



NPN

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**12th World Hearing Voices  
Congress, Cork, Ireland 1-3  
Sept 2021**

Because of the ongoing uncertainties around travel, social distancing, and limited opportunities for indoor gatherings, we have had to make the unfortunate decision to hold the 12th Annual Hearing Voices Congress from 1-3 September as a fully online event! Conference details at [www.hearingvoicesnetworkireland.ie](http://www.hearingvoicesnetworkireland.ie) Book your place now! Very good value at £45 for voice hearers and students and £65 for professionals for 3 full days, including cultural and social events. Congress Registration at

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/12th-world-hearing-voices-congress-cork-ireland-1-3-sept-2021-tickets-145886254715>

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The articles are the views of the contributors and not necessarily those of NPN.

## **How Covid-19 Social Distancing Recreates Your Childhood Emotional Neglect**

First, I want you to know that most everyone is feeling these 3 feelings during this extraordinary time, even those who did not grow up with CEN.

**Alone:** Social distancing is keeping the population physically isolated from each other, and so most people are naturally feeling alone right now. But when “alone” is your core feeling, this situation returns you back there in an achy sort of way? The aloneness you naturally feel now as an adult gets combined with the aloneness you felt as a child and you feel it with extra power and pain.

**Insecure:** Everyone is wondering what’s going to happen tomorrow and, in the future, and so everyone’s feeling of security is threatened right now. But if you were instilled with a deep sense of insecurity as a child, you are more at risk of doubting yourself and your ability to handle whatever is to come. You may be feeling some anxiety and wondering how — and if — you will be able to cope.

**Lost:** Just as it happened for you as a child, your feelings of aloneness and insecurity threaten to undermine the roots you have planted for yourself. Since this feeling has been with you for so very long you are vulnerable to helplessness and hopelessness about finding your way through this worldwide crisis.

## What To Do

1. Know that every situation that taps your core feelings is an opportunity for growth. This one is no exception.
2. Becoming aware of your core feelings is one giant step toward your emotional health and strength, and also toward healing your Childhood Emotional Neglect. Now is your chance to do just that.
3. As you go through this epidemic *pay attention*. Tune in to your body and make an effort to notice when you are feeling alone, insecure or lost. When you do, focus on that feeling and ask yourself, “How much of this feeling is about now, and how much is about the past?” Trying to sort this out is a key part of processing an old feeling and that takes away some of its power over you.
4. Use your brain to process the feeling. Why did you feel this as a child? Why do you feel it now? Is the intensity of the feeling in keeping with the intensity of the situation now? How often have you felt this feeling during your life? How has it affected your choices, your actions, your confidence in yourself?

Even though you may feel alone, insecure, or lost right now, please know that you are not. Your feelings are

expressions of your emotional truth, but they are not necessarily a reflection of external reality.

When you let your feelings run rampant on their own, you are at their mercy.

When you own them, consider them, and process them, you can put the past where it belongs, choose the emotions that are helpful, and put the rest in their place.

You can use this pandemic to become more authentic. You can claim your power to shape your choices, your future, and your life by taking this chance to face your feelings and heal your Childhood Emotional Neglect.

Are you secretly relieved that social distancing is giving you a built-in excuse? Few social demands, fewer social gatherings, cancelled group activities?

Remember how you used to feel when you were invited somewhere? All kinds of things went through your head as your discomfort grew:

*How many people will be there?*

*I prefer one-on-one.*

*I'd rather be alone.*

*I don't like being in a group.*

***I don't want to go.***

Most people enjoy parties, reunions, conferences, and group activities of all kinds. But there's a fairly large

subset of people who feel so exquisitely uncomfortable in a group that all they can think about is:

*When can I escape?*

How many times have you thought, or said, one of the sentences above? If your answer is, “Many,” I want to assure you that you are not alone. Being in a group requires a different level of confidence and different social skills than spending time with someone one-on-one.

