

## Module 7:

How perception changes in psychosis.



### This module will explain:

- what voice hearing is
- how you can start managing your voices

**Authors: Caroline O'Connor, Kevin Duffy, Caroline Brilly.**

Edited by Caoimhe Black and Brian Fitzmaurice



## Plan for today's session

How was your week?

What would you like to talk about today?

## Evaluating today's session

Summary of what we talked about today

What will I do during the week?

How was today for me?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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# What is voice hearing?

## How common is it to hear voices?

It is quite common for people to hear voices.

In a recent study of over 1000 people in Britain who had no history of mental illness, 16% had heard voices. That is one in six people. This suggests that about 10 million people in Britain have heard voices.

Studies of college students found that 37-39% of students say they have heard voices and that these experiences were not related to mental health problems.

Hearing voices can be a normal experience and can happen to anyone.

## Where do voices seem to come from?

Voice might come from objects and things, such as the television or radio, people on the street, loudspeakers or ghosts. Sometimes they seem to come out of the air.

Voices may be very loud or very quiet. They might shout or they might whisper.

Voices can be:

- kind and helpful or
- rude, threatening and abusive

Voices might talk about the person who is hearing them, which can be puzzling. How can the voices know what someone is thinking or doing? They may even tell the person hearing them to do terrible things.

## How do we explain voice hearing?

There is evidence that almost anyone can hear voices. And, in Britain, up to 5.5% of people (one in 20) have reported hearing voices and not using mental health services.

## Hearing voices after trauma

Marius Romme, a doctor in the Netherlands, recognised that hearing voices is actually quite common. He realised that most of his patients started hearing voices after a traumatic event such as an accident or a death. Dr Romme thinks that hearing voices may be a part of a coping process.

## Misinterpreting sounds

Sometimes voices that other people can't hear are misinterpretations of sounds or misinterpretations of our own thoughts. It might sound as if someone else is speaking aloud.

This does not mean that the voices we hear will sound like our own voices. Sometimes it could be the memory of someone else's voice. If you think about dreaming, it is easier to understand this. When we dream, we can hear other people speaking.

Some other examples of sounds we might experience as voices speaking to us are:

- memories of other people speaking
- imagining a conversation with someone we know well
- having a tune in our heads that we can't get rid of

## Talking to ourselves

Some research shows that when people hear voices there is activity in the parts of the brain that control speaking. Other studies show that our speech muscles move when we hear voices. These studies suggest that voices are a kind of inner speech that we experience as coming from someone or something else.

## What makes voices more likely?

These are the three main things that make hearing voices more likely.

- **Drug use**  
Taking drugs such as cannabis, LSD and cocaine can make voice hearing and other hallucinations worse. This can also happen if you are a heavy drinker and stop drinking after a long time.
- **Family history**  
Studies of identical twins show that if one twin develops psychosis, the other twin has a 36% chance of developing psychosis. This percentage is not as high in twins that are not identical.
- **Life stress**  
Stresses such as a death or a trauma appear to cause people to hear voices or experience other hallucinations such as seeing people. One study found that over 80% of older people who had lost their partner thought they saw or heard their partner within a month of the death.

Some people who hear voices can feel shame, guilt and anxiety because they hear voices. This can cause them to hear more voices.

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## What makes voices manageable?

The best way to make voices better is to learn coping skills.

- Discuss your experience with your coping skills therapist. They will help you identify what makes your voices worse and better.
- Talk to your coping skills therapist about any shame, guilt or anxiety you feel because of your voices.
- Try different coping skills and find the ones that help you manage your voices. Practice these skills every day.

## Experiences of living with voices: personal stories<sup>20</sup>

### Eleanor's story

“just a normal human experience”

“There was one big barrier between me and the future and that was the voices. Pat Bracken told me about the philosophy of Marius Romme and Sandra Escher, and about the Hearing Voices Network and that it was just a normal human experience.”



### Jonny's story

“a turning point for me”

“On the way home from Maastricht to Denmark, Trevor (my therapist) encouraged me to make, for the first time, a deal with the voices, suggesting that I would talk to them when we got home if they left me in peace to sleep throughout the night. To my amazement it worked! This too was a turning point for me as I realised that I had some form of control over the voices. It became a strategy that I used on a daily basis.”



