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FOUNDATION



# WORKBOOK FOR VOICE HEARERS

MAKING SENSE OF YOUR EXPERIENCE

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## PROLOGUE

The purpose of this workbook is to support you in your choice to explore your experience. This workbook is for people who hear voices to work through alone, but, preferably with someone they trust. It will enable people who have difficulties with their voices to discover a different side to the voices.

This booklet asks you to answer questions honestly (often bravely) in order to gather information about the relationship between voices and voice hearer. The point of this is to develop effective ways of coping with distressing voices.

The book is designed to ask you questions that can help you regain interest and power in your own life. Because Voice Hearing is more common than you may think and because voice hearers come from every walk of life, we know that hearing voices is not a sign of mental illness, but an experience you can grow to understand. This book is not about collecting information. It is purely for you (and a support) to explore the experience of hearing voices.

Along with this booklet, we hope that you will ask questions and gain support from your Hearing Voices Group. The people you meet at group and the facilitators are either voice hearers themselves or have met and supported many voice hearers in the journey of “understanding and changing the relationship with voices”.

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## GROUND RULES

- Voices are real. Therefore, arguments about who they are real for are by definition, pointless.
- Voices in themselves may not be the problem rather the relationships with them, the power they have and their influence in a persons' life may be the problem.
- This book is a record of the voice hearers experience and their plans for the future, therefore it belongs to them.
- It is all right for new coping strategies to be slow to work.
- Many people try different ways of dealing with voices. It is better to try and partially succeed than to never try at all. You are in charge and as long as you try you are no longer the victim...you are the Victor.
- Take your time.

## INTRODUCTION

In our view it is no longer sustainable to think of voices as part of a disease, such as schizophrenia, instead hearing voices can be regarded as a meaningful, real (although sometimes painful, fearful and overwhelming) event, that speak to the person in a metaphorical way about their lives, emotions and environment.

For instance, people experiencing distress as a consequence of abusive or commanding voices can often recognise their voices as those of their actual abusers and the voices have the effect of attacking their sense of self-esteem and worth. It should not be forgotten however, that some people experience helpful and guiding voices, also arising from times of trauma and stress.

Having discovered these kinds of relationships the next step has been to develop techniques to assist voice hearers to focus on their experience and get to know their voices better. This is in contradiction to most psychiatric and psychological orthodoxies that assume that such psychopathological symptoms are not open to insight and talking treatments instead would attempt to distract patients with such symptoms from their voices.

This turns out not only to be bad advice, but actually counterproductive, as such approaches disempowered the voice hearer by denying to them their real experience and disarming them from taking on the voices and standing up for themselves. The new approach requires the voice hearer to make space for the voices, to listen but not to necessarily follow, to engage, but in their own time and space essentially to learn how to control them in their own terms, according to their own beliefs and explanatory framework. This acceptance of the voices is crucial to growth and resolution, voice hearers who have learnt these techniques can now say "I hear voices, they are part of me and I am glad they are".

Hearing voices does not necessarily mean you are sick or ill. 13% of the population hear voices, voice hearing is more common though amongst people who are labelled mentally ill and so we have little doubt that voices in themselves may not be the problem. They can for some people, cause them to have problems that might be described as an "illness". Voice hearing itself is not always the problem. This is reinforced by the fact that more people hear voices and are not distressed but live without distress regarding their voices. In fact, many famous people in our world do and have heard voices.

