

NEUROSCIENCE TREATMENT TEAM PARTNER PROGRAM

Team Solutions

Schizophrenia: Understanding Your Symptoms

By Peter J. Weiden, MD

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Schizophrenia: Understanding Your Symptoms

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Contents

- 2 When Symptoms Are Taking Over Your Life
- 3 Emotional Symptoms Can Contribute to Difficulties in Your Life
- 4 Taking Action to Manage Symptoms
- 5 Stress Can Worsen Emotional Symptoms
- 8 Stress Is Harder on Some People
- 9 Knowing Your Symptoms
- 10 Symptoms That Improve With Treatment
- 14 Recognizing Your Symptoms
- 16 Ways People React to Their Symptoms
- 21 Getting Relief From Your Symptoms
- 22 Types of Services and Treatments Available
- 25 Medicines May Offer Protection Against Symptoms
- 26 How Antipsychotic Medicines Work to Help Relieve Your Symptoms
- 27 Michael's Story
- 33 Discovering Things About Yourself
- 36 Keep Taking Care of Yourself

When Symptoms Are Taking Over Your Life

Like many other people, you may be experiencing a time in your life when things seem to be getting more difficult. Work or school may seem harder to deal with. Other people might seem more irritating than they used to be. And you may not have the patience you used to have, or might feel angry more often than you used to.

Almost everyone experiences problems from time to time. But when too many problems happen at the same time, they can be overwhelming. The purpose of this workbook is to help explain why these things may be happening to you, and provide suggestions on what you can do to make your life better. To get the most from the questions and activities in this book, you may want to work through it with your case manager or another member of your health care team.



Emotional Symptoms Can Contribute to Difficulties in Your Life

It takes a good deal of concentration and energy to face life's challenges. Most of us are working toward future goals and at the same time are trying to get by each day. In addition, unexpected stresses or disappointments can come up at any time.

When things go wrong, it's normal to get upset. People react differently—some feel sad or depressed during setbacks; others may get angry or suspicious when bad things have happened to them. These kinds of reactions are normal. But there's a point at which these reactions can get out of control—and are then considered to be “emotional” or “psychiatric” symptoms.

Emotional symptoms affect your ability to cope and function. Emotional symptoms can be disabling, overwhelming, or unbearably painful. When symptoms become serious, many people find they can't do the things they used to do—they spend most of their time and energy coping with symptoms. There is little energy left over for other important things in their life such as school, work, or relationships. These emotional symptoms can lead to feelings of fear, embarrassment, loneliness, and worthlessness—feelings that make the situation even worse.



Taking Action to Manage Symptoms

When symptoms begin to take over your life, it's time to take action. There are many things you can do to overcome these difficulties. A first step for many people is to find help and support from other people. This might be a health care professional or someone else, such as a friend or family member. Once you have this support, work closely with these people—share as much information with them as possible, ask for their opinion, and decide which options will help you the most.

To get relief from your symptoms, you may rely on your doctor and other members of your treatment team. They can help you find out what may be causing these symptoms. And they can help you with ways to manage them.

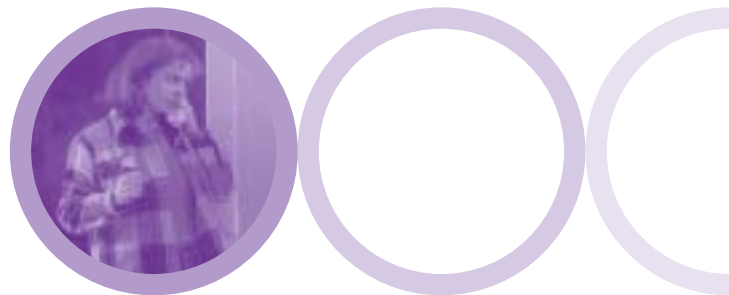


Stress Can Worsen Emotional Symptoms

For many people, stress plays a large role in the way they feel. Too much stress can make people feel anxious and depressed, and may cause sleep problems. Too much stress can affect your concentration—it might be harder for you to focus on things you're doing. In some people, stress may even trigger symptoms of psychosis, such as hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not really there) and delusions (believing things that are not really true).

