



# **Strategies for Coping with Distressing Voices**

## ***FOCUSING TECHNIQUES***

- Accepting that voices are not ‘the’ problem, they are a consequence of a problem. Your job is to find out more.
- Identify your voices - number, gender, age and so on.
- Learn about boundaries to apply to people and your voices (i.e. make a deal with your voices, “be quiet now and I’ll listen later”).
- Listen out for positive voices too - they can be allies.
- Schedule a time to listen to the voices and 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.
- Voice dialogue - let a trusted family member, friend or mental health worker talk directly to your voices.
- Write down what the voices are saying to you.

## ***EMOTIONAL FOCUSING***

- Discuss feelings with another person.
- List emotional triggers.
- Paint / draw emotions.
- Rainy day letter.
- Write a diary.
- Write poetry / prose regarding feelings.

## ***GENERAL IDEAS***

- Don’t beat yourself up, we all make mistakes.
- List achievements.
- Make a contract with your voices.
- Positive self talk.
- Self forgiveness (find yourself innocent).
- Talk to the voices, find out how they feel.
- Wear one ear plug.

## ***DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES***

- Cinema.
- Clean or tidy things up.
- Do puzzles or develop a hobby.
- Exercise – walking / running / dance / beach.
- Gardening / striking pot plants.
- Listening to CDs / mp3 player.
- Paint or draw pictures / posters / cards.
- Playing games / cards / computer.
- Reading out aloud or hum a tune to yourself.
- Sewing / knitting / collecting.
- Shopping.
- Sports.
- Telephone a friend.
- Use visual imagery or count to yourself when trying to get to sleep.
- Visit a friend.
- Walk in shallow water.
- Washing.
- Watch TV / video.
- Write letters.

NOTE: Distraction techniques are useful when voices are particularly distressing or intrusive but are not recommended as an on-going coping technique.

## ***POSITIVE EMOTIONAL TECHNIQUES***

- Go for a picnic.
- Listen to energetic music.
- Look at good things achieved list.
- Look at photo albums.
- Look at the list of good things others have said about you.
- Make a list of your assets or strengths.
- Make an emergency comfort bundle (of goodies).
- Read books, love letters, love poems.
- Read joke books / emails.
- Say positive statements to yourself.
- Record positive statements on tape (your voice).
- Watch films – comedy or inspirational.

## ***POINTS TO REMEMBER TO ENABLE ME TO LOOK AFTER MYSELF***

- Do something nice for ‘me’ each day.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Keep regular appointments with my support network even if I am feeling OK.
- Look up, get perspective, stretch or shift your body.
- Plan my day; ensure I do not have long periods of time with nothing to do.
- Reach out. Talk to someone.
- Take medication as prescribed (in consultation).
- Think about how I am feeling and be realistic about what I can achieve.
- Try to see the grey areas.

## **RELAXATION TECHNIQUES**

- Acknowledge fear, worry, and stress and let go consciously. Trust.
- Count your breaths.
- Dancing / walking.
- Focus on the position of your body.
- Focus solely on breathing / breathe deeply.
- Give yourself permission to relax.
- Guided fantasy dreamtime.
- Learn (figure 8) Yoga breath.
- Listen to guided relaxation on tape.
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Massage hands, feet, head, etc.
- Relax each muscle individually.
- Swimming / floating.
- Yoga.

## **WHAT MAY NOT HELP**

- Being over-medicated.
- Being told not to talk about voices.
- Dreams and trying to get to sleep.
- Labelling.
- Lack of sleep.
- Not having information.
- Other people denying the existence of voices.
- Other people denying your explanation of your voices.
- Professionals thinking they know more about your voices than you do.
- Side effects of the medication.
- Thinking negatively.
- Being socially isolated.

## **COMFORTING TECHNIQUES**

- Buy / pick fresh flowers.
- Change the sheets on your bed.
- Cuddle up to a teddy.
- Eat a favourite food in moderation.
- Have a bubble bath.
- Have a soothing drink.
- Hold a safe comforting object.
- Find a safe space.
- Hug someone.
- Listen to soothing music / favourite soft music.
- Prayer / meditation / creative visualization.
- Put lights / radio on (to sleep).
- Sing favourite songs.
- Sit in a safe place.
- Soak your feet / Radox bath.
- Spray room fragrance.
- Stroke / brush your pet or someone else's.
- Use perfume / hand cream or take a warm bath.
- Use pot pourri / essential oils.
- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Write a diary or talk about how you feel with another person.
- Zen seeing (with a friend).

## **FASCINATING MINDS**

Peer Support Groups for New Zealanders who Hear Voices or See Visions

**For more information visit  
[www.hearingvoices.org.nz](http://www.hearingvoices.org.nz)**

## **THINGS THAT MAY HELP VOICE HEARERS TO COPE**

- Acupuncture.
- Avoiding street drugs.
- Chanting or singing.
- Distraction e.g. reading, and computer games.
- Focusing on the voices.
- Going to Hearing Voices Groups.
- Having good support around you, good friends, family, nurse, counsellor etc.
- Holidays.
- Humour.
- Identifying when you are most likely to hear the voices.
- Ignoring voices.
- Isolating self.
- Keeping a diary about them.
- Keeping occupied e.g. cooking, house chores.
- Keeping physically active and healthy.
- Listening to music.
- Massage.
- Meditation.
- Money.
- Positive attitudes.
- Praying /speaking to God.
- Religion / Deliverance and Healing.
- Sex.
- Shouting at the voices.
- Sleeping.
- Staff listening to you.
- Talking (to a trusted person).

## **THINGS THAT MAY WORK FOR ME IN A CRISIS**

- Ask for help sooner not later.
- Create a personalised crises plan when you are feeling well.
- Cry.
- Find a safe place.
- Hand in my medication / blades or other similar items.
- Have PRN medication.
- Kick boxes around outside.
- Let people know where I am.
- Let someone know how I am feeling.
- Plan safety.
- Remember that situations and feelings frequently change - "This too shall pass" (King Solomon).
- Rest on my bed.
- Shout into my pillow.
- Try to identify how I am feeling.

Hearing Voices Network Aotearoa NZ would like to thank Hearing Voices Network Australia for making the information on this sheet available to us for replication. The original can be sourced at [http://hearingvoiceswa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Coping\\_Strategies\\_Poster.pdf](http://hearingvoiceswa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Coping_Strategies_Poster.pdf)

Please respect the collective minds of Voice Hearers – any replication from this document must acknowledge its source(s) © HVNA 2006. Strategies for Coping with Distressing Voices Hearing Voices Network Australia Auspiced by Richmond Fellowship WA