Having talked with countless numbers of folks who avoid groups, I can say with confidence that most likely it’s not the group itself that you’re avoiding.

Actually, you’re avoiding a particular feeling or set of feelings that you have when you’re in a group.

### **Common Feelings CEN People Experience in Groups**

- Left out
- Trapped
- Lost
- Overlooked
- Freaked out
- Anxious
- Sad
- Ignored
- Judged
- Panicked

- Confused
- Self-conscious
- Alone
- Invisible
- Inferior

What causes these feelings? What is it about being among a number of people that would cause a person to have any of these uncomfortable emotions? Is it a result of anxiety or depression? A social phobia? Is it a weakness or a fault?

Sure, some of these can be possible. Depression can make you feel like isolating yourself, and anxiety or social phobia can make you too nervous to enjoy the company of others.

But if you're reading this looking for answers, I want you to dispose of the idea that your discomfort is a result of personal weakness or fault. Neither of those is the answer.

And now I'd like to give you a far better explanation than any of those. Chances are high that your discomfort in groups is caused by one of three factors.

### **3 Reasons You May Be Uncomfortable or Anxious in Groups of People**

- 1. The prevailing feelings you had in your first group.** And by this, I mean your family. I have seen that those who grow up feeling uncomfortable in their family group often carry those uncomfortable feelings with them. So think back to when you were growing up. When your family was together did you feel ignored? Overlooked? Left out? Alone? Invisible? (All of those feelings are typically a result of Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN). Or did you feel trapped? Inferior? Targeted? Were you constantly preparing for some unpredictable eruption of anger or erratic behaviour of a family member? Whatever your prevailing feelings were, you naturally carry them forward into your adult life. These old feelings then arise in situations that mimic the family experience. Like being in a group.
- 2. Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.** Research has shown that when we expect people to treat us a certain way, we can unwittingly pull for it from other people. We actually unconsciously bring it upon ourselves. In a landmark study, it was shown that children who were labelled and treated as extra smart by their teachers actually acted smarter, and did better in school, regardless of what their IQ truly was (Rosenthal & Jacobson,

1968). Since 1968 it's been discovered that self-fulfilling prophecy happens in many different ways and in interpersonal arenas of all kinds. So expect to be treated as an outsider by a group of people, and you may actually bring about exclusionary behaviour in the people around you.

3. **The Fatal Flaw.** The Fatal Flaw is a feeling that something is wrong with you. It's a sense of being different; of being missing some vital ingredient that everyone else seems to have. A surprisingly large number of people walk around with this feeling. It can lie there, under the surface, making you feel on the outside at social events both professional and personal. The Fatal Flaw can make you feel you don't belong, even when you really, really do. It has the power to make you avoid group situations.

### **The Real Problem**

Notice that none of these potential causes of your discomfort are a product of the group itself. The actual people in the actual group are not the problem. The real problem is a feeling that you have; a feeling that you bring with you wherever you go.



## **And now the good news.**

You can't control other people (except perhaps unconsciously, thanks to Self-Fulfilling Prophecy). But you can control your feelings. Feelings can be managed. And now, during the pandemic, while the pressure is off, it's an excellent time to start working on your discomfort!

### **5 Steps to Overcome Your Discomfort in Groups**

1. Come to grips with the true nature of your discomfort. The people are not the problem. It's a feeling inside of you that's the problem. Is it Cause #1, 2, or 3 above? Or is it a mixture of several? Understanding what you're truly bothered by, and why, is a powerful Step One toward resolving it.
2. Put words to your uncomfortable feeling. Choose them from the list above and/or add your own. Naming a feeling instantly reduces its power.
3. Talk with a trusted person about the feeling and how it makes you want to avoid group events. If you don't feel comfortable talking with a friend or family member, talk with a therapist about it. Sharing your feeling with another person will even further reduce its power over you.
4. Start exposing yourself to group situations a little at a time, with support.

5. Before you go to the group event, set an amount of time you will be there. Remind yourself that you have to manage your feeling while you are there. Talk back to the feeling when you feel it.

