Voices may seem to be coming from behind you, through the walls even through loudspeakers. Or it can be very difficult to believe at times, voices that nobody else can hear are sometimes misinterpretations of other sounds or more usually thoughts sounding aloud. That doesn’t mean that the voices sound like your own voice, they may be memories of someone else’s voice or voices you don’t recognise. It may be a man’s voice or a woman’s voice. Just like in dreams you can hear people speaking, so voices can be thoughts aloud. Memories of other people speaking or of a tune in your head are examples of sounds you can sometimes quite vividly recall.

It is important to understand that voices cannot make you do anything. Thinking that they can’t control you, might make the voices feel worse initially. But if they are from your mind, it is up to you whether you act on what they say – in other words what you are thinking. But do get support if they seem overwhelming.

There are a variety of ways in which you can lessen the effect of voices or learn to cope with them better.
Where do voices come from?

Voices can occur in lots of different situations:
- when going off to sleep or waking up
- when stopped from going to sleep
- after a bereavement
- using drugs like speed – amphetamines- ecstasy, LSD and cocaine.
- when you have a very high temperature and with other physical illnesses
- severe states of deprivation, e.g. in a desert without water
- with illnesses like severe depression or schizophrenia
- when seriously deprived of stimulation, e.g. under conditions of sensory deprivation,
- In very stressful circumstances in hostage situations
- very stressful events like violent attacks, accidents or intimidation can sometimes imprint themselves on someone’s mind as voices

Supernatural or religious voices

The voice can seem like it comes from God or Satan, some supernatural source or even aliens of some sort. If it does you might want to talk over with someone like a therapist, psychologist, doctor, why you think that that is where it comes from. Has it said that to you itself? Well, is that reason to believe it? Would God say such unpleasant things? Satan (if you believe he exists) might but are you maybe jumping to conclusions that because the things said are so evil that it must be from an evil source - like the devil.

Such evil voices can occur as a result of being depressed or the effects of drugs like speed & cocaine. If you do have religious belief, you may find additional help through discussion with your spiritual adviser.

What can you do about voices?

The following are methods which have been useful at some time or other to people distressed by voices. Some may not be useful to you, but others may..

- switch on the radio
- listen to music (maybe use headphones)
- have a warm bath
- talk to a friend
- go for a walk
- read a newspaper or magazine
- make a cup of tea
- try some vigorous exercise
- just relax - use whatever method of unwinding that works for you
- keep a diary so that you can work out when the voices come on and what starts them off: then you might be able to work out ways of dealing with them
- some people talk about ‘developing a relationship with their voices’ which can help—asking them why they are saying what they say
- maybe talk with or better ask in your mind why they are distressing you—what right they have to invade your privacy
- if they say you are bad, see if you can discuss it with them—talking about your good points also
- some people have found it helpful to allocate a certain time in the day to listen to the voices and then get on with their life at other times.
- if they tell you to do something you don’t want to do, question them—explain that you don’t deserve to be told to do such things and you want to take control of your own life
- perhaps talk with a doctor about how medication might help with the voices
- talk with a nurse, doctor or psychologist about ways of understanding the voices and developing other coping methods

Brain scans of people who hear voices have shown that when the voices are active, there is brain activity in the area that normally indicates that they are speaking. It therefore seem that voices, at least in the people scanned is literally ‘inner speech’.

Studies in the USA have shown that 4-5% of the population hears voices at any one time.

Also in some countries, Hearing Voices Groups have been set up which can be a rich source of support & information.

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