you are using this workbook, you may also have had some questions about the cost of being always on guard. You may have wondered whether you're getting the most out of life when much of your energy is taken up with worry and doubt. Worry about whether a situation is threatening or not may keep you awake at night or affect your relationships.

WHAT KEEPS DOUBTS OR MISTRUST GOING?

One habit that can feed mistrust is not taking the time to consider other explanations. Misinterpreting chance events as having meaning is one way this works. Coincidences do happen all the time, but are especially noticeable to people who are especially observant or on high alert.

Avoiding situations we're afraid of, but that would test our fears, can actually keep them going. Avoidance takes away the opportunity to learn when a risk no longer exists.

People can act in an angry way when they feel threatened. Feeling defensive and getting angry or making accusations may attract more attention, rather than getting people to leave you alone. If you've ever been unjustly accused of something, you know how unfair that feels. In this way, getting defensive and angry can have the opposite effect—reducing support rather than increasing safety.

People who feel suspicious or mistrustful tend to make up their minds more quickly than average (jump to conclusions). This may be due to the “hurry up” feeling that accompanies nervousness. Hasty decisions may not always be the best ones.

Mistrust also tends to go with blaming other people when things go wrong. People who are depressed often point the finger at themselves when bad things happen. People who feel very much on guard or mistrustful tend to assume that others intentionally cause them trouble. (People without mistrust or depression often chalk up bad events to coincidence or chance).

HELPING YOURSELF WITH FEARS OR MISTRUST

1. Attend to your health. If you're not getting enough sleep, look online or ask others for advice. If you're using substances, consider seeking help to reduce your use. Good nutrition and medical check-ups can help you avoid physical issues that increase nervousness.
2. Share your stress. If you grew up with abuse, bullying, or isolation, it is advisable to talk this over with a trusted person. Mental health workers are trained to deal with the effects of trauma. 12-Step sponsors, caring family members, or spiritual mentors may also be able to help. If housing or money problems are causing you worry, by all means seek support from social services.
3. Be encouraged to know that thousands of other people have traveled this path and found relief using CBT-p and self-help methods. Are your perceptions accurate or is some of your worry unnecessary? This question deserves an answer.
4. Working with thought diaries is a good way to start exploring your experiences.
5. Questioning Thoughts, Alternative Explanations, Weighing the Evidence, and Testing Explanations are the basic methods people have used to work with "people phobia".
6. Many people identify their decision to examine and explore their ideas or voices as the starting point of their recovery.
7. Sometimes it is too difficult to undertake testing out whether your ideas are mistaken or not. It may be too scary or too confusing right now. It is fine to leave these ideas for another time. There are other constructive steps you can take to reduce anxiety as well. See if you can list some here that work for you:

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ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS WORKSHEETS

Step 1: THOUGHT DIARY

DATE & TIME: _____

EVENT (What was happening?)

THOUGHT (What was going through my mind?)

EMOTION (What was I feeling?)

ACTION (What did I do?)

Step 2: QUESTION MY CONCLUSIONS

1. Could I be overestimating the level of danger or threat?
2. How do others see this situation?
3. Did I see this kind of situation differently in the past?
4. Did I make up my mind about this quickly?
5. Am I taking this situation personally?
6. Am I assuming a person intentionally caused the problem?
7. Could someone have done this out of ignorance or by accident?
8. Or, could it be unrelated to others' behavior at all—could it be a random event or a coincidence?

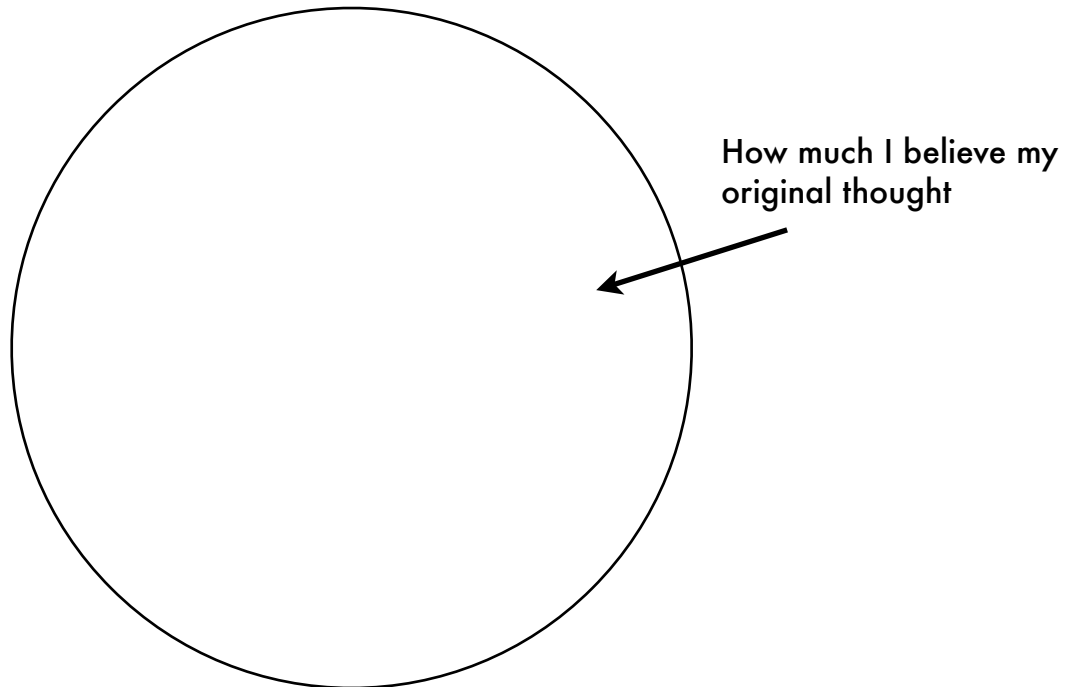
Step 3: THINK OF ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

What other possible explanations can I come up with for this event? Are there any other factors that might have contributed to it? Put your first explanation at the end of this list. Fill in the percentage you believe each explanation.

How much do I believe this idea? (0 to 100%):

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. Original explanation: _____

ILLUSTRATE how likely each idea is true with a Pie Chart:



STEP 4. ACTION STEP--TESTING OUT ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Overcoming fears takes courage & support. It often helps to have a trusted person accompany you as you undertake this work.

Test out your beliefs:

1. Put your belief in the form of a prediction: "If _____, then _____ will happen."
2. Review evidence for and against the prediction (including Alternative Explanations, above).
3. Figure out a way to test the prediction.
 - Think about how your prediction would work, if it is true
 - If your prediction were true, how would you know?
 - Your best alternative idea should be tested, too
 - A good test involves evidence that you & others can see
 - Set a time frame for the test
4. Make your observations. This is a good time to have someone accompany you, so you can compare notes.
5. Review the results and draw your conclusions, with your friend or worker, if possible.
 - Compare your results for the original idea and at least one of your alternatives.
 - Do the results give more support for the original prediction or the alternative?

My prediction:

Evidence for and against this prediction: _____

Alternative explanation: _____

How I will test this:

Observations: _____

Conclusions:

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