



# RECOVERY

# TOOLS FOR

## 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 a few 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.

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**Listen to headphones or loud music.** It is important that you are interested in what you are listening to. If you don't like the music the voices are likely to resume. Interestingly, it is not the loud volume that "drowns out" the voices. Rather what seems important is that your attention is focused on music you like.

**Tell the voices to stop.**

- First say "STOP"! (Say this in private.)
- Second, think of something pleasant. This is the key!
- Third, move on to an activity.

**View the voices as your own thoughts.**

For example, instead of thinking, "My voices say I am worthless," tell yourself "Today I am thinking I am worthless". When we use our own voice to verbalize scary thoughts, sometimes the voices don't need to speak back.

**Things to do in Private**

**Dismiss the voices**

Tell the voices to go away. Try stamping your foot or pounding on a table when you do this. You may want to do this only in private.

**Keep a diary of your voices.**

Keep a record of the time, place, day and what you were doing just before the voices started up. By keeping a record for a few weeks, you may begin to see a pattern. For example, you may notice that your voices start up just before visits to your family, after being in crowds, just before work, etc. Once you notice a pattern, you can avoid those situations and thereby eliminate the voices related to those situations.

**Write down everything the voices say.** Sometimes this makes them fall silent.

**Avoid drugs and alcohol** These can make your voices worse. Even caffeine and some over the counter medications can stimulate voices. Check with your doctor before taking over-the-counter medication.

**If you hear voices telling you to hurt or kill yourself** it is very important that you not act on them. Call your therapist immediately.

**Finally,** remember that just because you have a brain disease, you need to be treated with respect, just like other people.

## Community Mental Health Centers

Pikes Peak MHC  
719-573-9514

Spanish Peaks  
MHC  
719-545-2746

San Luis Valley  
MHC  
719-589-3671

Southeast Mental  
Health Services  
719-384-5446

West Central MHC  
719-275-2351

Southwest Colorado  
MHC  
970-259-2162

Midwestern MHC  
970-249-9694

Colorado West  
MHC  
970-945-2241

Colorado Health Networks believes that people can and do recovery from mental illness. That is why we created *Recovery Techniques*. *Recovery Techniques* is a series of tip sheets that are written by and for consumers about issues, opportunities and obstacles people face in their recovery from mental illness. Other tip sheets in the series "Managing your Illness" include "Coping Skills, General Mental Illness information & Relapse Prevention. These tip sheets are available through your mental health center or by calling the access to Care line at 1-800-804-5040.