You may have experienced feelings or symptoms from too much physical or emotional stress. One example of intense stress is the way you'd feel if you stayed awake for one or two days without any sleep. People who don't get enough sleep tend to forget things, get confused easily, and feel more irritable. In people who are severely sleep deprived, strange symptoms may occur—they may feel afraid and not know why, and they may even see or hear things that are not really there.

That's because situations that cause severe stress, such as lack of sleep, can have an effect on your mind and body. For example, intensely stressful situations, such as getting into an argument, can cause your heart rate to speed up. Your face may get flushed. It will probably take you a little time to calm down before you're able to focus on your work. The argument might use up so much of your energy, you may not feel like doing anything afterwards.



Likewise, constant stresses that occur over long periods of time can have a similar effect. Constant stresses may include staying up too late every night, taking a difficult course, or getting drunk or high often.

Stress may also result from the good things that happen in your life, such as moving, getting a new job, or starting a new relationship. All of these stresses (good or bad) can affect your system over time. Also, stress can trigger emotional symptoms, making it harder for you to cope with other problems.



Possible Causes of Symptoms

Intense stress isn't the only reason people experience emotional symptoms. There are many medical, neurological, and psychiatric conditions that can also cause these symptoms. Some of the causes include:

- Anxiety disorders
- Major depression or manic depression
- Schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder
- Disorders related to excessive drug or alcohol use
- Medical or neurological conditions, such as thyroid problems or seizure disorders
- Extreme emotional or physical stress such as not getting any sleep for several days or not getting enough to eat



Because there are so many different reasons why people may get emotional symptoms, this workbook will not focus on the specific conditions that can cause symptoms. That's why it's so important for you to discuss your symptoms with your doctor or treatment team—they'll be able to find the reasons or conditions that might explain your symptoms.

The good news is that there are several things you can do to help reduce symptoms or help keep symptoms from returning.



Stress Is Harder on Some People

Why do some people have a harder time handling pressures than other people? Because some people are born with the ability to handle lots of pressure. Other people aren't—they get stressed out more easily. And some people handle pressure better because they've learned better ways to cope with it. They know the kinds of things that are hard on them and they do things to keep from getting stressed out. Below are some ways people have said they've been able to keep their stress level down:



- *“I make sure I get enough sleep every night—go to bed around the same time and wake up about the same time each day.”*
- *“I listen to my favorite music every day.”*
- *“I talk with my friends regularly. Talking to them and doing things with them keeps my mind off my troubles and helps me feel better.”*
- *“When I'm feeling really stressed out, I take a shower. The water makes me feel relaxed.”*
- *“I don't get involved in situations that I know will get me anxious, like around the holidays—I visit my family after the big holiday dinner because it's more calm then.”*
- *“I don't get high any more—the booze and (street) drugs made me feel great at first, but my life started falling apart so I decided to stop them.”*



Knowing Your Symptoms

One of the first steps in helping yourself feel better is to figure out what problems or symptoms are bothering you. Some of the symptoms may seem like normal reactions—such as feeling nervous or down.

Other kinds of reactions may seem more unusual. People don't like to talk about them much—for example, seeing strange visions or believing unusual things that no one else agrees with.

No matter what types of symptoms you have, it's important to take an honest look at what they are. That's because your symptoms may cause other problems in your life without your realizing it. For example, if you're having trouble concentrating on school work, you may be spending a lot of time studying, but you may not be able to understand or remember enough to do well on your exams.

As symptoms start going away, most people feel happier and enjoy life a lot more. This doesn't mean that if your symptoms get better your problems will suddenly go away. Rather, when symptoms get better, you can pay more attention to your goals. You can put your energy into other things that are important to you, like school, work, or relationships. Once you figure out what these symptoms are, you may find ways to reduce or manage them.



Symptoms That Improve With Treatment

The next section of this workbook focuses on common symptoms that often require treatment. They are anxiety, depression, and psychosis. Keep in mind this is not a complete list. For example, obsessive-compulsive symptoms and manic symptoms are not covered here. Talk to your doctor about the kinds of symptoms you are having.

Anxiety Symptoms

Anxiety symptoms refer to having a sense of fear or danger that does not fit the situation. For example, it is normal to be frightened or anxious when you are in a car accident. But if you're always so worried about getting into an accident that you can't drive a car, then you have an anxiety symptom.

