



# recovery

# tools

## Dealing with Voices

Many people with mental illnesses hear voices. They can be outside the person's head such as a running commentary on the person's behavior, two voices arguing with each other or voices speaking the person's thoughts out loud. Some researchers think that thoughts are transformed into sounds by the brain.

Other people hear voices inside their heads. These can be experienced in many different ways. Sometimes they sound like an echo in the back of the mind. Many people experience them as thoughts that are sudden and unexpected, which are out of context with what is going on or not something they would normally think. There are ways to cope with the voices and here are a few tips:

**Try not to talk back to the voices in public places.** This will be a quick way for people to know you are suffering from a mental illness and it will stigmatize you. Instead:

**When in public, use your own voice in a normal tone and:**

Try speaking to someone when voices start. Try humming or singing quietly to yourself. Quietly, repeat a common phrase such as "I am safe, I am OK"

**If you are in private, try repeating everything the voices say to you.** The voices may become confused and fall silent.

**Distract yourself** Try reading aloud if you are by yourself. Shift your attention to something outside yourself. Try activities that require your full attention such as reading or watching a sports event. Change your environment to shift your attention. For example if you are inside, go outside, or vice versa.

**Use positive self-talk.** Use "I statements". Say to yourself "I am a good person.". "My symptoms are distressing but not dangerous." "It is not my fault that I was born with a mental illness". "I have the will to bear discomfort". "I know that my symptoms will rise and fall". "I will wear the mask and not let everyone know I am hearing voices". "Feelings are not facts".

**Focus on the positive** Tape record what people like about you and what you think your positive qualities are. Listen to it. Ask your friends to write good things about you on a piece of paper. Look at it when the voices start.

**Use earplugs.** Using an earplug in one ear can help reduce or eliminate voices. Try it in the left ear; if that doesn't work try your right ear.

**Take a time out.** Sometimes being with people can be stressful and overstimulating. Take a short "time out" away from them and then return to being with people again when you are calm.