*These people are fine. They're not the problem.*

*You're an adult, and no one in this group can hurt you.*

*You're a good person and you belong here.*

*It doesn't matter what other people think.*

*It's just a feeling. It's old, and you don't need it anymore.*

*You're a person, on equal footing with everyone else here. And you matter.*

## **7 Reasons You May Feel Better and Happier During the Epidemic**

1. **Folks with Chronic FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)**  
— These are the people who walk through their lives feeling like they are somehow on the outside of things. They look around and see other people laughing and enjoying life. To these folks, it always seems that other people are living more exciting and happy lives. So finally, now, with almost the entire population trapped

at home, it's easier to relax in the knowledge that they aren't missing anything.

2. **Those Who Have Always Felt Alone in the World** — If, as a child, you did not receive enough emotional support from your parents, you are likely to go through your adult life feeling somewhat alone in the world. Perhaps you have felt alone for so long that it has become comfortably uncomfortable. Perhaps, in this global crisis, you really are alone. Perhaps you are able to tolerate being alone far better than others. Perhaps, finally, your real life on the outside mirrors what you've always felt on the inside, and it is, on some level, validating.
3. **People Whose Specific Childhood Challenges Prepared Them** — If your childhood was unpredictable, was filled with uncertainty, or required you to make decisions you weren't prepared for or act beyond your years, then perhaps your childhood prepared you for this very moment. When you grow up this way you develop some special skills out of necessity. You learn how to hyper-focus in ambiguous situations and how to act decisively and trust yourself. Since you have a solid foundation of the exact skills needed for the pandemic, you may be feeling more focused and confident right now than you have in years.
4. **People Who Feel Numb Unless Something Extreme is Happening** — If you wouldn't

describe yourself as an emotional person, or if you find yourself feeling nothing when you know you should be feeling something, you may find yourself having some real emotions as this COVID-19 pandemic unfolds. Scores of people need a novel or extreme situation to feel something. Some engage in dangerous, unpredictable, or thrill-seeking activities in order to feel. Today, the danger, unpredictability, and thrills have come to them. Finally, they are having feelings, and any feelings, even negative ones, are better than numbness.

5. **Extreme Introverts** — If you're a severe homebody who gets tired of being required to go out into the world and mix with people more than is comfortable for you, this may be your respite. Finally, instead of having to adjust to everyone else, everyone else is adjusting to you. There's a new normal afoot, and it is you! What a nice feeling, at last.
6. **Those Already Struggling With Significant Life Challenges Before the Pandemic** — Some people were already dealing with some major life crises or challenges before this epidemic hit. For them, this situation may feel like somewhat of a relief. Suddenly, with the world shut down, it's not possible to struggle or solve. As a result, this situation may offer you a bit of rest. And you're also seeing everyone else struggling, which may feel comforting in a certain way. It's

not that you want other people to have problems; it just feels soothing that you are no longer alone. Everyone else is having problems too.

7. **Anxious Worriers Who Have Spent Years Anticipating Disaster** — Anxiety can drive people to have a grave fear of being blindsided by an unexpected, painful experience. So some people constantly anticipate what might go wrong as a way to prevent themselves from any sudden, negative shock. Now, here we are. That long-anticipated, long-prepared-for event has happened. These folks are feeling relieved that what they've been vigilantly watching out for their entire lives is finally here. Instead of feeling shocked, they feel relieved.

### **What This All Means**

If any single one of the above applies to you, even in some small way, it's possible that you may have some feelings of guilt about it. You may be concerned that it's wrong to feel better at a time like this.

I want to assure you that it is not! Since we cannot choose our feelings, you should never judge yourself for having a feeling. But it is your responsibility to use your emotions in a healthy way.

