



IV. CONCENTRATION

According to our previous study about the training needs of people with disabilities, a representative sample of people living with severe and prolonged mental illness expressed their lack of concentration in most of their daily life activities. Here we propose some exercises to improve this skill.

IV. 1. WHEN YOU HEAR...

Abilities reinforced: Concentration.

Description: Ask the participants to sit in a circle. Anticipate that you are about to tell a story (which you will have to make up). Inform them that every time when the word “who” appears in the narration everybody has to stand up and when the word “no” appears they have to take a sitting position again. Each time someone doesn’t perform the required action following the words “who” and “no”, he abandons the game or gives a gives a garment.

Suggestions: If your team is good at it you may take turns at the time of accounting the story, which will add difficulty to the game, as it will require even more concentration. Of course, you can change the words and the movements to be done when hearing them.

This exercise encourages concentration and attention in an enjoyable way.





IV.2. FIND THE DIFFERENCE

Abilities reinforced: Concentration, memory.

Description: Ask one participant in a group to look attentively at the rest of his companions for 60 seconds (you may set other duration based on the number of participants). Then this participant turns his back to the rest giving the other 40 seconds to change one thing (or any number you indicate) about them- this can include anything from jewellery or clothing being swapped with other people, untied shoelaces, a different hair do, or a watch or a ring switched to the other hand. All changes must be something the “observer” can see. Once the changes have been recognized, another person takes over the observer’s role and the game repeats.

Suggestions: If there are many participants in a group, it might be divided in two groups of people facing each other- each participant would be in charge of guessing element(s) that were changed in the person placed in front of him/her.

This exercise is of great importance because it offers the chance to relax, to motivate the observation of surroundings, improves concentrations, etc.



IV.3. FEEL THE FRUIT

Abilities reinforced: Concentration, observation, insightfulness, perception.

Materials: One fruit per participant.

Description:

LEVEL 1: Ask the participants to take a fruit- an apple, an orange, a banana or any other fruit- and hold it in his/her hands. Instruct them to examine the fruit from all its sides, while keeping their whole attention focused on it. Tell them not to let themselves be carried away by irrelevant thoughts that might seek to make their way into their minds. Ask them to try and just look at the fruit, focus their attention on examining its shape, smell, and touch.

LEVEL 2: Once your group has dominated the first level of the exercise, ask them to visualize the fruit, instead of looking at it. You can tell everybody to start by looking at the fruit and examining it for about 2 minutes. Then ask them to close their eyes and try to see, smell, taste and touch the fruit in their imagination. Tell them that whenever the image becomes blurred in their mind to open their eyes, look at the fruit for a short while, and then close their eyes again and continue the exercise. They may imagine holding the fruit in their hands, as in the previous exercise, or imagine it lying on a table.

Suggestions: This activity shall be repeated over several training sessions. In the beginning the activity will surely cause some difficulties, but with practice it will eventually become natural and effortless. You might ask the participants to practice the exercise at home on a daily basis all through the training period in order to reach best results. The object doesn't have to be a piece of fruit necessarily, but it's important that it doesn't have any writing on it in order to not distract attention (it can bread, chocolate, soap, etc.). Also it is recommendable that, whatever object you chose to practice with, has a smell in order to make the experience more intense.

It is worthy to do this exercise every day.



IV.4. SPOT ON THE MAP

Abilities reinforced: Attentive listening, effective communication, imagination.

Description: Invite one participant to think of a location he/she would like to visit. Then ask him/her to give a description of the location giving only subtle hints as to the specific place (it may be related to: weather, landscape, fauna, flora, scents, food, people around etc.). The listener(s) will have to pick up on these subtleties and, at the end, recommend a destination suitable for the speaker based on their explanation. The original speaker will confirm or deny the usefulness of the suggestion, and the group will then discuss ways people can stay alert as a listener, and pick up on the appropriate cues to help them play a more vital role in discussions.

Suggestions: You can also ask the participants to think of a concrete location they visited once or would like to visit (city, town, country, etc.). Before talking about it, he/she should think about specificities of the chosen place that would give hints to the rest of the group about it. The hints, though, should be integrated in a whole “story” in a way that it is hidden among some less clarifying or obvious description. The mission of the rest of the group will be to guess the place the speaker is referring to.





IV.5. RED IN BLUE

Abilities reinforced: Visual attention, concentration.

Materials: Flipchart/ white board/ large sheet of paper, a variety of coloured markers.

Description: Print the names of several colours using a coloured marker of a different colour than the name of the colour you are printing. For instance, you might print "RED" using a blue marker. Repeat this for as many colours as you wish. Present these colours to participants (one at a time) and ask them to quickly read the colours, not the words, this is to say- using the example given above- the participant should read the colour blue, not the word red, printed on the board. When the activity is finished ask the participants whether they found it difficult and if so where they believe the difficulty lies?

Suggestions: You can also use a computer or a tablet to visualize the words.

It is recommended to try this exercise no more than 1-3 times per week to keep the positive effects of the game.





IV.6. FIZZ BUZZ

Abilities reinforced: Listening skills and close concentration. It is also a good ice breaker and can be used to promote a sense of joviality and light heartedness within the group setting.

Description: Here, the participants take it in turns to count, each calling one number at a time, but each time they say a multiple of five they have to replace the number with the word Fizz and multiples of seven are named Buzz, i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4, FIZZ, 6, BUZZ, 8, 9, FIZZ, 11, 12, 13, BUZZ, FIZZ, 16, 17 etc.

Suggestions: If you believe that replacing the multiples of two numbers at a time will result too complicated to your group, you may start by replacing just one (FIZZ). Once the group dominates the game you may add a BUZZ to make it more difficult.





IV.7. THAT SPOT IN THE WALL

Abilities reinforced: Concentration, relaxing, listening abilities.

Description: Ask the peer mentors to sit down looking at the wall. Ask them to look to a concrete point, like a spot, small hole or something similar. The look should be held in that point but the person must be concentrated as much as possible in the breathing: how the air is entering slowly into your lungs and how it goes out later on. This exercise must be held for some minutes. It is also a great activity to relax yourself after a hard day.

Suggestions: The facilitator can guide the breathing rhythm all the time softly or even play some relaxing music.

It is worthy to do this exercise every day as it facilitates the relaxation and builds trust and exchange of feelings.





IV.8. THE SOUND THAT TAKES IT ALL

Abilities reinforced: Concentration.

Description: Ask the peer mentors to choose a word or a sound. Ask them to repeat it mentally once and again, without thinking in anything else during 5 minutes. This sound is called mantra. It can be difficult at the beginning but repeating it several times they will manage to increase the concentration time.

It is worthy to do this exercise every day.

