



Coping with Voices: Ideas for and from voice-hearers

Hearing voices? Feeling stuck with them in your head 24/7?

Here are some suggestions, compiled by voice-hearers and allies (such as John Watkins who wrote this awesome book called “Hearing Voices: A Common Human Experience”).

But first, some sage advice (that you could think of as “golden rules” but if you don’t like rules, then call it advice):

1. Your voices are there for a reason.

What that reason is, you may not know yet... but they got there somehow and they serve a purpose in the Universe, like everything. So be curious... Where do they come from? What could they represent? And how could you turn something difficult into a learning experience?

2. Voices can be useful.

Voices are fascinating aspects of the human mind. In some societies and cultures, voice-hearing is seen as a gift that can be harnessed. Many people who hear voices are spiritually sensitive, highly empathic, neuro-diverse or just charmingly odd.

3. Take charge of your journey.

Voices can be downright horrible, but remember, it’s your life. You still have choices, you still have power. *You always do.*

4. Be persistent in trying different things.

There are many, many ways that voice-hearers can learn to cope with and even control voices, and so is important to try lots of different things and to be persistent. Even if the technique doesn’t work immediately, it will often work after some practice.

5. You can live well even if you hear voices.

Lots of people hear voices. Some people just learn to cope and life gets easier. Other people do loads of work on themselves and find the voices either go away naturally or change into nicer ones.

As much as *you* change, the voices will change.

Good so far?

Excellent.

Take a deep breath (just because it’s good for you).

Coping Ideas for Overwhelming Voices

Let's start with the most intense kind of voices - the kind that are constant, loud, hostile, upsetting. You can't sleep, the voices are saying awful things, and worse... you're wondering if they might be right!

When you are hearing these kinds of voices so intensely, no amount of yoga is going to help, right? These kinds of voices may require the following antidote:

Radical self-care.

Why radical? Because you are going to stop trying to pretend you're okay and instead do everything in your power to take care of yourself. Things like:

- Make sure you are staying in a safe, low-stimulus
- Talk to a trusted, calming person
- Take a shower or bath, or do something sensory
- Take deep steady breaths
- Eat nourishing meals
- Take a PRN (as needed) medication if you have any
- Sing, hum or chant (using your own voice can be very grounding)
- Play music or listen to guided meditations to drown out the voices
- Any other grounding activities that help you stay calm
- Go to hospital if that is a safe place for you
- Reduce the fear with positive self-talk

Now is NOT the time to:

- Doomscroll on social media
- Watch scary or overly-stimulating films
- Eat rubbish food or no food at all
- Stay awake all night
- Drink coffee or energy drinks
- Take drugs or drink alcohol
- Talk to people who trigger you

Like all challenges in life, crises don't last forever. Remind yourself that you *will* get through this.

Coping Ideas for Ordinary Times

You're not in crisis and you're functioning, but the voices are still troubling you, interrupting your thoughts and your plans, creating some level of anxiety or depression or in your life.

This is the perfect time to try the toolbox of coping ideas.

And remember Golden Rule #4: ***Be persistent in trying different things.***

Here are some ideas:

1. Track your voice activity and see what the triggers are

You can keep a “voice diary” over a period of a few weeks and look for the patterns like:

- When are your voices most active?
- Do certain things (or people, events) cause them to worsen?
- How do you tend to respond and is this helping or not?

2. Work around triggers

Once you know what triggers your voices, you can work on strategies to *work around* those triggers. Sometimes you can avoid them, sometimes you can't – but if you can't, then how can you reduce distress?

For example, if noisy, crowded shops trigger your voices, maybe you could wear some ear-plugs to reduce the sound.

3. Change your response.

Often people get angry or upset when they hear voices. This doesn't usually help, so try out different responses, such as:

1. Stay emotionally neutral
2. Focus on your breath
3. Be present with your body and feelings
4. Counter negative voices with positive affirmation or mantra
5. Nurture yourself

4. Create a set time to listen to your voices

If you give your voices your full attention for a short period of time each day, they may be happy to leave you alone the rest of the day.

You can listen to them in your head or you can journal what they say. When the time is up (e.g. 10 – 15 minutes), firmly tell them you are going to stop listening now, and you'll come back again tomorrow.

You can couple this with the Chicken Coop (see below).

5. The Chicken Coop / Voice House

Often people hear their voices most at night-time as they are trying to get to bed. If you negotiate with your voices to listen to them at this time, they will probably like this. And then when its time for sleep, you can imagine calling them into a safe place in your mind. You can visualise things like:

- a chicken coop
- a house where the voices would like to live
- a cage
- a box

6. Voice Profiling

Get to know your voices. You can do this alone or with a support person... on a big piece of art paper, map out the names of the voices (or give them a name yourself), and their characteristics, such as:

- What age and gender are they?
- When did you start hearing them?
- Where do you think they come from?
- Do they remind you of anyone?

7. Compassion for yourself and your voices

If you can come to understand your voices more, you could find compassion for them... if they are hostile voices, then know that hostility masks pain and fear. Likewise, cultivate compassion for yourself in your self-talk and actions.

8. Feel the feelings

Voices often represent repressed emotions that we don't feel safe to feel. So logically, if you learn to feel these feelings, you won't need the voices as much.

9. What's the message?

Voices can be messengers – their presence may tell you that you are stressed or in pain. More deeply, they could point to unresolved pain and trauma from your past. Research has found that 70% of voice-hearers report experiencing some kind of trauma before their voices started.¹

10. Challenge the voices / reality testing

The voices often claim to know all sorts of things, be all powerful and have control. But is this true? Or is there some truth to it but another way to view it as well? Find a middle ground if needed.

11. Call on your wise voice

Many voice-hearers have multiple voices and some of them are good and wise. As well, we all have an inner wise voice that comes from our heart. Practice listening to this voice and seek its advice when you feel confused or overwhelmed.

12. Small steps to wellness

Every day, set intentions for how you want to feel. Then take positive actions towards what you want, no matter how small - even if it means "just getting out of bed" or "just having a shower".

The more aligned your choices are with your values, the stronger you'll become.

Small changes can add up over time to something amazing. Have faith that you will get there if you persist.

You are not broken; you are becoming.

¹ Romme, M.A.J. and Escher, A. (2000). Making sense of voices. Mind: UK.