In 1993, in an interview in the News of the World, the Hollywood actor Anthony Hopkins made a remarkable admission, he claimed he heard strange voices in his head,

*"I've always had a little voice in my head, particularly when I was younger and less assured", he said. "While onstage, during classical theatre the voice would suddenly say, "Oh, you think you can do Shakespeare, do you?" and he added; "Recently, I was being interviewed on television and the voice inside my head said to me, "Who the hell do you think you are. You're just an actor, what the hell do you know about anything".*

Anthony Hopkins locates the root of his voice hearing experience in the insecurity he felt as a child, he says

*"I've always had a little voice in my head pulling me down, particularly when I was younger and less grounded... My school days were not always happy and I wanted to get away from Wales and be someone else. I was stupid at school; I just didn't know what was going on. I thought I was on Mars, I didn't know what they were talking about."*

Many voice hearers share this description of the trigger for the voice experience and a recent survey showed that Hopkins is by no means alone. Social circumstances are related to the onset of the voices and examples of this include unbearable living situations, recent or childhood traumas, conflicts between the ideal and reality of people's lives and the person's overall emotional development.

Others have and do hear spiritual and creative voices. Some people hear the voices of people they have loved and lost. What appears to have the greatest impact is the relationship a person has with their voices.

This workbook is designed to help you begin to explore your voices and the relationship and meaning in your life. It is advised that you do this with support, but if you feel you are able you can begin to explore this by yourself. This is your life, your experience and your genuine interest (like being a journalist or scientist of your own life) will help you grow in understanding and courage.

*“Whenever we feel anxiety and fear we can be sure that we are being courageous”.*



# IDENTIFYING YOUR VOICES

Write about your voices.

*Do you know or have you tried to find the source of the voices? Explain.*

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*Are you hearing voices now?*

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*Where are they coming from?*

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*Can you see them as well?*

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*Are you able to talk with your voices? Explain.*

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*Do you know the gender of your voice/voices?*

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*What are the characteristics of the voices?*

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*Do you also have other experiences, such as seeing or feeling things?*

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*Can the voices, sounds etc. be heard by other people?*

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Over the next few days record the times and situations you hear voices or experience visions or sensations. Use this page or feel free to keep a diary or journal.

DAY	TIME	EVENT WHAT was I doing/WHERE	HOW DID I FEEL

*What do you notice about your voices?*

*When you feel good do the voices go away or have little influence?*

*How do you hear the voices?*

*Is it clear words?*

*Is it thoughts that are inserted?*

*Is it telepathic communication?*

*Is it other people's feelings and thoughts that you are sensitive to feel?*

*Another way? Please explain.*

*Do you hear voices through your ears or some other way? eg. maybe outside you or from another part of your body, eg. stomach.*

*Can others hear these sounds? If not, what is your explanation for this?*

*Can your voices influence you, e.g. stop you doing something, keep you awake, etc.*

*Describe any patterns and other things you understand about your voices.*

## EXPLORING YOUR EXPERIENCE

*How long have you heard voices?*

*When did they start? How old were you?*

*How long have you been hearing voices?*

*Have people told you that you are ill? If so what diagnosis have they given you?*

*Do you feel ill?*

*Do you agree with the diagnosis? Please explain if you wish.*

Don't worry if you disagree or your diagnosis has changed, this is pretty normal and diagnosis is not always accurate but it is important to recognise if you disagree or agree as this can also affect you in many ways that can actually become problems for you.

*Are you able to carry on a dialogue with the voices/voices or communicate in any way? Can you give an example?*

Are you able to indicate who the voices belong to and/or the names you have given them or they are known by? What do they tell you and in what tone etc.

No	Name	Age	Gender	Content/tone	Frequency
1					
2					
3					
4					

Other information you would like to include? eg. does the manner or the tone remind you of anyone you know or used to know?

## THE HISTORY OF HEARING VOICES

Can you describe for **each** voice, the circumstances you first heard them? eg. where, when, how old were you? What was happening in your life? Take your time and just remember all that you can

1	
2	
3	
4	

Here is a list of life events that can trigger voices. Are any true for you?