Two common anxiety symptoms are *generalized anxiety* and *social anxiety*:

- *Generalized anxiety* refers to a constant, exaggerated fearfulness or nervousness. A person with generalized anxiety worries all the time, and has trouble relaxing. The worries and fears may cause physical distress, including trembling, pacing, sweating, headaches, and upset stomach.
- *Social anxiety* is when anxiety symptoms happen around other people—especially around a lot of people or when talking with strangers. People who have social anxiety often fear being embarrassed or humiliated. They often avoid new social situations.

One important thing to keep in mind about anxiety symptoms is that they can often be caused by other kinds of symptoms such as depression or psychosis. For example, if you hear threatening voices that others don't hear, you might feel very anxious.

Symptoms of Depression

Feeling depressed can be normal. Depression may occur after a setback like losing a job or breaking off a romantic relationship. However, when depression lasts a long time or becomes so severe that it takes over your life, it's considered to be a symptom. Some symptoms of depression include:

- **A persistent depressed mood**—Depressed moods caused by setbacks usually tend to last less than two weeks. So, if you're feeling depressed for more than two weeks, it may be a symptom of clinical depression.
- **Hopelessness**—Even people who go through very difficult and painful experiences, such as the death of a loved one, usually feel hope for the future. Feeling hopeless is usually a symptom of depression.
- **Suicidal thoughts**—Like hopelessness, suicidal thoughts are a common symptom of depression. Wishing for death, thinking of ways to kill yourself, and not wanting to live anymore are some signs of being depressed.



Symptoms of Psychosis

Psychotic symptoms are unusual thoughts and experiences that are caused by problems in the brain. These kinds of symptoms seem very real to most people. Your brain creates stories and conversations while you're asleep—you know those are dreams. But sometimes a dream can seem *very real* while it's happening.

Unlike dreaming, psychotic symptoms happen while you're awake. Your brain can create unusual thoughts, beliefs, stories, people, or conversations when you're awake. They seem just as real as people and experiences in the world around you, so it's hard to figure out if something is a psychotic symptom or not.

Common psychotic symptoms include:

- **Hallucinations**—There are all sorts of hallucinations. These may be sounds, voices, images, odors, or things you feel or taste that other people don't experience. Hallucinations can be short-lived or last a long time. And they can be vivid and detailed, or vague and blurry.
- **Delusions**—These are strong beliefs a person may have that others know are not true. An example of a delusion is believing your food is poisoned.
- **Disorganized thinking**—People who have this symptom have a hard time focusing on what other people are saying. It may be hard for them to get their thoughts together. Or, they may have problems saying what they're thinking—so other people may not be able to understand what they're saying.

Is It Real or Not?

It can be very hard to figure out if something is really happening or if your brain is playing tricks on you. Your brain can make you have all sorts of ideas and experiences that seem very real. For example, some beliefs may be true or they may be a psychotic symptom, depending on the situation.

Let's say you have a fear that someone is out to kill you. It may be real or it may be a delusion. If you had this fear without any actual threats, the fear would be considered a paranoid delusion.

Anxiety, depression, and feeling overwhelmed can be reactions to the stress of being psychotic. They can also be a part of the initial problem that's causing the psychotic symptoms in the first place. As you can see, it may be hard to tell where these symptoms are coming from.



Recognizing Your Symptoms

What symptoms have bothered you the most? Figuring out what these symptoms are can help you gain control over them.

The next few pages can help you figure out what symptoms you're having now or those you may have had in the past. Not all of these symptoms will apply to you, and you may have other symptoms not listed here.

Place a check mark in the box next to each symptom you've had:

Symptoms of Anxiety

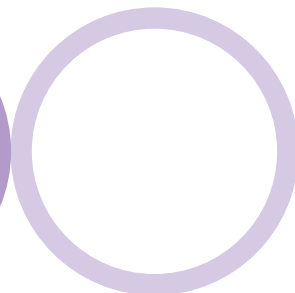


- I feel anxious much of the time
- At times I have fears about being harmed or killed
- I believe someone is watching me
- I'm frightened that I'm losing my mind
- Other

Symptoms of Depression



- I feel sad all the time
- Few things give me any pleasure
- I feel totally hopeless about my situation
- I'd rather be dead than feel this bad
- Other



Symptoms of Psychosis



- People on TV are having a conversation with me or about me
- My room is bugged, and people listen in on all of my conversations
- I can hear other people's thoughts
- Shapes and faces seem distorted
- At times, my thoughts or actions are controlled by others
- I hear voices even when no one is speaking
- People can't understand what I am saying
- My thoughts are all jumbled
- Other _____
- Other _____



Ways People React to Their Symptoms

Having emotional symptoms can lead to many types of feelings, stresses, and difficult situations—fear, embarrassment, anger, worthlessness, isolation, and drug and alcohol use are a few of the common ways people react to their symptoms.

