Information leaflets available in this series:
- What is psychosis?
- Psychosocial interventions for psychosis
- Disturbing beliefs and thoughts
- Psychosis and recovery
- Knowing someone with psychosis – carers’ leaflet

**Samaritans** ([www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk))
Offers a 24-hour telephone service.
Tel: 08457 909090

**Scottish Recovery Network** ([www.scottishrecovery.net](http://www.scottishrecovery.net))

**NHS Direct**
Offers a telephone help-line.
Tel: 08454 242424

**MIND** ([www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk))
Offers a telephone advice help-line.
Tel: 0845 7660163

**Breathing Space**
Offers a free confidential help-line for individuals experiencing low mood or worries and wanting to talk to someone (especially males under 40).
Tel: 0800 838587

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**Psychological Views on Psychosis:**

A leaflet for anyone with psychosis or who knows of somebody with psychosis
Hearing voices that others cannot hear is a relatively common experience. Some people who hear voices find it a positive experience, with the voices being helpful or reassuring. For other people, the voices they hear may be experienced as critical or hostile which can be very distressing.

Even though the experience of hearing voices is relatively common, there appear to be myths about why it occurs and who has these experiences. Often looking a little closer at the facts can help dispel some of these myths. It is also useful to think about helpful ways of coping when the voices are experienced as distressing.

Some helpful tips for coping with hearing voices:

- Remember hearing voices is not uncommon. In fact, it is as common as being left-handed.
- Talk to someone you know about what you are thinking and how you are feeling.
- Minimise stress in your life.
- Keep good sleeping and eating habits.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or taking illegal drugs.
- Keep doing activities that you find enjoyable or relaxing.
- Try using relaxation techniques e.g. breathing exercises
- Distract yourself by listening to the radio, watching TV or playing music.
- Try different things and see what works for you
So, it can be useful to try to understand and make sense of the voices from a personal perspective. It is often useful to talk to other people about the experience and the feelings that hearing can arouse.

Relaxation is a very good way of coping with the stress associated with the voices. When the voices are distressing or interruptive, distraction techniques may also help relieve distress in the short-term, by helping you take control of the situation. So listening to music, going for a walk or reading a book may give you a temporary break from the voices.

**Facts:**
- 10% of the population report hearing voices that others cannot hear.
- Some famous people who have heard voices include Joan of Arc, Winston Churchill and Anthony Hopkins.
- Hearing voices can occur in the absence of mental illness.
- Auditory hallucinations is a medical term for hearing voices: they mean the same thing.
- In some parts of the world, hearing voices is seen as a gift that gives the person special status within their community.

**Myths:**
- Only people with schizophrenia hear voices.
- People who hear voices are mad.
- Once you hear voices you will always hear voices - there is nothing you can do about it.
- Medication is the only way to cope with hearing voices.
20% of people who hear voices find them reassuring or helpful, but the majority of people experience them as threatening or punishing. The voices can be familiar or unfamiliar to the person, and may be occasional or persistent. They may also be critical or tell the hearer to do something they do not want to do. Voices may also speak to each other if there is more than one voice. They may seem to know things about the voice-hearer that nobody else knows. Hearing voices can be a very frightening experience that many people find anxiety-provoking and disruptive to their life.

Traditionally, hearing voices was viewed as a symptom of mental illness i.e. schizophrenia. However, people have begun to recognise that the voices can often be understood in the context of a person’s life and reflect memories, thoughts or feelings that the person may be finding hard to deal with.

For many, extreme stress seems to trigger the experience of hearing voices for the first time. This stress may relate to a trauma that occurred during childhood or more recent personal events such as a bereavement, isolation or torture.

There is also evidence to say that long-term use of cannabis or alcohol can increase the likelihood of hearing voices.

A common way that people deal with voices is to pretend that it is not happening to them, withdraw socially, self-harm or block them out with alcohol or drugs. These strategies may seem to help in the short-term, e.g. by providing temporary relief, but in the long-term they can actually make the experience of hearing voices worse.

To help someone cope, it can be important to understand some of the key triggers to the voices. Think about the following questions:

- Does a certain thought or feeling trigger them?
- Does what you do affect how often they occur or how much they bother you?

Using a diary may help to identify any triggers for the voices and factors that make them better or worse.

There is also evidence that a person’s view of their voices can influence how they cope. Those who have managed to develop an accepting attitude towards their voices seem to cope more positively than those who deny their experiences.

i.e. If you hear a voice calling your name and you think “I’m day-dreaming, I must be really tired” you are likely to feel relaxed. You may respond to the voices by having an early night. If, however, you hear a voice calling your name and you think “they’re out to get me”, you are likely to feel afraid and hide yourself away.