If any of the first four apply to you, if you are prone to FOMO, a feeling of aloneness, were prepared for this pandemic by your childhood, or live with a numb or empty feeling, you may want to consider the possibility that you grew up with some amount of **Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN**. CEN can be quite difficult to see or remember, yet it leaves you with these very specific burdens to carry through your adult life. And one very good thing about CEN is that once you know about it, you can heal it!

Now, about how you can use your preparedness and your positive feelings in a good way right now. You likely have more time, and you may be feeling some relief. This is your opportunity to work on understanding yourself better, owning your childhood challenges — which perhaps also made you stronger — and accepting your feelings instead of judging yourself for having them.

## **Dreams, desire and disappointment**

I wanted to paint, but you said artists all starve to  
death.  
I wanted to grow flowers, but you said they are fleeting  
as breath.  
I wanted to open a curiosity shop, but you said it would  
not last.  
Every dream I ever held onto, you silenced into the  
past.  
I wanted to move to a foreign land, you said the  
language I didn't speak.  
I wanted to thrive at home, but you said it wouldn't  
keep.  
I wanted to break free from you, you said I'd never  
survive.  
Disappointment held me by a thread, I hardly felt alive.  
You made me into a fragile bird, afraid to try its wings.  
You crushed every hope I had, now I no longer sing.  
You kept me in a cage of your making, to that perch I  
cling.  
Crippled by your point of view, where pain is crowned  
as king.  
You became the proverbial fly in the ointment.  
All that I am left with is dreams, desire, and  
disappointment.

**Gillian Carter**

## **What is Self-Harm?**

Self-harm is a way of expressing very deep distress. Often, people don't know why they self-harm. It's a means of communicating what can't be put into words or even into thoughts and has been described as an inner scream. Afterwards, people feel better able to cope with life again, for a while.

Self-harm is a broad term. People may injure or poison themselves by scratching, cutting or burning their skin, by hitting themselves against objects, taking a drug overdose, or swallowing or putting other things inside themselves. It may also take less obvious forms including unnecessary risks, staying in an abusive relationship, developing an eating problem (such as anorexia or bulimia) being addicted to alcohol or drugs, or someone simply not looking after their own emotional or physical needs.

These responses may help someone to cope with feelings that threaten to overwhelm them; painful emotions, such as rage, sadness, emptiness, grief, self-hatred, fear, loneliness and guilt.

These can be released through the body, where they can be seen and dealt with. Self-harm may serve a number of purposes at the same time. It may be a way of getting the pain out, of being distracted from it, of communicating feelings to somebody else and of finding



comfort. It can also be a means of self-punishment or an attempt to gain some control over life. Because they may feel ashamed, afraid or worried about other people's reactions, people who self-harm often conceal what they are doing rather than draw attention to it.

It's worth remembering that most people behave self-destructively at times, even if they don't realize it. Perfectly ordinary behaviour such as smoking, eating and drinking too much, or working long hours day after day can all be helping people to numb or distract themselves and avoid being alone with their thoughts and feelings.

### **Why do people harm themselves?**

A person who self-harms is likely to have gone through very difficult, painful experiences as a child or young adult. At the time, they probably had no one they could confide in, so didn't receive the support and the emotional outlet they needed to deal with it. The experience might have involved physical violence, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse, they might have been neglected, separated from someone they loved, been bullied, harassed, assaulted, isolated, put under intolerable pressure, made homeless, sent into care, into hospital or to other institutions.

Experiences like these erode self-esteem. Emotions that have no outlet may be buried and blocked completely

out of awareness. If a trusted adult betrays or abuses them, children will often blame themselves. They turn their anger inwards. By the time they become adults, self-injury can be a way of expressing their pain, punishing themselves and keeping memories at bay.

There is often an absence of pain during the act of self-injury, rather like the absence of sensation that often occurs during abuse or trauma. The body produces natural opiates, which numb it and mask the emotions so that little is felt or realized consciously. A badly traumatized person may end up feeling quite detached from their feelings and their body. Some may injure themselves to maintain that sense of being separate and to convince themselves in order to feel something and know that they are real and alive.