Feeling Frightened

Sometimes, symptoms may occur when you least expect them to. People describe this sudden flooding of symptoms as a loss of control—as if their mind is “falling apart.” These symptoms can bring on feelings of fear, panic, and terror. This makes it even harder to know what to do, how to get help, and how to get relief from the symptoms.

Many people have gone through these types of experiences. And lots of people have been able to regain control of their thoughts and feelings. One thing that’s helped them is the support they’ve found in trusted friends, family, and health care professionals. They have also discovered that treatment may be necessary in helping them manage their symptoms.



Feeling Stigmatized or Embarrassed

Stigma is the offensive way people treat you, based on their own bias against those who have emotional symptoms; *embarrassment* is how you feel about yourself. Unfortunately, people with emotional problems often face stigma and discrimination. These kinds of attitudes are seen all the time—the way movies and television portray people with a mental illness is one example of stigma.

People can feel embarrassed for a variety of reasons. Sometimes people do or say things they don't mean when their symptoms are out of control. Other people may feel embarrassed because they look “drugged” from their medicine. And others may feel embarrassed to be seen participating in programs designed for people with psychiatric problems.

If you feel embarrassed about having symptoms or about being in psychiatric treatment, you are not alone. Most people have these feelings. There is no easy answer to this problem, but many people have found it useful to talk with a trusted friend, relative, or mental health professional about these feelings.



Feeling Worthless

Because of your symptoms, you've probably found it harder to do well in school, or keep up with a full-time job. You may feel ashamed that you're not able to do the things you used to be able to do. Many people base their self-worth on what they do or what they earn. So, when symptoms take over and people aren't at their best, they may lose their sense of identity and begin to feel worthless.

Accepting and liking yourself, even when you are struggling with symptoms, is very hard. People who can't do the things they once did may think of themselves as *weak* or *lazy*. But in fact, it's often just the opposite—it takes a lot of *courage* and *inner strength* to go on.

Feeling Isolated From Others

Many people have said that feeling isolated and lonely are just as tough as the emotional symptoms themselves. Some people need to be alone when they're going through difficult times. Other people feel the need to be with others when times get tough—but sometimes it may be hard to find someone to talk to.

If you're feeling lonely, there may be a few ways to find someone you would trust enough to confide in. You may want to start with your friends or family. Other people who might understand your loneliness are mental health professionals, clergy, or someone who has gone through similar symptoms.



Feeling Angry at Others

There are many reasons why people may feel frustrated or angry at times. Many are unhappy with “the system”—they say they would like to be treated as a person, not as a patient. At times they find it hard to get access to the help they need. And sometimes people have had several different diagnoses and don’t know which one to believe. Or they feel pressure from the system to accept treatment they don’t agree with or want. Other people have problems at home—they feel as if they’re treated like a child.

These problems are unlikely to go away on their own. Here are a few things you can do to handle anger more skillfully so that you feel less frustrated or angry:

- **If you disagree with something your doctor or family says or does, plan a time to discuss the problem with them.**
Quite often, others are not aware of the way you feel. So, speak to them about your opinion. And give them a chance to discuss the way they feel too. Together, you may be able to find a situation that’s better for everyone.
- **“Agree to disagree.”**
Of course, there may be times that you won’t be able to agree on something—and that’s okay in some situations. Learning to “agree to disagree” is a skill that can help people avoid frustration and anger that may lead to an argument.
- **Find ways to manage your anger.**
There are times when you’ll be angry for a good reason. But the problem with staying angry is that it can be harmful to your own health. Find ways to get past your anger. Talk to other people about ways they overcome their own anger—you may find their ideas helpful.

Drinking and Getting High

Some people try to get relief from their symptoms by drinking alcohol or getting high. The drug might be a street drug like marijuana or cocaine, or a legal one like caffeine or alcohol. Although you may feel better when you use these substances, these drugs always make the symptoms worse in the long run.