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<sup>20</sup> These stories are from “Accepting Voices and Finding a Way Out” in **Living with Voices: 50 Stories of Recovery**, by M Romme and other authors. It was published in 2009 by PCCS Books.

## Mieke's story

“I no longer feel ashamed”

“I then contacted Pieter Langendijk, a psychologist and alternative therapist who is married to a voice hearer. He put me at rest by telling me that hearing voices was not so special. It was not madness, and that one can cope with the voices through a dialogue, and to talk to them and try to make them positive.”

“It helped me enormously to realise that hearing voices is quite a normal experience that one can talk about it and that the voices express what is happening to me.”

“I no longer feel ashamed about the voices, and I can even talk with my family about it. I can do it because I have changed my mind about it being my fault. I had to say to myself over and over again the opposite: I was not to blame.”



## Mien's story

“I had never told anyone about my voices”

“Up to then I had never told anyone about my voices. At the institute I had been in, there was no special therapy for voice hearers. Now I got psychotherapy. Because of this I got more inside myself. I could understand the phenomenon of voice hearing better.”



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# Coping with voices

How you think about the voices you hear is very important in helping you cope with them.



Remember, hearing voices does not necessarily mean you have a mental illness. It is very common for people to experience voice hearing.

You do not have to let voice hearing distress you. You can think about your voices the same way you would think about worry or an itch. You can do this by using a **focus strategy**. This means you focus on the content of the voice or a distressing belief and deal with it directly. This section gives you ideas of how to do this.

## Finding out more about your voices

To help you focus on your voices, you should learn more about them. Take time to do these things to help you learn more.

- Working with your voices:
  - Identify your voices. How many are there? How old are they? What gender are they?
  - Write down what the voices say to you. Write down the evidence for and against what the voice is saying. Think about this carefully.
  - Let a trusted family member, friend or mental health worker talk directly to your voices.
  - Pick a time to listen to your voices. Ask them to leave you alone until that time.
  - Tell negative voices that you will only talk with them if they are respectful towards you.
  - Remind yourself that you don't always have to agree with what you hear, even if it is in your own head.
- Listen for positive voices. They can help you. Look up self-help websites for tips and strategies on managing voices.

## Thinking about what your voices say

Thinking carefully about your voices can help you manage them and manage your distress.

- Consider the evidence for and against what the voices say. Make up your own mind – you don't have to agree with them.
- If your voices make predictions, do they ever come true?
- If your voices claim to have special powers, what proof is there that they do?
- If your voices seem to predict the future, ask yourself if they are telling you something that you may have known anyway. For example, if a voice tells you your sister will ring you on Saturday and your sister has rung you on Saturday for the past two years, the voice is telling you something you already know.
- Do the voices say things that match their identity? For example, if a voice says it is an angel, does it say things that sound like they come from an angel?
- If a voice threatens you, are the threats carried out?

## Preventing voices from occurring

It is possible to learn how to prevent voices from happening.

- Learn what triggers your voices. What frame of mind are you in when you hear them? If you can control the mood, you may be able to control the voice.
- Build coping strategies to help you with stress and negative emotions.
- Keep busy and socialise. You are more likely to hear voices if you are isolated and inactive.
- Keep well and fit. Poor diet and health may trigger voices.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs because they can trigger hallucinations. You may also hear voices and hallucinate when you stop using alcohol or drugs.
- Think about whether your voices are you talking to yourself. Some people have eliminated voices by thinking of them as 'me talking to myself'.
- Believe that you can do something to actively prevent or control your voices. Experience shows that people who do this can reduce or eliminate voices. People who expect to hear voices are more likely to hear them.



## Coping strategies to help you control voices

Many of the coping strategies for general anxiety and worry can also help you control your voices. Here is a list of reminders and some new ideas.