Circumstances	Yes/No	Age	Voices
Stressful change			
Living on your own for first time			
Moving to a new residence, school, town etc			
Starting studies			
Being unemployed, job changes			
Children leaving home			
Financial problems			
Illness or Death			
Hospital admission			
Death of close friend or family			
Death of cherished pet			
Serious illness of loved one			
Love and sexuality			
Divorce or break up			
Menstruation/pregnancy			
Abortion			
Falling in love and rejection			
Severe tension in home			
Confrontation with sexuality			
Unexpected changes in relationships, ie unfaithfulness			
Religion, mystic, spiritual experiences			
Attending séance, ritual or spiritual event			

Problems with religious community/sect			
Others ?			

*If any of these events changed the nature of a voice, please explain?*

*Have you noticed that voices are present when you feel certain emotions? Circle against this list.*

Insecurity / jealousy / fear / grief / doubt / fatigue / in love

depressed or sad / anger or aggression / happiness

your own sexual feelings / the sexual feelings of others / lonely

*Can you describe how the voices react?*

# TRIGGERS

*Can you describe situations in which your voices tend to be more present? eg. being in crowds, being alone.*

We know that people with friends and allies who know about the voices often find it easier to cope.

*Who knows about your voices?*

*Can you talk openly about the voices?*

*Are there people you would like to know more about and understand your experience?*

*Do you have beliefs related to the voices that you feel others find unusual?*

*How would you describe your relationship to the voices?*

*What would be your concern in telling others?*



## HOW HAVE YOU COPED?

Many people learn to live with voices and through dialogue and other techniques change the relationship voices have to their life.

*List the ways you cope with voices that worry you?*

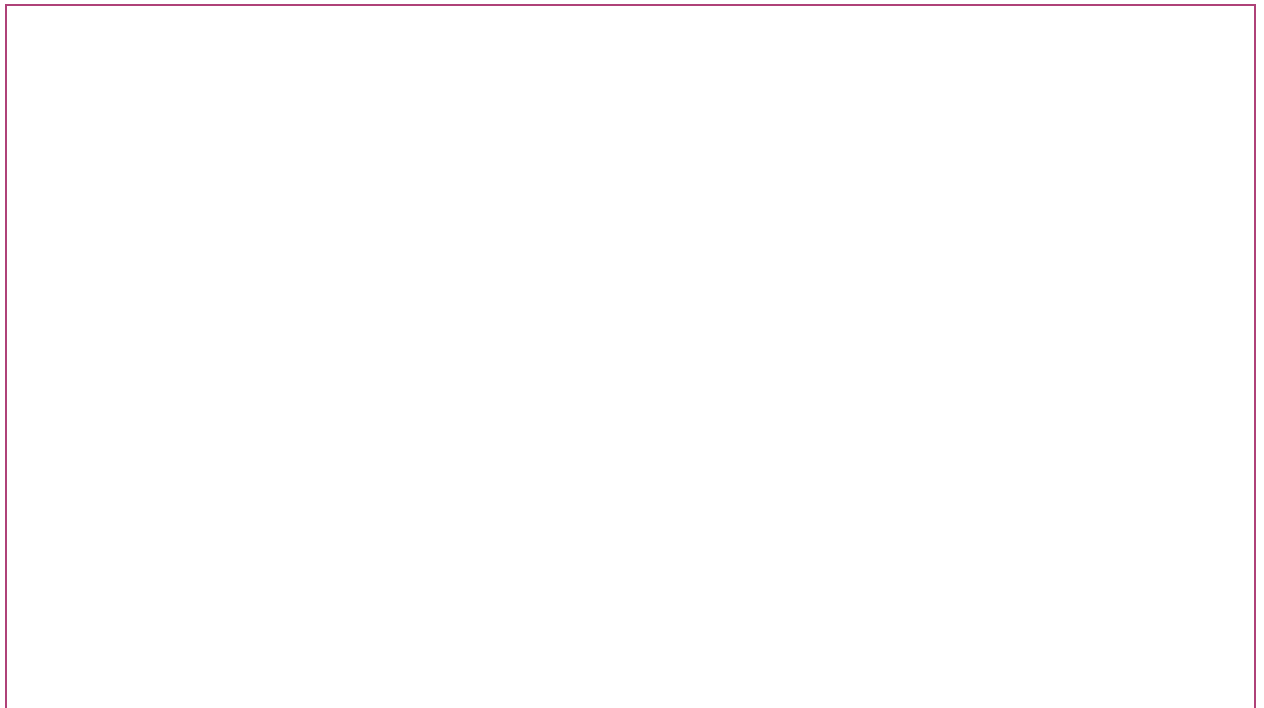
*Have you discovered different ways to cope over the period in which you have heard voices?*