Another reason people choose to use drugs or alcohol is because symptoms can make it much harder to be with people or have friends. Many people drink or get high together, and it can be easy to hang out with drug or drinking buddies. But, you will run into the same problem—partying will make your symptoms worse, and it'll be even harder to socialize when your symptoms are out of control.



One thing that fools many people is that even small amounts of drugs or alcohol can be bad for a person who is sensitive to psychiatric symptoms. Only a small amount of these substances—much less than other people use—can bring on severe symptoms.

Getting Relief From Your Symptoms

Most people who get these kinds of symptoms find them difficult to ignore. Yet, it's so hard to overcome them on your own. Most people feel embarrassed about having these symptoms. They don't want to tell anyone how bad they're feeling or that they are hearing voices.

It's normal to feel uneasy about telling others about these unusual symptoms. If you feel this way, there are two facts you should know—first, there are many other people who are also bothered by these symptoms. And second, your doctor and other members of your treatment team are very familiar with these symptoms. They hear about symptoms like these all of the time and have worked with thousands of people to help them feel better.

There may be several ways to get relief from these symptoms. But the fastest and most effective way is to work with your doctor and other members of your treatment team to set up a plan—a “treatment plan”—designed just for you based on your needs. The goals of the treatment plan are to help relieve your symptoms and provide you with skills that may help you as you work toward your goals (living on your own, getting back to work or school, etc.).



Types of Services and Treatments Available

Depending on your symptoms and problems, your treatment team will design a treatment plan specifically for your needs. Your treatment plan may involve some or many of the following types of services and treatments:

Community Resources



If you've been disabled by your symptoms, you might need assistance with paying the rent, finding a decent or safe place to live, or getting adequate nutritious food. Paying for medical care and medicines can also be a major problem, especially if you don't have benefits, or if they have run out.

Your treatment team can help you find resources that may be helpful to you. These may include applying for disability payments, medical benefits, or help with housing.

Medicines



There are medicines available that can help reduce symptoms. The choice of medicine and how well it may work for you will depend on a variety of things—the kinds of symptoms you're having, your willingness to try medicine, and other things that are going on in your life. When used properly, medicines are often able to relieve symptoms such as nervousness, trouble sleeping, unusual fears, hearing voices, feeling overly suspicious, confused thinking, and depression.

Counseling or Therapy Sessions

Medicines alone are often not enough to relieve symptoms. That's because medicines don't prevent stresses that happen in your life. And they can't help you handle an overwhelming situation.

People who are having these kinds of problems may find it helpful to speak with a trained counselor or therapist. You may decide to use counseling or therapy for emotional support during stressful times, or for help in coping with symptoms or other life problems.

Counseling or therapy sessions may be given in different ways—they can be private sessions with a therapist, or sessions with your family, or group sessions with other people who are going through similar problems.

Education About Symptoms and Treatment



For most medical conditions, there are various educational programs that can help you learn about your specific symptoms and treatment. For emotional or psychiatric symptoms, these illness education programs are called psychoeducation. Often, families and loved ones are also invited to join sessions to learn more about your symptoms, treatment, and how to help you get better.



Rehabilitation

If you have been disabled for a long time, you may need help in regaining educational, vocational, or living skills. There are rehabilitation programs that can help you learn the skills you need to live on your own, go to school, or find work.

Peer Support Groups

Many people find it helpful to learn from others who have had similar problems. Some people feel less isolated when they talk with peers. Others like to get feedback without professionals being around.

Support groups are very helpful in this way. People who have had the same problems you're having now can tell you how they've managed these problems. The best known peer support group is Alcoholics Anonymous for people whose major problem is alcohol. There are also peer groups for many psychiatric conditions, such as *Recovery, Inc.*

Recovery, Inc. focuses on self-help techniques to help reduce emotional symptoms such as anxiety and fear. To find out more about Recovery, Inc., or where you can attend a meeting, call (312) 337-5661 or visit their web site at www.recovery-inc.com. Check your phone book for the phone number of your local Recovery, Inc. chapter.



