

## ■ Advice for people with schizophrenia

Often people with schizophrenia develop their own ways of coping with symptoms, such as playing music through headphones when hearing voices. The use of these 'coping strategies' does not necessarily remove the symptoms, but it often enables the person to feel more in control of those symptoms. Outlined here are some coping strategies that some people have found useful.

### Self monitoring

An important first step in managing your own symptoms is to become more aware of them and how they affect you. Monitoring your own mood, symptoms and behaviour, by completing a short questionnaire every fortnight has been shown to be useful (Early Signs Scale pp172–73). The questionnaire includes early warning signs that you may be getting unwell. If symptoms are getting worse then positive steps can be taken, such as seeking further support, or preparing for a relapse. It can help to have another person's view, so why not ask a close friend or relative to fill in the questionnaire too.

## ■ Coping with positive symptoms

- ◆ **Distraction.** Distract attention from voices by keeping busy, talking to others, listening to a radio, using a personal stereo with ear plugs or with headphones or reading the newspaper.
- ◆ **Relaxation.** Practice relaxation exercises to relieve tension and anxiety. If you can relax yourself physically there is a good chance that your mind will relax.
- ◆ **Challenge the voices.** Seek help to understand and perhaps challenge what the voices say or challenge your worrying thoughts or delusional beliefs. Ask yourself 'What is the evidence for that particular thought?', 'How would someone else view this situation?' Prepare a number of positive

thoughts such as, 'these voices are part of my illness and what they say is usually nonsense'. Write these thoughts on a card, and remind yourself of them when you hear the voices. Maybe whisper to yourself the positive challenging thoughts.

- ◆ **Find a creative outlet.** Have you tried painting or drawing, playing a musical instrument, writing poetry or short stories, woodwork or metal work?
- ◆ **Reduce your stress.** Try to maintain a balanced lifestyle. Avoid situations of high expressed emotion or people that 'wind you up'.
- ◆ **Take your medication regularly.**

## ■ Coping with negative symptoms

- ◆ **Build in structure and purpose to each day.** Perhaps keep a calendar or diary and plan activities, or make a 'to do' list on a sheet of paper or sticky label. Plan to go to support and activity groups.
- ◆ **Encourage social support.** Ask others to help you get going and provide support.
- ◆ **Keep active.** Have a range of interests and hobbies, including physical exercises.
- ◆ **Be positive.** Make a list of your achievements and feel positive about yourself.

## ■ Identify triggers

Most people can identify specific events or a series of events that make symptoms worse. These might include a sudden unexpected change in circumstances; having too much to do or excessive stimulation. Other triggers might be situations where there are people who are critical, hostile, over-protective or display excessive levels of emotion that you may not be able to respond to.