



Coping With Disturbing Voices

November 2009

Reducing the Fear of Voices

1. Hearing voices does **“not”** necessarily indicate psychosis or “Mentally Ill”.
2. Discover just how common voice hearing experiences actually are.
3. Meeting and sharing experiences with other people who hear voices is an important source of comfort. **You are not alone.**

Preventing Voices from Occurring

1. Triggers are **“Individual”** – every person is different.
2. **Stress and emotional arousal** are triggers – **avoid excessively distressing situations.**
3. Expectation: Knowing the **“frame of mind”** that brings on and/or stimulates voices – **Control the mood, control the voice.**
4. Low levels of **Auditory Stimulation** – Strong likelihood of hearing voices during periods of **social isolation and inactivity**. Increasing auditory stimulation **may mitigate frequency/severity of voices.**
5. **Physical Health Problems** – Irregular diet, certain foods may be a trigger. **General health and fitness can help minimize problems with voices.**
6. **Alcohol and Drug Use** – Drugs are known to **cause hallucinations**. Excessive alcohol use can cause **hallucinations** during alcohol withdrawal (DT’s).

Questions that might help people to identify some of the inner and outer factors that may influence the timing, duration, content and other specific qualities of their voice:

- Do they occur at any particular time, or in any particular situation?
- Are there times they are louder or more aggressive than others?
- Is voice frequency affected by your mood or frame of mind?
- Is what voices say in any way related to the way you feel about yourself at the time you hear them?
- Are the voices affected by your state of general health?
- Are there any other factors which seem to affect the voices?

You might find it helpful to have a friend or counsellor to discuss these questions with, when you are trying to answer them.

Learning to Control the Voices

Techniques that may help a person to control or stop the voices:

1. **Distraction** – Socialising with other people, listening to music, reading, writing, hobbies, exercise, sports etc.
2. **Vocal Activity** – Speaking with someone, humming or singing quietly to oneself. Counting or repeating a sentence under the breath, reading aloud, yawning, gargling, or holding ones mouth open.
3. **Relaxation** – Progressive muscular relaxation, meditation, breathing techniques. Practice remaining relaxed while exposed to anxiety provoking situations.

4. **Interpersonal Contact** – If voices become worse when alone or isolated interact with someone. Engage in conversation (also computer chat sites/message boards)
5. **Physical Stimulation** – Immobility, sitting or lying quietly. Walking, jogging, running, swimming, aerobics etc.
6. **Auditory Stimulation – Earplugs**, place one plug in left ear, if ineffective change to right ear, vary timing, have patience.
Headphones, Listening to interesting, meaningful work is helpful. Volume is not a vital element, but loud and stimulating music also works.
7. **Ignoring the Voices** – Occupy mind with pleasant or positive thoughts. Keep busy. Practice – listen to a friend speak while tv/radio is on.
8. **Dismissing the Voices** – Simple steps, in a loud and clear voice say “**Go away, leave me alone**”. Add emphasis to this command (stamp foot or bang fist on table). Repeat the procedure if necessary.
9. **Thought Stopping** – As soon as voices begin say to them out loud “**Stop**”, think of something pleasant, occupy the mind. If voices persist, again say out loud “**Stop**” and then try and create an image of something pleasant in your mind.
10. **Aversion Therapy** – Wear a rubber band around your wrist and snap sharply when voices begin/Intensify.
11. **Self Monitoring** – Keep a record of:
 - a) When the voices started (Time of day)
 - b) Where you were when voices started.
 - c) What voices said.For effectiveness this must be done each time voices are heard. This can be useful in identifying “Triggers”
12. **Reasoning with Voices** – Set boundaries. Agree on times when the voices may activate.

13. Challenging the Voices – These questions may help in challenging the voices claims and identity:

- a) How are the voices heard? Do they speak with human voices?
- b) If voices make predictions, do they ever come true?
- c) If voices claim to have special powers, what proof is there that they actually do?
- d) If the voices seem to be able to predict the future, are they only echoing what the hearer might have known by other means? (subconsciously)
- e) Are voices statements or comments consistent with their supposed identity? (God like/Angel etc)
- f) If voices threaten dire consequences for disobeying them, are the threats actually carried out?

14. First Person Singular Therapy – Theory, people who hear voices actually are talking to themselves without knowing it. By referring to their voices as “**me talking to myself**”, some people have eliminated them.

15. Selective Listening – If you hear both positive and negative voices, focus on the positive voices, ignoring the negative ones.

16. Cultivating Self-Esteem – Repeating affirmations and consciously practicing positive self-talk can be very effective. To be effective, it is essential that the person reads the affirmations and positive self-statements with full attention to their meaning.

17. Maintaining Positive Attitudes and Expectations – A person’s Expectation that they will hear voices seems to increase the likelihood that they actually will. If you believe you can do something to actively prevent or control the voices sometimes this belief in itself seems to reduce their frequency.

Voice Diary and Coping Strategy Monitoring

As outlined in the previous sections, identifying triggers and understanding what coping strategies work for you are critical elements.

To assist in documenting and evaluating these issues, below are two examples of how to “capture” that important information.

The first is a “**voice diary**” which is a simple form which is helpful in trying to identify “triggers”:

Voice Diary

Date & Time	Preceding events <i>What were you doing?</i> <i>Who were you with?</i> <i>What were you feeling?</i>	What were the voices saying?	Rate your distress level (0 = none, 5 = moderate, 10 = max.)

The second is a “**Coping Strategy Monitoring**” Diary or register. This will provide important data that will assist in identifying which coping strategies work best for you, and in what situations:

Coping Strategy Monitoring

Situation	What did the voice(s) say?	Negative emotion (ie anxiety, anger, sadness) & intensity <i>0 = none,</i> <i>5 = moderate,</i> <i>10 = extreme</i>	Coping Strategy	Helpful (H) or Unhelpful (U)	Negative emotion after coping strategy <i>0 = none,</i> <i>5 = moderate,</i> <i>10 = extreme</i>

You can start with the simpler “**voice diary**” then migrate to “**coping strategy monitoring**” diary if you wish. Or, if you prefer, go straight to the monitoring diary and use it for both purposes. Rule up an exercise book using the above column headings for either/both diaries.

The Importance of Practice

Learning to cope with voices is a process that takes time. The following general suggestions may help to further enhance the effectiveness of voice-control strategies.

Modify the techniques – Find the right strategy or technique that best suits your needs. There is plenty of room for creativity and ingenuity.

Use a combination of different techniques – It is possible that a combination of two or more techniques works best.

Use coping techniques that have already worked – If you already have a particular strategy that works for you, then keep using it. You can also build on or modify this strategy using some of the suggestions outlined above.

Practice the techniques when not hearing voices – Most people will find it easier to learn voice-control techniques when they are not being troubled by voices.

Confront known “trigger” situations – When confidence in controlling voices builds, deliberately put yourself in situations which you know will “trigger” the voices. This creates the opportunity to practice new skills in a situation which, in the past, may have seemed to difficult to handle.

Deliberately induce voices – If you are able to do this, you can use it to create a convenient opportunity to learn and practice coping techniques. If a person discovers they have the ability to make their voice start and stop they actually have much more control over them.

References – Hearing Voices – A Common Human Experience, by John Watkins.