Medicines May Offer Protection Against Symptoms

There are many medicines available that help reduce almost all of the symptoms described in this workbook. Medicines can help relieve symptoms of anxiety, depression, or psychosis. They may also prevent or delay symptoms from returning. In a way, they act as a safety net against stresses that may occur in the future. Their protective effect may be especially valuable after recovering from a setback or a flare-up of symptoms. That's why, if you're taking a medicine and you find it helps your symptoms, your doctor may recommend that you take it for a long period of time, even after your symptoms have improved.

Antipsychotic Medicines



Antipsychotic medicines are used to treat symptoms of psychosis such as hallucinations and delusions. They may also help you feel less anxious about being with other people, help you concentrate better on the things you're doing, and can help improve bothersome symptoms such as fears and voices. Here are a few facts about antipsychotic medicines:

- It may take a few weeks before you can feel their beneficial effects, so your doctor may want you to take your medicine regularly even though you won't be able to notice any difference at first.
- They are not addictive.
- Like all other medicines, they may cause side effects—but most side effects can be managed. Always talk to your doctor if you think you are having side effects from any medication.

How Antipsychotic Medicines Work to Help Relieve Your Symptoms

You may be wondering why these symptoms are happening and how medicine can help improve them. There are many theories as to why people get these kinds of symptoms. One explanation may be that these symptoms are related to too much stress—stress that's affecting your heart rate, breathing, and even the delicate balance of hormones and chemicals in your brain and other areas of your body. Antipsychotic medicines may work in three ways:

- They may adjust the imbalance of chemicals in your brain.
- They may enhance your resistance to stress.
- They may make it easier for you to cope with your symptoms.

You may want to ask your doctor to tell you about the different antipsychotic medicines available. Let your doctor explain the advantages and disadvantages of each one. It's important to discuss all of your treatment options with your doctor and other members of your treatment team so that you can make the best choices about your treatment.



Michael's Story

Sometimes it helps to look at things from another point of view so that you learn more about yourself. The story you are about to read includes actual events that have occurred; however, the names have been changed to preserve confidentiality. This story illustrates how Michael, a college student, started having problems and how they affected his life over a one-year period. As you read about his experiences, think about some of the experiences you've had in your own life. Think of ways you were able to overcome some of the problems you have had. After reading "Michael's Story," you'll be asked to discuss and list your ideas on things Michael could do (or could have done) to manage these problems and improve his life.

Part I: Introduction

Michael, a college junior who was majoring in history, usually got As and Bs in most of his courses. Over the past year, his grades slipped, and he dropped two courses to avoid failing grades. He took a summer job as a waiter in a local restaurant, and usually went out with his friends after work.

Halfway through the summer, Michael and another waiter at the restaurant got into an argument. The argument got worse and turned into a fist fight. Michael was stronger than the other waiter and pushed him against the counter. The waiter hit his head and blacked out. In anger, Michael slammed his fist against a window. Glass shattered around him, and people in the restaurant started running toward the door. The police arrived and Michael went with them to the police station.



What's Your Opinion?



What are some things Michael could have done when he noticed his grades slipping?



List ways that Michael might have avoided getting into a fist fight with the other waiter:



Describe ways Michael may be able to avoid heated arguments in the future:

Part II: Michael's Second Chance

Michael couldn't explain why he felt so angry. He'd had disagreements with people in the past and nothing like this had ever happened. He told the police he was having a lot of problems. The police gave him a choice—go to jail or agree to see a psychiatrist. Michael didn't like either of these options. He was more afraid of going to jail, so he agreed to see the psychiatrist.

During the meeting with the psychiatrist, Michael explained many of the things that happened to him over the past year. He found it hard to explain why his courses seemed so difficult—and why he didn't want to go back to school the next semester. He also couldn't understand why everyone was against him at the restaurant—maybe they were trying to steal his tips from him, he thought.

After a lengthy discussion with the psychiatrist, Michael was able to remember some of the difficulties he was having in his life—he was not sleeping well, he could no longer relate to some of his friends, and he felt very disorganized.

Michael told the psychiatrist a lot about the problems he was having. But there were a few things he didn't mention, such as the voices he was hearing that nobody else seemed to hear. He also didn't want her to know that he and his friends often stayed up late partying. He was afraid of what she might think of him.



Over the next few weeks, Michael kept hearing the voices—they were frightening and became even worse over time. Finally, he told the psychiatrist about them. The psychiatrist recommended treatment to help with the symptoms. She also recommended an antipsychotic medicine to help Michael feel more relaxed and help him sleep at night.

