

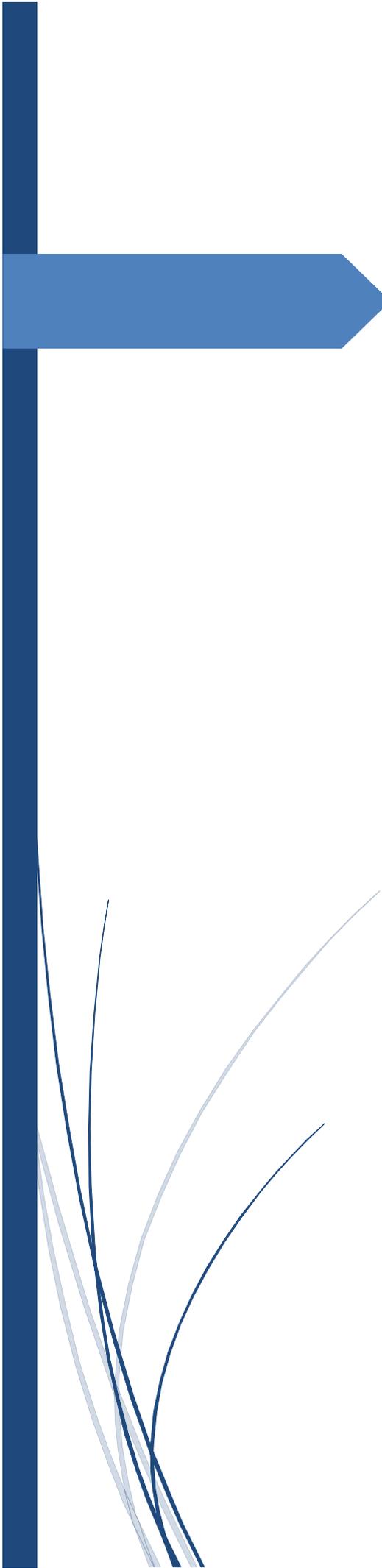


Unusual Beliefs

Stabilisation Pack



**Cwm Taf University Health Board –
Psychological Therapies Department**



Unusual Beliefs

What are unusual beliefs?

Most of us have beliefs that can't actually be proved - for example, we may believe in God, or telepathy, or ghosts. If these beliefs are common, and if they do not cause any harm or distress, they are not seen as a problem. However, some people have strong beliefs that are not shared by others, and which cause them a significant amount of distress. Often these beliefs are quite frightening. For example, you may be convinced that people or organisations are following you or spying on you or plotting to harm you in some way. Others may believe that people on the television are talking about them, or that secret cameras have been installed in their home, or that their food is being poisoned.

What causes unusual beliefs?

Research has shown that nearly all of us have some beliefs that could be described as 'paranoid.' For example, it is common to walk into a room and immediately be afraid that everyone is talking about you - especially if you are rather shy and self-conscious. It has been estimated that between 10-15% of the population regularly have thoughts that would fit the diagnosis of 'paranoia', although most of these people do not come into contact with mental health services. The people who access services are usually those who are most distressed by their beliefs, whereas others with similar beliefs may manage to live alongside them without too many problems.

Suspicious beliefs can be the result of drugs, either illegal or prescribed. For example, amphetamines can make people very suspicious and afraid, as can cannabis, alcohol, cocaine and ecstasy. Some prescribed drugs can also have this effect in some people. If you have concerns about this you should talk to your GP or psychiatrist.

Another reason for having unusual beliefs that are not shared by others, is a past history of trauma of some kind. It is not surprising that the world may seem a very dangerous place if you've been through traumatic events. We know that people who have had very real and frightening experiences of being bullied or victimised are more likely to develop beliefs that are sometimes described as 'paranoid.' If you really have been threatened, it is not surprising that later on in your life, you will easily get worried that you might be in danger again. Situations of inequality – such as being poor, powerless and taken advantage of - can also lead us to feel 'paranoid'. For example, you may have been in situations where others were hostile to you or tried to cover up or lie about what was going on (e.g. workplace harassment, or racism.) Or you may live in a part of town that is unsafe. All of this will make it more likely that

your fears, which arise out of real events and situations, increase and start to dominate your life.

Sometimes, fears that arise during confusing and unpleasant situations seem to get exaggerated, and then it is hard to work out what is real and what isn't real. This may be because your mind is working very hard to protect you from further risks, even when the risks are not there any more, or are much lower than you think.

Strategies that might help

One way of working out what is really happening is to try and test out some of your beliefs. Sometimes there is a reassuring explanation. For example, one man was convinced that the police were following him, even though he had done nothing wrong. When he looked into this with the help of his mental health worker, they discovered that there was a police station just around the corner. This was the reason that there were a lot of police cars around. Perhaps you and your mental health worker, if you have one, can come up with some ways of finding out if there is evidence to support your beliefs, or not.

Another helpful approach is trying to reduce the distress that the belief causes you, so that it has less influence over your life. Even if you and others have different opinions about whether the belief is true, you can still try some of the ideas that other people have found useful.

These ideas fall into 3 main groups:

REDUCING FEAR AND INCREASING CONTROL.

You may be able to do this by finding additional ways to protect yourself, planning for difficult situations, using reassuring phrases to yourself, relaxation or Mindfulness techniques.

BUILDING UP OTHER ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE.

Having a structure to your day can help, as does getting involved in activities and hobbies that distract you from worries and bring more enjoyment into your life.

OVERCOMING PROBLEMS.

If the belief is stopping you doing things you want to do, or interfering in your life in other ways, see if you (and your mental health worker if you have one) can come up with some creative solutions. For example, even if you are

worried about your food being poisoned, there may be types of food or places to eat which worry you less. If you stick to these, at least in the short-term until you build up confidence, your life will be less restricted.

It is important that mental health workers take your fears seriously and are willing to discuss how and why they may have started. Many people find that if they are able to put together an account about how their beliefs fit in with their life experiences, they experience some relief and become less afraid. If you think your beliefs may be related to traumatic experiences in the past, you may find it helpful to have counselling or therapy to resolve some of the feelings. You can discuss this with your mental health worker or GP.

Reading and Resources

This **free book** discusses strategies for living alongside unusual beliefs:

Beyond Belief: Alternative ways of working with delusions, obsessions and unusual experiences, by Tamasin Knight (2009), Peter Lehmann Publishing.

A PDF version is at:

<http://www.psyclope.co.uk/resources/beyond-belief%20recommendation.pdf>

This **book** has personal accounts by people who learned to live with unusual or frightening beliefs:

Living with Voices: 50 stories of recovery, by Romme, M., Escher, S., Dillon, J. Corstens, D. and Morris, M. (2013) Ross on Wye: PCCS Books.

This **website** has personal stories and ideas about what might help:

www.nationalparanoianetwork.org