

GUIDELINES TO COPING WITH DISTRESSING VOICES

Try not to isolate:

Talk to someone about how you are feeling – about your experience. Come to a Hearing Voices Group.

Do something to take charge of your recovery:

The only person who can change things is YOU – take a step on your recovery journey today. If you have always looked to others to fix you – have a good look at this pattern – how often is this helpful really? How realistic is it to think that it will be different this time? It is important to try and do things that will empower you – that will enable you to find coping strategies and gain mastery over the voices.

Plan your Journey:

It is important to think about your destination, what do you want in your life? Mental distress can interrupt one's life at any age, however, some of us forget to get back on the journey of life...we can begin to live our lives. You can **STOP** this from today, and begin to reflect on who you are and where you want to go. Plan to get your life back or plan for a new life, also make a plan for what you want to occur if you experience a crisis. What can you do when things come up/get in the way? Who will you enlist to assist?

Find a friend/supporter:

Although you may, at times, feel very alone and not worthy, there are people who feel the same as you, or who are there to offer a listening ear. Enlist a friend or mentor to be there as a navigator on your journey. This may mean taking a risk of reaching out to someone you don't know (or even someone you do know). Pick someone who is reliable and can listen and support you. They don't have to be a professional but they do need to offer a healthy relationship that allows you to have your feelings (what ever they are) and to support you to express them in a healthy way. They need to be caring, strong with healthy boundaries, to be able to say no, and accept you saying no.

Remember distress will often impact on voices:

Stress/Distress can come from physical illness and health issues, social circumstances, family problems, foods (such as too much caffeine, sugar foods, not enough vitamins and good food), substances such as marijuana and other drugs (both from the street and from the chemist), can all affect us in ways that may make voices experiences worse.

Learn to notice what events in your life are stressful or cause you to have emotional or mental distress.

Have you just had an argument, is your rent late or has someone just snubbed you or tried to control you? No wonder your voices are giving you grief! What help might you need to overcome these life events? It is important for you to learn ways that you personally can use to de-stress, to advocate for social support and to get what you need in order to live. What is good for **YOU**? Perhaps cutting down on certain foods/substances, taking relaxing baths, walks, stimulating talks, movies/music etc? Finding assistance to get work or somewhere safe to live. Take some time to write a de-stress list and a mental wellbeing list so that when you need to you can revisit it: be proactive and take responsibility for feeling better so you can dream a little and reclaim your life.

Distinguish between what the voices say and what others say:

Check-in with a trusted friend or fellow voice group member. If the voices are saying you are "worthless", "no good", and other nasty things – check in with that person as to how they see you. It is important that you recognize that although you may not believe them 'yet', they do have a different perception of you than your voices. This means that the voices are simply offering you their 'perception'.

Tracking Voices and Triggers:

It can be helpful to record what is happening for you each time the voices get bad or get louder, and especially to note what is happening when they quiet down. Tracking helps you to seek if there is a pattern or particular circumstances/people that helps or hinders. For example, while on public transport your voices may get worse and while listening to music they may get better. Once you find this out, then you can begin to learn how to reduce your distress during these times. One hint may be to combine the two; such as listening to music while on a bus. There are different ways of reducing distress that suit different people – going to voices groups is a way to tap into other's ways of coping that may be of some use.

**Coleman, R, and Smith, M. (1998). Working with voices II; Victim to Victor. Handsell Publications UK*

Acknowledgement: Our thanks to the Hearing Voices Network Australia for permission to use their Guidelines.