- **Distract yourself.** There are lots of ways you can distract yourself. Meet your friend, do a hobby, exercise, read or listen to music.
- **Use your own voice.** Hum or sing a song to yourself. Count or repeat a sentence or affirmation under your breath. Read aloud or even gargle – anything that makes noise with your own voice.
- **Relax.** Use relaxation techniques such as muscular relaxation, meditation and breathing techniques. Practise being relaxed when you are in a situation that makes you anxious.
- **Exercise.** Exercise can be a distraction, but it can also improve your mood and make you feel good about yourself.
- **Listen to music or other audio.** Listen to things that are interesting and meaningful to you such as audiobooks or podcasts. Also try changing the way you listen. Use only one earplug at a time and change ears every so often.
- **Ignore the voices.** Use distractions to help you ignore the voices.
- **Dismiss the voices.** In a loud, clear voice, say, “Go away! Leave me alone.” If you need to, stamp your foot or bang the table to emphasise what you mean. Repeat this if you need to.
- **Stop the thought.** As soon as the voices start, say, “Stop!” Think of something pleasant. If the voices continue, do it again.
- **Use aversion therapy.** Wear a rubber band around your wrist. When the voices start or get stronger, snap the band against your wrist.
- **Keep a diary.** Write down when voices happen and what is going on so you can try to identify what causes them.
- **Reason with the voices.** Set boundaries. Agree times when the voices can talk to you.

# My Voice Diary

Use this worksheet to make notes about the voices you hear.

**Date and time I heard the voices** .....

**What was I doing just before I heard the voices?** .....

**Who was I with?** .....

**What happened?** .....

**What did I feel?** .....

**What did the voices say?** .....

**How distressed was I on a scale of 0 to 10?** .....

**Not distressed = 0. Very distressed = 10** .....

**Date and time I heard the voices** .....

**What was I doing just before I heard the voices?** .....

**Who was I with?** .....

**What happened?** .....

**What did I feel?** .....

**What did the voices say?** .....

**How distressed was I on a scale of 0 to 10?** .....

**Not distressed = 0. Very distressed = 10** .....

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Using a hot cross bun to work with your voices

## Worksheet

You can also use a hot cross bun to think about your voices and manage them.

### Personal experience: Calvin's hot cross bun<sup>21</sup>

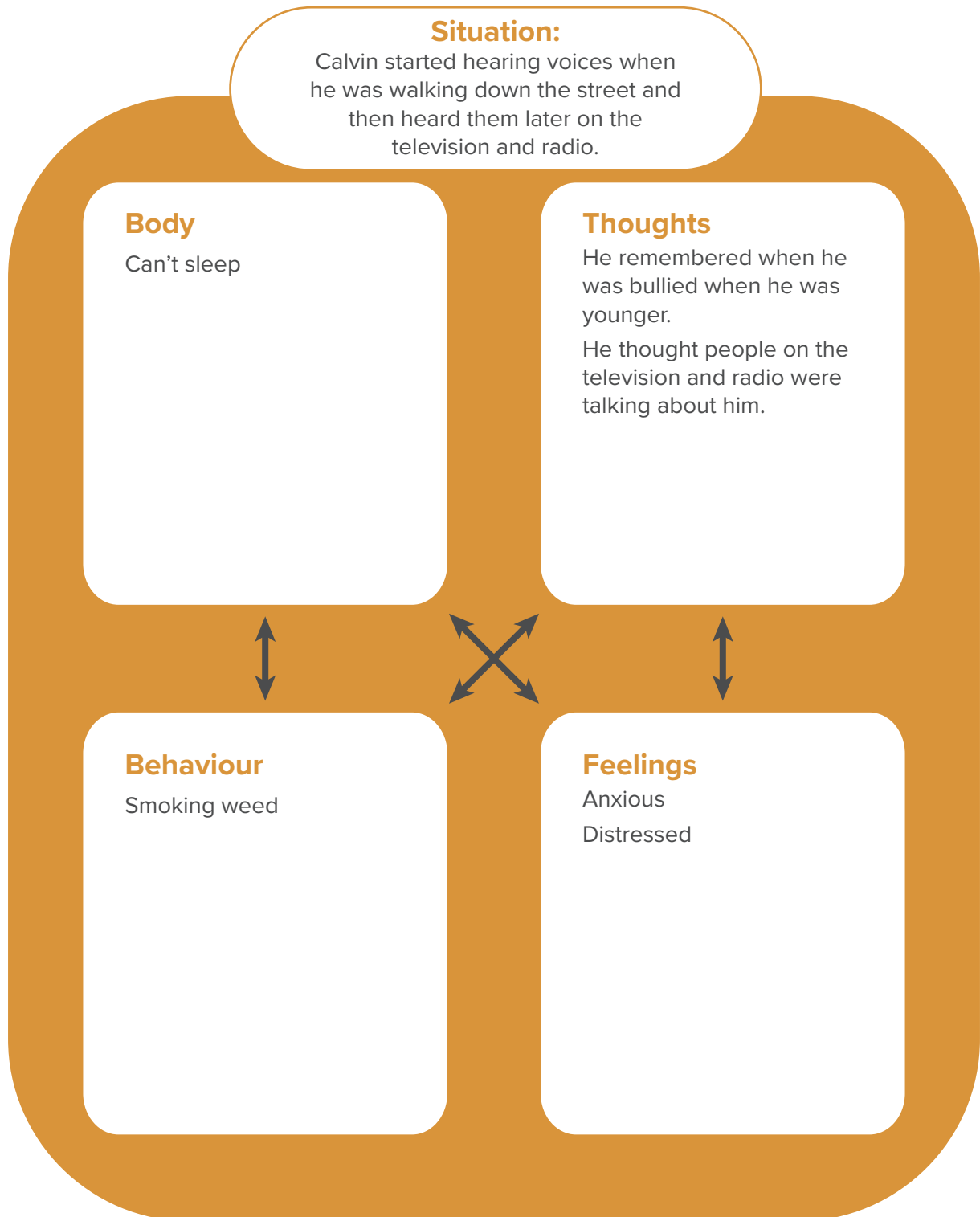
“they're singing about you now”

