

# Voice Hearing Techniques and Exercises

## Exercises & Resources

### Hope

Voice hearing does not mean that you have a mental illness. There are more people in our society who hear voices and don't have a diagnosed mental illness, than there are people who hear voices that become mentally ill.

There are many different types of voice hearing experience and it is helpful to know that you are not alone in this experience. Voices can have their own distinct character, may be that of someone you know, or unknown.

They can be supportive or criticising. There could be only one or many and some talk to you, or talk about you, or amongst themselves. From listening to many different people's experience of voice hearing, one of the most important factors in an individual's ability to cope with them is a sense of control.

Feeling in control of the voices = coping

Feeling like the voices control you = not coping well

There are many individual things that will affect your feeling of being in control and being able to cope, but what others have found helpful includes the following.

### Acceptance

If people accept the voices are real and meaningful, rather than trying to suppress or deny their presence, they are more likely to find meaningful ways of coping and living with them. Voices can be seen as symbolic or metaphorical expressions of past experiences, our suppressed beliefs, of spiritual origin, a response to trauma, our thoughts expressed externally or any other personal meaning we give to them.

### Meaning and explanation

Many have found when they have

developed or found a theory to explain and give meaning to their experience, they have found a sense of security and greater feelings of ability to cope. This of course is highly individual and may take some time to begin to find an understanding that feels right. It is important to allow yourself time.

### Support

Feeling isolated and alone does not help your confidence and ability to cope. Finding others who have had similar experiences has been really useful for many. There will hopefully be a 'Hearing Voices' network nearby which may be able to provide vital support for you in developing coping strategies and meaning in your experience.

### Rubber band

Some people have found putting a rubber band on the wrist and snapping it each time distressing voices start up can decrease the intensity and frequency of voices.

### Diary

Keeping a diary for a couple of weeks, recording the time, day, place and what you were doing before the voices start, can help you see any patterns emerging. Some people find that certain situations, people and anniversaries can trigger voice hearing. By finding out your patterns, you are then more able to avoid or prepare for situations that may trigger off your voices.

### Physical factors

Other triggers may include PMS, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, street drugs, some cold remedies, spicy food, and lack of sunlight, fever or other health conditions. These are highly individual, but gaining awareness of your physical triggers can help you plan and increase your sense of control.

### Music

Listening to your favourite music

on a personal stereo can help diminish the intensity of your voices. The idea is not to drown out the voices with the volume, but to focus your attention on music you like. So this may not be so helpful when listening to music you don't connect to.

### 'I' statements

Some people have found using 'I' statements useful in claiming ownership of voice hearing as a thought. This way the voice does not have to keep reminding you of it and may quieten down. If the voice tells me I am worthless, stupid, and ugly. I could say out loud, "right now I feel worthless/stupid/ugly" This is very different to saying "the voices say I am worthless/stupid/ugly" In this way you say what you are hearing and own it as a thought.

### Distraction

There are times when distraction is extremely effective, although this is time limited as it demands your attention, concentration and at times stamina!

Doing something you can become absorbed in can be helpful to 'block out' or have a break from voice hearing. This could be running, digging the ground, aerobics, gaming, singing, swimming etc.

### Ignoring/selective listening

Ignoring the voices may help for some, but what has been found more effective is allowing a certain amount of time each day to really listen to voices and perhaps talk with them. This has been found useful in gaining more control as the voices get their messages across with your undivided attention and you get time off.

### Setting limits

Just like any relationship, setting limits has been found to be of some benefit, allowing time for

listening and times when you strictly need privacy. Talking to the voices and telling them what the rules are and then ignoring them till their allotted time can give a greater sense of control and some compromise.

**Talking with**

Some people have found that exploring their relationship with the voices have helped give meaning to the experience. Voice dialoguing has been found useful for those who have a health professional or therapist willing to help. *Information on voice dialoguing can be found at [www.intervoiceline.org](http://www.intervoiceline.org).*

**Medication**

There are different types of medications that aim to help with voice hearing. Your GP, pharmacist or Mental health service can provide information about the pros and cons of their use. Medication can be used regularly or when required and for different reasons, like to help you sleep.

**Education**

There are many organisations, groups, websites and books that provide information and support on the subject of voice hearing and management of this. Organisations include, Together, Mind, Rethink, Hearing Voices networks and Local Mental health services.

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/information/mental-health-a-z/hearing-voices/>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/5346930.stm>

<http://www.psychminded.co.uk/critical/marius.htm>

<http://www.intervoiceline.org/>

<http://www.hearing-voices.org/>

Voice hearing network telephone for information and enquiries – 0845 122 8641

**Voice hearing exercises**

These exercises are designed to help bring some clarity for the individual around the voice hearing experience. This process is designed to explore the impact and effects of voice hearing on a person's life and what can be done to help. This exercise is done preferably with a support person in order to develop ways forward with support.

**Right now, what are the most difficult parts of your experience?**

The volume, feel I have no control, I respond to them and people notice, they are negative.  
Space to add your own

**Right now, what are the positive things about this experience?**

They keep me company, give me insight, comforting at times, they give me a creatively different life.  
Space to add your own

**What are the things you do to manage the negative effects?**

Medication, loud music, shouting at them, surrendering to them for brief moments.  
Space to add your own

**What are the things you do to draw out the positive effects?**

Seeing them as a gift, thinking and asking for their help and advice, waiting for them to speak.  
Space to add your own

**Looking at what you have written, what bits do you want to keep and can manage and what do you want to get rid of?**

**Keep**

When they comfort me, the good voice, the reassurance that they want what's best for me.  
Space to add you own

**Can manage**

That they're not there all the time, the feeling of being overheard, that they are part of me.  
Space to add your own

**Want rid of**

The negative comments, loudness, feeling that I have no control.  
Space to add your own

**What meaning do you make of this experience?**

That I must be ill, that I'm gifted, this is part of who I am.  
Space to add your own

This exercise is one of a series published in the Whole Life Workbook (Eastern Development Centre 2009). Exercise developed by Tanya Kennard-Campbell.