

ACCESS: SUPPORTS FOR LIVING PROS

Group Protocol: Learning to Trust Myself and Others (CL)

Goal: To increase perceptual and interpretational acuity and to decrease fear, isolation, confusion and shame which stem from experiencing hallucinations, paranoia and delusions.

***"experiences not shared by others" refers to any type of sensory hallucination or delusion that occur independently or in combination**

Objectives: Participants are offered a safe therapeutic environment focused on sharing and effectively coping with experiences which are not shared by others, which are often met with invalidating and shaming responses from others and oneself. Support for exploring and shifting perspectives on the roots and meanings of these experiences is mutually shared. Participants learn that they are not alone in these experiences and that an array of healthy responses is possible to any experience. Participants learn to challenge distressing perceptions, to seek healthier interpretations and to test reality as a group. Participants also develop their abilities to independently utilize reality testing, to recognize emotions and thoughts about perceptions and interpretations that amplify distress. Topics such as stigma and rejection are addressed.

Methodologies: This group uses mindfulness and CBT to increase awareness of thoughts and emotions as they occur, for noting and taking a helicopter view to manage these, to identify perceptions and interpretations as such and to distinguish these from reality. Distress tolerance and emotion regulation strategies are utilized to decrease and manage reactions to distressing or confusing experiences. Interpersonal and social skill development assists in communicating with others regarding these experiences (hallucinations and delusions) both within and outside of the group. Facilitated interactions and engagement among group members is a part of the culture of this group. Material (videos, articles) from individuals who live with these experiences and have shared publicly are utilized and discussed. There is a component of psychoeducation to normalize and offer root causes of experiences.

Barriers and Symptoms Addressed: The nature of paranoia is isolating and self-perpetuating. Participants in this group have experienced rejection, invalidation, and criticism which fuel inhibition and guardedness. Many participants' symptoms are resistant to treatment.

Resources Utilized Include: *Cognitive Therapy of Schizophrenia*, David G. Kingdon, Douglas Turkington; *Rational Living Therapy, Levels I & II*, Aldo Pucci; *Emotion Regulation in Psychotherapy*, Robert L. Leahy, Dennis Tirch, Lisa A. Napolitano; *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, Christopher Germer.