Calvin was walking down the road last week and heard a voices saying “He shouldn't be allowed out”. Someone should get him. When he looked around, there was nobody there. Yesterday, he was watching television and heard a voice telling him that the newsreader was talking about him. He changed channel to watch Top of the Pops and the voices said, ‘They're singing about you now’.

Calvin started to hear voices when he was 18 years old. Just beforehand, he had begun to recall an incident of bullying from his childhood. He found these memories very distressing and he had trouble sleeping. To try to help himself sleep, and in the hope of feeling calmer during the daytime, he started to smoke a lot of cannabis. When the voices started again he found that they said supportive things to him, such as “You'll be okay’ and ‘It wasn't your fault’. He thought that the voices might be supernatural friends who were trying to protect him.

When Calvin saw his coping skills worker, they talked about this experience. Calvin decided to use a hot cross bun to think about what had happened.

21 This personal story comes from **Think you're crazy? Think again** by Morrison and other authors. It was published in 2008 by Routledge in the UK.



## Finding more information

There are lots of resources available to help you if you hear voices. Here are some online one we recommend.

Hearing Voices Ireland	<a href="http://www.voicesireland.com/">www.voicesireland.com/</a>
Critical Voices Network Ireland	<a href="http://www.criticalvoicesnetwork.com">www.criticalvoicesnetwork.com</a>
Working on Recovery	<a href="http://www.workingtorecovery.co.uk">www.workingtorecovery.co.uk</a>
Intervoice	<a href="http://www.intervoiceonline.org">www.intervoiceonline.org</a>
Hearing Voices Network Australia	<a href="http://www.rfwa.org.au">www.rfwa.org.au</a>
Dundee Hearing Voices Network (Scotland)	<a href="http://www.hearingvoicesnetwork.co.uk">www.hearingvoicesnetwork.co.uk</a>
Working to Recovery	<a href="http://www.workingtorecovery.co.uk">www.workingtorecovery.co.uk</a>
The Ron Coleman Story	<a href="http://www.roncolemanvoices.co.uk">www.roncolemanvoices.co.uk</a>
Hearing Voices Network USA	<a href="http://www.hvn-usa.org">www.hvn-usa.org</a>
Grampian Hearing Voices Network Scotland	<a href="http://www.hearing-voices.net">www.hearing-voices.net</a>
Manchester Hearing Voices Network England	<a href="http://www.hearing-voices.org">www.hearing-voices.org</a>
Deptford Hearing Voices Service South London England	<a href="http://www.dhvs.freeuk.com">www.dhvs.freeuk.com</a>
Keep well New Zealand/Australia	<a href="http://www.keepwell.co.nz">www.keepwell.co.nz</a> <a href="http://www.keepwell.com.au">www.keepwell.com.au</a>
Hearing Voices Network	<a href="http://www.hearing-voices.org/">www.hearing-voices.org/</a>
Recovery Learning Community	<a href="http://www.westernmassrlc.org">www.westernmassrlc.org</a>