At first, Michael refused to take the medicine because he felt that medicines were for sick people, and he was not sick. But after a few days, he decided to take the medicine just to see if it would make any difference. He started to feel better after a few weeks.

What's Your Opinion?



Michael was drinking beer and getting high with his friends the night before the argument. **Why do you think Michael didn't want to tell the psychiatrist about how often he was partying?**



What effect do you think the alcohol or drugs had on his symptoms?



Why do you think Michael was frightened about hearing voices?

Part III: Epilog

The next year, Michael was able to go back to school part time. During his midterms, Michael stayed up late studying. He drank several cups of coffee to keep himself awake. The midterms seemed to go okay, but he felt terrible. He stopped taking the antipsychotic medicine because he thought it wasn't helping him any more. For the first time in weeks, he began to hear voices again. By the end of the semester, he felt worse and dropped out of school. Michael is living at home with his family now. He doesn't have a job. He still asks himself why all of these things have happened to him.

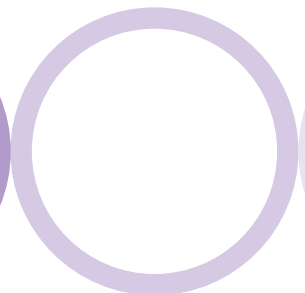
What's Your Opinion?

Why do you think Michael had another setback during his midterms?



Do you think Michael can get his life back on track again? If so, what are some of the things he should do to accomplish his goals?





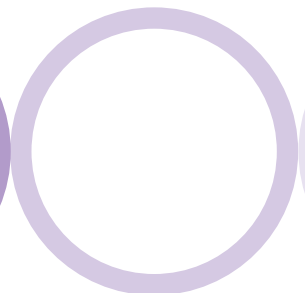
Your Advice to Michael



Think back to your own life experiences. If you could help Michael, what would you advise him to do? List as many suggestions as possible.



What kinds of difficulties have you had in your own life, and how did you manage them?



Discovering Things About Yourself

You finished the exercise, *Michael's Story*, and came up with ways Michael might be able to manage his symptoms and problems. You may be able to use some of these ideas to manage the difficulties you're having and improve your own life. Answer each of the questions in this section. Use the new ideas you discussed or listed from *Michael's Story* to help yourself answer the questions.



Describe a time in your life when you felt as if you lost control:



What could you have done to stay in control?



What can you do to avoid situations in the future that may cause you to lose control? (Use any ideas you may have discussed after *Michael's Story*.)



Why is it important to keep your stress at a comfortable level?



What are some of the things you can do to keep your stress at a comfortable level?



How do you feel about taking medicine for your symptoms?

Beware of Caffeine

Caffeine can make anxiety worse and is often the cause of insomnia (not being able to sleep). Many people don't realize how much caffeine they're consuming. Many foods and drinks contain caffeine. They include chocolate, coffee, tea, and some sodas. Many nonprescription drug products also contain caffeine.

Fill in the chart on page 35. List all of the foods (such as candy bars that contain chocolate) and drinks you consume that contain caffeine. Also write down how much of each food or drink you consume.

How Much Caffeine Are You Consuming Each Day?

Food or Drink	How Much You Consume At One Time	How Many Times a Day You Consume It
Coffee		
Tea		
Soda		
Chocolate		

Medicines You Select Yourself

Nonprescription medicines such as decongestants, diet pills, some nonprescription pain pills, and pills you take to stay awake can aggravate your condition. So can caffeine, alcohol, and street drugs.

It's important to check with your doctor, pharmacist, or other member of your treatment team before taking any nonprescription medicines—some medicines may interfere with your antipsychotic medicine and make your symptoms worse. **On the lines below, list the nonprescription medicines that you have taken within the last month:**



Keep Taking Care of Yourself

With treatment, you are likely to start feeling much better. In fact, you may even feel up to taking on new challenges! But keep in mind that new challenges can bring extra stress. So if you decide to make a few major changes in your life, such as starting a new job, moving, or starting a new relationship, be sure to do all you can to maintain a comfortable stress level.

Talk to your doctor about medicines that may be helpful to you. Also keep exploring new ways to overcome difficulties that may come up in the future. The more ways you find to cope with stress, the more prepared you'll be to avoid problems and symptoms in the future—or manage them more easily.