## YOUR LIFE HISTORY

In your own words, try to write about your life from being young until now. Include meaningful or critical people, places and times in your life. Take your time. Many of us never write our story. This is your chance. You can work on your own, but hopefully with the person who has been your support throughout this work book already.



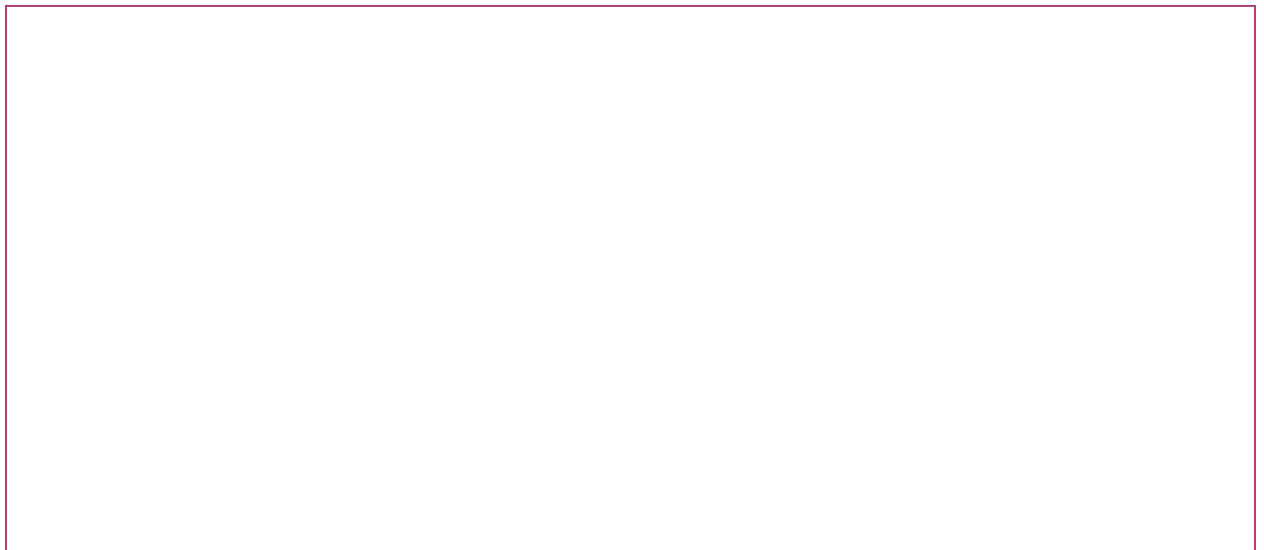
Many people relate their voices to life events. Do you think there is any connection for you and your voices? Explain.



*Has writing your story and recording more about your voices given you any further understanding?*



*What are the real problems for you? Often, it is not the existence of the voices, but the way they influence our life. If you go back to the “I just heard voices” checklist, you may begin to see this influence they have in your life.*



**Moving into understanding is a journey. You may wish to talk to facilitators, others or do your own research on dialoguing with voices. Changing the relationship, rather than getting rid of voices, is often the key to heading toward the life you imagine for yourself.**

**There is lots of information on [www.intervoiceonline.org](http://www.intervoiceonline.org) and there is support and expertise from other voice hearers at the Hearing Voices Group.**