

## Focusing on movement and breathing instead of distressing thoughts

A new training programme aims to encourage people with schizophrenia to focus their minds on gentle physical movements, rather than stressful, distressing or anxiety-provoking thoughts.

The 'Body in Mind Training' programme has been successfully piloted in south London with groups of people with schizophrenia and some of the mental health professionals who support them.

Developed by Tamara Russell, a researcher at the Institute of Psychiatry, Body in Mind Training brings together principles of psychology, tai chi and 'mindfulness'.

'Movement gives the mind something to anchor onto, something to "watch",' she says. 'The training encourages people to be really aware of deliberately doing a movement, to notice what happens when they start or stop a movement, and what happens in the body as they move. It's about slowing down movements and paying deliberate attention to them, focusing on what your body is doing at that particular moment.' If people's minds wander during the movement, they are encouraged to note, but not to react to that, she says.

By helping people learn to focus on their body while performing a movement and also concentrate on their breathing, Tamara hopes it will prepare them for learning how to respond to their emotions and distressing symptoms in a more 'mindful way'.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence recommends mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for the treatment of depression: the therapy aims to help people cope better with negative thoughts and feelings, to be more accepting of those experiences and to react to them in a more positive way. Various research studies are currently being undertaken to see if mindfulness can help people who have experience of psychosis.

'The idea is that mindfulness training can help people engage with their mental experiences in different, kinder and more accepting way,' says Tamara.

The exercise element of Body in Mind Training can also benefit people with schizophrenia who are more likely to have physical health problems, sometimes as a result of antipsychotic medication side-effects, she says. 'The classes are suitable for people at any fitness level, and many exercise can be carried out while people are sitting.'

The programme has been piloted with people who are being cared for on a psychiatric ward, in a residential care home for people with severe mental illness and on a forensic low security unit.

Feedback from both people who are unwell and the mental health professionals who have participated in the pilot programme has been very positive. Many said they felt less stressed after the sessions. The pilot programmes have consisted of weekly sessions for eight weeks.

continues on page 2

reliable and up-to-date  
information about  
psychosis for family  
members and friends  
[www.mentalhealthcare.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealthcare.org.uk)

## Focusing on movement and breathing instead of distressing thoughts/2

The classes – described by one participant as being ‘like a tai chi class with more talking’ – are carried out with music in the background to help people feel calm and relaxed. The feedback shows that single sex groups seem to work best and the most successful pilot sessions were when participants knew each other – were all from the same ward, for example – and therefore felt comfortable with each other.

Tamara is now planning a research project to properly evaluate what effect Body in Mind Training has on people’s anxiety, and the distress caused by anxiety. She is also developing a version of the programme for people with experience of schizophrenia who are on the road to recovery.

But she stresses: ‘Body in Mind Training is not just for those with mental health difficulties, anyone can benefit.’ A version of the programme has already been offered to mental health professionals working in services run by South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust.

Tamara has written about the Body in Mind Training programme in an article in the *British Journal of Wellbeing*, published in March 2011.

■ Body in mind training: mindful movement for severe and enduring mental illness, Tamara Russell, *British Journal of Wellbeing*, Volume 2, No 3, March 2011.

*uploaded onto mentalhealthcare.org.uk 8/5/11*