

Beyond Disbelief

Ways of approaching alternative realities

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Hearing Voices Movement principles that are helpful for living with unusual beliefs

- *Commonality of alternative beliefs* Studies have shown that all sorts of beliefs Psychiatric professional might see as irrational including beliefs in magic, aliens, telepathy and spiritualist beliefs are extremely common in the general population (Peters et al. 1999a).
- *Embracing different frames of reference:* Within the hearing voices movement different understandings of voice hearing are respected, including spiritual and paranormal interpretations.
- *Community education:* If communities can accept and become more understanding towards unusual beliefs, people will be at less risk of social exclusion processes.

- *Reducing Social isolation:* People's beliefs are likely to be held more strongly and be more inflexible if they are socially isolated. Having respectful relationships to relate to others is likely to be empowering.
- *An emphasis on the importance of social relationships:* By encouraging people to talk about their relationships with others and collaborating with them on different ways to improve these relationships people can regain their independence and take responsibility for their actions.
- *Meaning:* Unusual beliefs are likely to meaningfully relate to people's present and/or past social relationships.

- *Living with:* It may be useful to move away from an illness model where unusual beliefs are seen as fundamentally pathological. Rather we should assume that what is important is not what one believes but how one lives with those beliefs and negotiates them in the wider world.
- *Giving people back responsibility:* If someone acts anti-socially, educating people that they have a choice and responsibility to act ethically even where they are responding to beliefs others do not share.
- *Emotional and Socio political Dynamics:* It may be helpful to think about the relationship between beliefs and emotions. It may be helpful to think about the relationship between beliefs and emotions and social and political processes.

‘The map is not the territory’

- None of us know reality. We all have different versions which we are constantly updating, and which are always inaccurate to some degree.
- There are therefore many different versions of reality.
- Learning to dialogue with these allows us to consider different possible meanings.

Madness is relative

If you believe you are a messiah and you can persuade other people of this, you can start a sect but if you cannot persuade anyone else you may be sectioned!

Delusions are in 'the eye of the beholder'

Many spiritual and political beliefs that are commonly held can be seen as a way of life to the holders but to the outside observers who wish to dismiss the values of these beliefs, they can be seen as madness or 'collectively held delusions'.

Spiritual Emergence

understands psychotic experiences as a form of spiritual waking up, so that the development of unusual beliefs and extreme mind states can form part of a psychologically transformative experience.

Accepting alternative realities

- Respecting unusual beliefs.
- Finding common ground, meaningful shared activity, creating safety.
- Only challenging particular beliefs for good ethical reasons and where this seems to be beneficial.
- When someone is safe and grounded and motivated: Collaboratively stepping back and looking at different possible meanings of beliefs.

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