



COPES Case Study

Selina is 10 years old. She was referred to COPES by her school when she reported that she was hearing a malevolent voice criticizing and swearing at her, telling her to harm and kill herself and that bad things would happen to her family.

At our first meeting, it became apparent that Selina was also regularly experiencing a visual hallucination of a frightening figure. She was seeing the figure and hearing the voice at home, at school: across settings. Selina was also experiencing disturbed sleep. She would often wake at night and then get into mum's bed. She was becoming increasingly reluctant to go to school in the mornings and was having difficulty separating from mum. She was not enjoying school, was unhappy, withdrawn and was not engaging in class or with family life.

Selina's parents had separated when she was very young but had remained living together until she was 9. Selina, her mum and her sister moved to a new home in the next town in the spring and the hallucinations began in October.

Selina has had 13 individual therapeutic sessions to date: 9 in school and a further 4 were bought privately by the family and were held at a venue in the community. There was also one therapeutic family session held in the home.

When we began working together, Selina spoke very quietly and avoided eye contact. Her speech was muddled, fast and unclear which made it difficult for me to understand what she was trying to express.

During our time together I introduced a range of creative therapeutic techniques such as sandplay, potion making, therapeutic board games and stories. I began each session with solution-focused scaling questions to get an impression of subjective experience and to identify any shift or progress. I regularly used 5 minute guided relaxations at the end of sessions and also suggested that mum introduce this practice at home as part of the bedtime routine. In one particularly powerful session Selina used the clay to model a representation of 'the voice' and we used this symbol to enable her to explore and express her feelings towards it. This was the first time that Selina was able to challenge the voice verbally; out loud and in the presence of another. She also went on to re model the image, transforming it in to something humorous rather than frightening before destroying it.

Over the weeks, I began to see a gradual increase in confidence. Selina's voice was becoming louder and clearer. By session 5 Selina was reporting a reduction in frequency of the auditory and visual hallucinations. She was no longer experiencing this daily and the visual hallucination was shrinking. As the sessions progressed, Selina had more and more positives to share. She was feeling good about her achievement's and was excited about her school trip.

Selina's family have noticed a change in her behaviour and report that she is smiling and chatting more and is engaging in family life. She is sleeping better: mostly in her own bed and getting in to school has improved considerably.

There has also been an additional, incidental outcome of COPES intervention. It became apparent from our conversations that Selina had been struggling to keep up with the school work that was being set: she had been assessed as mildly dyslexic in year 3. She found extended writing



particularly challenging and was feeling unsupported by one of her teachers. Through sharing this with me, Selena's mother and I were able to raise the issues with the school SENCO and this led to some changes being put in place for her. Selina was retested for dyslexia in year 6 with the result that she was now assessed as in the severely dyslexic range, highlighting her need for additional learning support.

Selina will be starting secondary school in the autumn and though she is happy to be moving to the school of her choice with her friends, she is feeling anxious. Although she has made great progress, at times of stress the voice can get louder. However, during our time together Selina has developed a more assertive relationship to her critical inner voice and my hope is that she will draw on the strategies that we practiced and will continue to challenge it.

COPES Service Contact Details

For more information on the services that COPES provides and how these may be accessed, please contact the main COPES service line on (01273) 407336. Alternatively, please contact the manager of the COPES team via the details below:

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