There can often be myths and negative attitudes surrounding self-harming and they exist even in the healthcare industry. Professionals can often make assumptions as to why someone is self-harming and therefore how to treat them. There can be instances of healthcare professionals with an unsympathetic attitude to someone who comes to them with injuries; for example, believing that a person who is cutting themselves is causing their own injuries and therefore wasting the time of the nurse who has to stitch their wounds. NICE (The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) produces guidelines on the

treatment of self-harm, explaining the need for exploring the underlying reasons someone may be self-harming, rather than just self-harming behaviour itself.

### **Who is most likely to self-harm?**

According to research, the majority are young women, although the percentage of young men seems to be on the increase. Self-harming behaviour is also significant among minority groups discriminated against by society. Someone who has mental health problems is more likely to self-harm. So are those who are dependent on drugs or alcohol, or who are faced with a number of major life problems, such as being homeless, a single parent, in financial difficulty or otherwise living in stressful circumstances. A common factor is often a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness with regard to their emotions.

#### **Young People:**

Research focusing on young people suggests that about 10% of 15–16-year-olds have self-harmed, usually by cutting themselves, and that girls are far more likely to self-harm than boys. The most common reason is 'to find relief from a terrible situation'. Young people are often under great pressure within their families, from school and among their peers. Many young people report having friends who also self-harm.

The research suggests that young people who self-harm are much more likely to have low self-esteem, to be depressed and anxious. They seem to be facing more problems in life but may be less good at coping with them. They may retreat into themselves, feeling angry, blaming themselves, tending to drink and smoke too much, and to use more recreational drugs. They confide in fewer friends and tend not to talk to their parents or other adults, or to ask for the help they need.

Women:

Women often find themselves in a caring role, putting their own needs last. This can grossly undermine their sense of worth, their opinions and strengths. In due course, a woman may come to feel she is an unimportant, silent witness to any abuses she has to endure. She may lose her sense of identity, power, and rights. To survive, she may cut herself off from her real needs; for example, if the focus for this is the size and shape of her body, she may drastically restrict what she eats.

Men:

Men conform to the macho stereotype that expressing emotion is a weakness, it can leave them unable to feel their feelings and detached from that side of themselves. They may have less difficulty showing anger than women, but if they are in prison, where pent up

feelings can't be released, men are more likely to turn to self-harm, especially if they have been abused.

### **Is Self-harm a suicide attempt?**

Self-harm can be about trying to stay alive – a coping mechanism for survival and to escape from emotional pain. The majority of people who self-harm are not suicidal, but a small minority will intentionally attempt suicide. Some suicides resulting from self-harming behaviour may be accidental occurring when someone has hurt themselves more than they intended to.

### **Is Self-Harming behaviour attention seeking?**

Because it can be hard to understand, healthcare professions, friends and relatives sometimes mistakenly regard people who self-harm with mistrust or fear and see their behaviour as attention seeking and manipulative. If someone you know self-harms, you may feel helpless when faces with their wounds and your own feelings and fears about the situation may cause you to blame them instead of supporting them. Bear in mind they may be using the only way they can to communicate their pain and to get the attention care and comfort they need. However, upsetting it may be for you, it doesn't necessarily mean this is their intention.

Whether people have deep wounds or slight injuries, the problem they represent should always be taken very

seriously. The size of the wound isn't a measure of the size of the conflict inside.

### **What triggers it?**

You may harm yourself once or twice at a particularly difficult time in your life and never do so again. But self-harming can become an ongoing way of coping with current problems and may occur regularly on a monthly, weekly or daily basis, depending on circumstances. The trigger could be a reminder of the past, such as an anniversary which sets off a hidden memory or something unexpected could happen to cause a shake-up. But sometimes, ordinary life is just so difficult that for some, self-harm is the only way to cope with it.

### **What can I do to stop self-harming?**

The single most important thing to remember is that you have choices: Stopping self-injury can begin now.

