

# Lloyd's Reality

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## Lloyd Hale

Most people take "reality" for granted, but for the person dealing with schizophrenia, reality may not be as it seems to everyone else. Because of this, the disorder can wreak havoc on a person's relationships and ability to thrive. Friends and relatives may not understand the condition and might distance themselves from the affected individual. This reaction often pushes the person to withdraw even further, causing the symptoms to worsen.

For Lloyd, this way of life began in his teen years. It was preceded by a behavioral change that involved straying from school and spending more time with friends who were using alcohol and drugs. By 15, Lloyd had begun a new and unusual habit — he was talking to himself regularly. At the same time, he was avoiding communications with others and started obeying the commands his mind arbitrarily asserted. Instead of having regular thoughts such as: "The car windows should be rolled up before it rains" or "We are out of bananas," his mind would directly tell him: "YOU need to go outside and roll up the windows" or "YOU need to go to the store and buy some bananas." Even more confusing, these commands were stated in the voices of people he knew.

The more isolated Lloyd became, the more frequently he had conversations with the voices in his head. Over time, the voices became even stronger, and to Lloyd, they became as real as a conversation with a live person. Because they were so authentic, Lloyd began to confuse the conversations in his mind with the ones he had with the people around him. He would act on and respond to the mental conversations as though they had actually taken place. In his mind he would make a comment to someone, and later he would expect that person to remember it but (in reality) they would not. Sometimes, he would imagine that a person had told him to do something, when it only happened in his mind. He would fulfill the task, but when he assured that person (in reality) that it was done, they would not understand what he was talking about.

Because this was his reality, Lloyd thought that everyone had this same experience, but no one liked to talk about it. Since the subject seemed unmentionable, Lloyd kept his concerns to himself, and his family did not seem to notice what was happening to him. Besides, they had their own problems — his mother and other close relatives were dealing with substance abuse and his father was incarcerated.

Gradually, Lloyd's thoughts became more negative. If he had an argument with someone (in reality), the quarrel would continue in Lloyd's mind after they parted ways. In the meantime, his anger would grow, and when he saw that person again, he would initiate a confrontation with them. This led to physical fights that inevitably sent him to a juvenile facility. Although he received medication while there, no diagnosis was made, and when he stabilized and served his time, he was sent home.

When Lloyd went back to his old school, he was soon expelled. He was then given the opportunity to attend an alternative boarding school designed to offer troubled youth a second chance. Although Lloyd was able to pass to the next grade while there, he also was able to easily obtain and use illegal substances and alcohol. The voices did not seem to trouble him as much, but he did have feelings of paranoia, fear, and anger.

At the end of the semester, Lloyd returned home. There he resumed his alcohol and drug abuse routine, and the voices came back, louder than ever. Only once did Lloyd confide with someone — his mother — about his internal conflicts, and she urged him to get some help, but he did not.

In the following summer, Lloyd worked part-time, but one day he decided to quit. Without giving any notice, he simply walked away. He went home but could not find the keys to his house, so he broke in just to change his clothes. All alone, his mother's voice came into his mind with a special message: "Lloyd there's a problem in the house, and I want you to fix it." Lloyd interpreted this request to mean that his mother's boyfriend was causing problems, and she wanted him to take care of it. Lloyd immediately sought out the boyfriend and a violent fight ensued. In the end, the boyfriend was taken to the hospital, the police were called, and Lloyd was apprehended. In the midst of the chaos, however, he could not understand why everyone was angry with him. After all, he believed he was only trying to please his mother.

Lloyd was again confined to a juvenile facility and later moved to the county jail. While there, his illness exploded. Because of his symptoms, he was constantly in trouble with others and was taken to isolation. The seclusion fed his

paranoia and seemed to energize the voices. They were louder than someone yelling in his face. He was afraid to go to sleep and sudden noises terrified him. He couldn't eat, and he exercised constantly to stay awake. When he was offered medication, Lloyd refused to take it because he thought it was part of a conspiracy against him. One frightening night, he even hallucinated that a robot was standing outside his window waiting to get him. Anger also gripped him, and he spent some of his time planning to seek revenge after he was released. He had no visitors, and when he called his family, they would not answer the phone. He was completely cut off.

They were desperate and dark nights in the jail, and Lloyd found some solace in prayer. In calmer times, his mother had encouraged him to pray and trust in God. He tried his best to do just that.

Finally, Lloyd was moved to the state mental health facility in Columbia, and that is where his wellness began to take place. For almost a year, he was provided with treatment options and medication by doctors. At that time, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Consistently, professionals were available to talk with Lloyd, and they offered him feedback and information about his illness. For the first time in his life, Lloyd began to understand himself and his symptoms. Enthusiastically, he joined numerous group sessions to find the help he needed and completed over 50 courses in subjects such as anger management, symptom management, medication management, independent living skills, and coping skills. Toward the end of his hospitalization, he had a hand in developing a mental health newsletter entitled "Trail Blazer," which included information about mental health issues, poetry on recovery, and stories about available jobs and classes.

While hospitalized, Lloyd also met and talked with other patients and likened this to "looking into a mirror." He met a number of people who were highly intelligent and professional and also dealing successfully with symptoms just like his. Lloyd was greatly encouraged by this. Until that time, he had only thought of mental illness in negative terms of simply "being crazy," but after discovering that doctors, judges, and nurses could have the same problems and recover, he too had hope.

When Lloyd was released, he moved into a residential care facility in the lowcountry. Since he had received living-skills training in the hospital, he was ready to start living. A counselor took him under his wing and placed Lloyd in social settings where he could apply those skills. He learned how to pay bills, look for a job, schedule doctor's appointments, ride a bus, and buy groceries. Lloyd studied for and received his GED. He found a full-time job with benefits and endeavored to become completely independent. When the time was right, he moved out of the home and into an apartment. Living on his own was an exceptional challenge for him since he was so young when his problems started, but Lloyd has proved to himself that he can do it.

Today, Lloyd is a motivational speaker who frequently shares his story of recovery with others. He also works with the mental health services as a certified Peer Support Specialist. Through contacts at work, he learned of the many programs that SC SHARE\* (South Carolina Self-Help Association Regarding Emotions) offers. Lloyd immediately became involved in their Recovery for Life, Conflict Resolution, and Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) programs. According to Lloyd's philosophy, the more tools and instruments he can master, the more proficient he will be in helping others — in the same way he was helped.

Lloyd is available for speaking to groups. Contact SC SHARE for more information.

\*South Carolina Self-Help Association Regarding Emotions (SC SHARE) is an organization that is pioneering in the long-term approach to recovery from mental illness. This non-profit agency, located in Columbia, South Carolina, is actively bridging the gaps in people's understanding of mental health issues. Although relatively unknown, SC SHARE is the only program in the state instrumental in creating awareness about this issue and encouraging those with a diagnosis to strive for recovery by giving them the tools of education, hope, and support needed to be successful. For more information, check their website at [SCSHARE.com](http://SCSHARE.com).