

Five ways you can...

A person, struggling and in pain...

#1

At the centre of every "case" of "mental illness" is a person in pain: feeling stuck, trapped, lost, powerless, scared, and feeling alone. And, likely, not just the one person but many of those around them will, by degree, feel some of this too.

All that stuff about symptoms diagnosis is interesting but, really, its not that useful.

We can be seduced into believing that if we know all the right terms we're becoming expert at categorizing the problem so we can talk with fellow experts in ways that sound all experty.

Yet, when we focus on the categories we lose sight of the person and the pain they live with.

To be categorized is to be dehumanized, it disconnects us from the rest of humanity and is itself a core experience of what we call both "psychosis" and "trauma".

If we can hold-off looking for ways to categorize "what's wrong", or ways to decide just what category into which we can assign the person in their struggle, we give ourselves more chance to connect with them as fellow human being.

As we choose to hold off using language that categorizes and dehumanizes we open ourselves to richer vocabulary with which we might express the complexities of our individual and shared human experiences of struggle and pain.

Choose not to join the chorus

#2

Every person given a psychiatric diagnosis will have someone, or a whole chorus of someones, telling them what they need to do.

We don't need you to keep telling us what's wrong with us.

We don't need to keep being told what you want us to do.

We need you to listen.

You could try asking:

Q. What do you need?

but do be prepared for us not to be able to put it into words, especially not right now.

It might help if you think of retreating into "psychosis" as, at least in part, a survival response, to life circumstances we find overwhelming and painful.

We might be where we are because...

- it helps us hold the pain.
- to figure out what we need.
- some *thing* in our life needs to "die" or end or be ended so that something new can be born, can begin.
- we need a break or moment's relief.

You might also be feeling similar to a greater or lesser degree.

Try to remember this:

Madness is the beginning of a process it's not supposed to be the end result.

Listen, learn to sit with discomfort

#3

Listening is, itself, powerful healing and it also opens us to more.

This is not the kind of listening referred to as "active listening" where we have been trained to mentally tick-off a list of things we "should" be doing to make it *look as if* we're listening, it's this kind of listening:

Listening is such a simple act. It requires us to be present, and that takes practice, but we don't have to do anything else. We don't have to advise, or coach, or sound wise.

We just have to be willing to sit there and listen.

Actually listening requires of us that we give our full attention; in a way that the person we're listening to *feels* listened to.

Not listening is fragmentary, and fragmentation is at root of all suffering.

Listening is healing - for the person being listened to and also for the person listening, and for the relationship between them; listening brings us closer, helps us feel more whole.

We will likely feel discomforted or unsettled or feel challenged. Resisting the urge to control by making demands of others is difficult but powerful. It lets us listen not only to the other person but also listen to our own selves, our inner fears and the pain we hold inside. This enables us better to connect, to be with, to feel with, and helps us remember:

We are in this together.

SUCK LESS

...when supporting a person struggling in ways that get called "psychosis"

Look for the hook...

#4

If we can manage to suspend our inclination to categorize; and choose not to join

the chorus of name callers and tellers then we can listen and observe more openly, more curiously.

We can ask questions like

Q. Where is the hook?

Where is the hook upon which this person is caught, like a "fish", struggling on a hook?

Where or what is the hook upon which this person is fighting for their life, their freedom for space to just be who they need to be?

What do we know of the whole-life context within which whatever this person is experiencing right now makes perfect, simple sense?

When we choose the role of being human-first we can draw upon all our life experiences, especially those we have found or do find most painful, and in ways they can help us understand, more fully, more deeply.

- **What is the hook upon which they are wriggling?**
- **What is the pain that they hold inside?**
- **If that pain could speak, what might it say?**

Tend to basic human needs

#5

When our experience of the world has left us traumatized - or "wounded" - we

live in a different body, our body is changed, and we can find it hard to feel safe in the world, especially in relationship with others.

You can't convince us we are safe, we need to feel safe-enough. It's not a cognitive, thinking thing, it's a body thing. It's also very personal, but meeting basic human needs is a good start point: e.g. sleep, food, water, comfort, soothing, shelter, sleep.

You'll need to attend to your own too; it's your number one job to own and tend to your own discomfort.

Don't make [fixing] others the focus of how you cope with your own discomfort...

Feeling disempowered and disconnected - from body, self and others - are at the core of trauma and psychosis experiences.

Being granted space to reconnect and to find our power to act and make choices is at centre of finding our way out through the pain and towards healing.