- Knowledge is power; gather as much information as possible about your own behaviour. Keep notes of what is going on when you feel the need to harm yourself so that you can identify over a period of time, specific thoughts which come up. It's also useful to keep a daily diary of events and feelings, and to record how you cope with or channel powerful emotions of anger, pain or happiness.

- Try to talk about your feelings with someone supportive. Even though you may feel you are alone, there are others who can understand your pain and help to boost your strength and courage. Many people find that joining a support group of people with similar problems is an important step towards making themselves feel better and changing their lives. If there are no appropriate support groups in your area, your local Mind association may be able to help start one.
- Work on building up your self-esteem. Remember you are not to blame for how you feel; your self-injury is an expression of powerful negative feelings. It's not your fault, make lists of your feelings, and then write positive statements about yourself or the world around you. If you can't think of any, ask friends to write things they like about you. Keep these in a place so that they are visible. Make a tape of your own voice saying something affirming or reading your favourite stories or poems. Hearing your own voice can be soothing, or you can ask someone you trust to record their voice reading to you.
- Try to find ways to make your life less stressful, give yourself occasional treats, eat healthily, get plenty of sleep and build physical activity into

your life, because this is known to boost self-esteem and lift low moods.

- Have the telephone numbers of friends, locals and national helplines where you can find them easily, if you need to talk to somebody in a crisis.
- Think about your anger and what you do with it. If you weren't busy being angry with yourself, who would you really be angry with? Write a list of people who have caused you to feel like this. Remind yourself you deserve good things in life, not punishment for what others have done to you.
- Line up a set of cushions to represent people who caused you pain. Tell them how they hurt you and that you don't deserve punishment. Kicking or hitting cushions is good. Try to do this with someone else, if possible so that the experience is shared, and you do not hurt yourself.
- Creativity is a powerful tool against despair. This doesn't have to be about making something. Whatever lifts you out of your pain and makes you feel good is creative. If you feel like it, try drawing or painting how you feel. Some people draw on themselves using bright body colours.
- If you feel the need to self-harm, focus on staying within safe limits. A supportive GP will



give you good advice on minimising and caring for your injuries and help you find further help.

### **What help can I get?**

If experiences were so painful, they forced you to deal with your emotions by hurting yourself, you may now seriously doubt whether you can deal with them in any other way. But people do move forward to grieve over past events or a lost childhood and work through the fear and confusion surrounding them. With plenty of support, they learn that they can cope with the pain, anger and rage, which need to surface.

The important thing is to find ways to start talking to someone you trust. It could be to a friend, a family member, a professional counsellor, a psychologist, or a psychotherapist.

**Maastricht Interview Training for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thought Beliefs & Paranoia Is available online from the National Paranoia Network. Other training available online Working through Paranoia, Making Sense of Hearing Voices & Working with Childhood Trauma**

It can be delivered across the world for more information and costings Email [enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org](mailto:enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org)

Online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Groups Join our online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group Meetings on ZOOM

Thursday 3pm -4.30pm with Paul Meeting ID 88460268952 Password 375878

Sundays: HVN USA on ZOOM 6:30p - 8:00p USA Time with Cindee 11.30pm – 1.00 am UK Time Meeting ID 827 5463 8654 No Password Needed

Saturdays Texas USA HVN Meeting on ZOOM 10am-11.30 USA Time with Paul 4pm-5.30pm UK Time Meeting ID 83079149464 No Password Needed

Monday Sheffield Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group with Emma & Lyn on ZOOM 11am-12pm UK Time Meeting ID: 558 685 8263 Password 6DyVca

Hearing Voices Group Ireland

## **A New Hearing Voices Group in Ireland**

A group for people who hear voices or experience  
paranoia and unusual beliefs, on Zoom

Facilitated by Michael Ryan

Every Sunday @ 4pm

Zoom Link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89201253186>

Email: [vhmichael9345@gmail.com](mailto:vhmichael9345@gmail.com)

With enquiries