



# **Advice for Whanau, Friends and Caregivers of Voice hearers**

Hearing Voices is more common than people think. It is a normal but unusual experience. However, it can be a frightening experience for both the hearer and those around them. The person hearing voices may become ill from not being able to cope with them. Family members may be unsure how to react. Research has shown that 70% of people who hear voices can relate the experience to some sort of trauma which has occurred in their lives. This can be physical or emotional trauma. Some research has also linked voice hearing with the use of recreational drugs such as Marijuana, P, and LSD etc.

Voices often respond to what is happening around the voice hearer. Therefore, they can tell the hearer that the person they are speaking to is trying to harm them or that something bad will happen if they talk about their voices.

This can lead to feelings of fear and vulnerability, resulting in the person reacting differently to those around them or becoming isolated from others. It is important at this time that they have someone who will take the time to listen to them and to offer them the loving support they need to deal with their voices.

## **SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS**

- It can be a great relief for a voice hearer to be able to share their experiences with another. Keeping it to themselves is often a burden and makes the voices more frightening to them. Just letting them share what they are experiencing can help.
- Do not judge the person on the content of the voices. Often the voices can be mirrors of the persons own fears. Sometimes they can mirror their own negative feelings about themselves. Offer supportive, positive, practical advice and encouragement. It may be helpful to deal with the voice as if it is a real person. See our information on Coping Strategies.
- Accept that the voices exist, that they are a very real experience for the person. Telling someone to "ignore the voices" doesn't usually work and may cause them merely to stop telling you about them. Or denying they are still there.
- Encourage the voice hearer to keep a diary. This will help them to notice when the voices are bad and when the voices are good. Research by the HVN has shown that the voices are often linked with our own emotions. To write down what they do that may help, what doesn't help. It may be something simple like going for a walk- or calling a good friend, getting a good night's sleep, not drinking too much coffee.
- Do not feel 'sorry' for them, or treat them as though they are different from everyone else. Often voice hearers find it hardest when those around them start treating them as though they are no longer normal (whatever normal is!) Instead empower them by encouraging them to set goals and to continue to do the things that they enjoy.
- Encourage them to look after their health. A bad diet, stress, lack of sleep, no exercise, isolation, can exasperate the voices.

- Look after yourself. Make sure you have time to relax for yourself as well.
- Join a support group, so you can talk to others with similar experiences. SF- Supporting Families offer support groups in New Zealand ([www.supportingfamilies.org.nz](http://www.supportingfamilies.org.nz)).
- Learn as much as you can about hearing voices. The more you know, the more you will understand and can better help the voice hearer.
- Learn to say "no". You must have your own boundaries as to what you are able to do.
- Offering your warmth, support and encouragement, and see the positive aspects of the voice hearer. Applaud every little step forward they take. Let them know that they can get control over their voices. But it may take one little step at a time.
- If there is a Hearing Voices Network Support Group nearby (see our information on peer support groups – Fascinating Minds), encourage them to attend, so they can have a wider support network other than you.
- Join the Hearing Voices Network. We are made up of family, voice hearers, caregivers, mental health workers and concerned citizens. Helping us to better educate the public, and voice hearers about the experience. Reducing stigma, which in itself can be as debilitating as the voices themselves.
- Please be patient with a voice hearer. Think of what it is like when you are trying to talk on the telephone and someone else is talking to you at the same time. It is very hard to listen to either one. It can make concentration difficult. Voice hearers are not stupid, or slow. Usually we are very intelligent.
- Voice hearers can sometimes be made very drowsy and dopey by their medication. This is not a symptom of illness.
- If you can treat their voice hearing experiences without fear, it will reduce the fear and anxiety they feel about hearing voices.
- Lastly Patience, Patience, Patience, and lashings of Love.