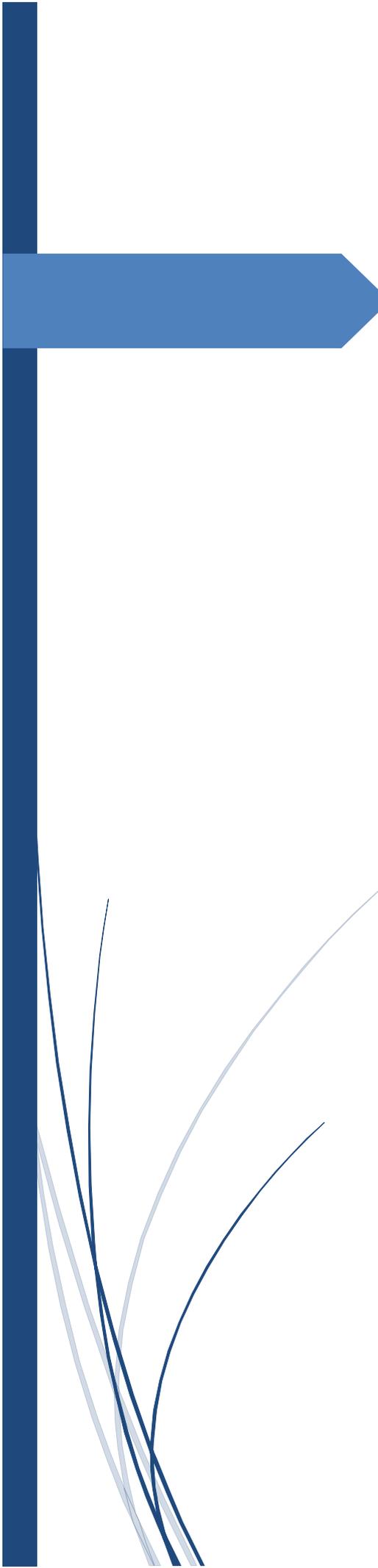


Hearing Voices Stabilisation Pack



**Cwm Taf University Health Board –
Psychological Therapies Department**

Hearing Voices

Hearing voices that other people do not hear is a fairly common experience. It is thought that about *1 in 8 people* will hear voices at some point in their lives. It does not have to be seen as a sign of a serious mental illness. Some people view their voices as a mystical or spiritual experience, or a comforting reminder of someone who has died. In fact, many people live happily with their voices, especially if they are friendly and supportive. Hearing voices is not necessarily a sign of what is sometimes called ‘schizophrenia’ or ‘psychosis.’

Some people hear voices through their ears, in the same way as hearing anyone else speak, while others hear them in their heads or other parts of their body. Voices can be male or female, or perhaps a mixture of both. They can shout or whisper.

Sometimes these voices sound like people you have actually known, or else they say the same things that people in your life have said. It is quite common to have other unusual experiences as well, such as images, visions, tastes, smells and sensations of being touched. Some of the resources below discuss these experiences in more detail.

Voices can become a problem when they are very critical, hostile, dominating, or if they interfere with your life in a negative way. People may be very afraid of threats made by voices, or find it hard to concentrate because of the voice’s constant interruptions. Some people hear up to 30 or 40 different voices, and they may believe that they belong to devils or demons. This is because the voices may seem very real and powerful.

Sometimes distressing voices may be a result of trauma or abuse. People who hear hostile voices are very much more likely to have experienced traumas of various kinds. Voices often appear for the first time after a traumatic event. This means that if you can come to terms with the trauma, the voices may become much easier to live with. You may even come to value them for their advice, comfort or company. In some cases, though not all, the voices may disappear altogether.

Learning to cope better with voices happens in several stages:

1. Understanding and finding out more about the voices. You can do this with a mental health professional, or on your own. This means thinking about when they started, what was happening at the time, what seems to trigger them, who they may remind you of, and so on. The MIND leaflet 'How to cope with hearing voices' can help you with this process, as can some of the other resources listed below.
2. Learning new ways of coping with the voices. Some of this overlaps with the other ideas in this booklet, such as eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep and so on. There are also particular ideas and strategies that have been found useful by people who hear voices. These include distraction, using headphones, listening to music, Mindfulness, focusing on the pleasant voices, setting aside a time of day to listen to the voices, and so on. Read the resources below for more ideas. As you build confidence, it is helpful to be able to stand up to voices that are bullying or threatening. This is often the start of building a better relationship with them.
3. Working through trauma memories. As we have said at the start of the booklet, not everyone wants to do this. It is your choice. You can discuss this with a mental health professional or GP when you feel more in control of your voices.

It is important not to feel on your own with these experiences.

The websites below can put you in touch with the stories of many other people who hear voices. Some people find it helpful to join a small group of other voice-hearers so that together you can work out ways of coping with this experience. Hearing Voices groups are now running throughout the UK, both inside and outside services.

By following these steps, many people have learned to come to terms with their voices and live full and productive lives. You can read some of these accounts in books like '50 recovery stories' or by visiting the websites below.

Hearing Voices Reading and Resources

A very good starting point is to read this leaflet from the mental health charity MIND:

- How to cope with hearing voices. www.mind.org.uk
- There is also a free leaflet on coping with voices at <http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/?p=selfhelp>

These **books** have lots of information about how to cope with voices and other unusual experiences:

- *Coping with Voices and Visions: A guide to helping people who experience hearing voices, seeing visions, tactile or other sensations*, by Julie Downs (2005). Manchester: The Hearing Voices Network.
- *Making Sense of Voices*, by Marius Romme and Sandra Escher (2000). London: Mind Publications.

This **book** has inspiring stories by people who learned to understand and live with their voices:

- *Living with Voices: 50 stories of recovery*, by Romme, M., Escher, S., Dillon, J. Corstens, D. and Morris, M. (2013). Ross on Wye: PCCS Books

The Hearing Voices Network

A confidential help-line, run by voice hearers, which offers support and advice to anyone who experiences voices, visions or other unusual sensations.

Tel: 0845 1228642

Opening Times: 1-4 pm every Tuesday

www.intervoiceonline.org

An international network for training, education and research into hearing voices which works across the world to spread positive and hopeful messages about voice hearing experiences.

www.hearingvoices.org

HVN (Hearing Voices Network) offers information, support and understanding to people who hear voices and those who support them. It also aims to promote awareness, tolerance and understanding of voice hearing, visions, tactile sensations and other unusual experiences.

Hearing Voices Reading and Resources cont...

www.sussexvoice.org.uk

The SHV (Sussex Hearing Voices) site is aimed at people who hear voices, as well as their friends and family. The site is full of resources for voice hearing, including newsletters, discussion forums and links to support groups.

National Voices Forum

www.voicesforum.org.uk/ahearing.htm

Run by voice-hearers for voice hearers. The site includes poetry, art, articles about mental health issues and advice on coping and medication

Online Voices Group

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/voice-hearers

A group where people who hear, or who have heard voices, can share support, coping strategies and other concerns freely and openly.

Eleanor Longden is a voice-hearer who now does training and research. Her talk has now been seen by several million people, and it is an inspiring story about how she learned to understand and live with her voices. You can see it at

- **http://www.ted.com/talks/eleanor_longden_the_voices_in_my_head**

If you have been given a diagnosis of 'schizophrenia' or 'psychosis' but want to find out alternative ways of understanding your experiences, possibly not based on a diagnosis, look at the free download report from the Division of Clinical Psychology at www.understandingpsychosis.net

