

There are lots of different ways to manage distressing voices and experiences. Here we've collected the six coping strategies that people seem to find the most useful.

1 Listening to music, podcasts or audiobooks

Listening to music, podcasts or audio books can be a way of distracting yourself from the voices. It's a useful strategy because it's something that can be done at home or out and about, with headphones.

"Music has been an incredible help for me. Drowning out the noise with a better, more beautiful noise."

"If I'm at home and start hearing a lot of voices talking to me I often put on an audiobook so I can listen to the audiobook's words rather than the voices."

"I have playlists set up on my phone. Metal for when I need strength to help withstand the voices or walk through town when I feel worried. Upbeat music when I want to counter them. Sad music when I want to feel that someone understands me. The wrong kind of music can make my voices worse, so I've learnt to prepare."

2 Grounding techniques and objects

Grounding techniques help to shift the focus away from distressing voices to other sensory information, whether that is inside or outside your body. They are things you can do to bring yourself into contact with the present moment and feel 'grounded' in the world.

Grounding objects are things people hold or touch that they can focus on. Some people choose objects with a special meaning or memory attached to them, or objects with soothing or interesting textures.

"I carry around a small stone in my pocket for when I'm out. I find it helpful to hold it and move it between my fingers when my 'voices' start. When I'm at home I usually try self-soothing methods such as holding a warm toy and using a blanket."

Examples you might like to try:

The **5-4-3-2-1 technique**. Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can smell, 2 things you can feel, and one thing you can taste.

Take ten slow deep breaths. Focus your attention fully on each breath, on the way in and on the way out. Say the number of breaths to yourself each time you exhale.

Go for a walk. Really concentrate on the way your feet feel on the ground.

3 Exercise

Exercise can be a useful way to distract from voices, use up energy or feel more connected to your body. Some people find activities like kick-boxing or shadow boxing helpful as a way to express strong feelings. But it doesn't have to be high energy – many people find gentle stretching or walking a good way to focus on something else.

"The routine of exercising even just twice a week really helped me. Find something you enjoy – for me it was a body balance class with a yoga element."

"The punch bag has multiple uses when you're a voice-hearer. Not only does it express anger, it also helps remind me that I'm in an adult body and that I'm strong."



4 Challenging the voices

Saying 'no' to commanding voices can be a source of power and control. If 'no' feels too difficult, saying 'not yet' in order to delay responding or acting on their commands could feel more doable. Other things that might be useful when dealing with difficult voices:

- **"Reality testing"**. This involves checking the reality of what the voice is saying, for example, by asking a friend or trusted ally what they think.
- **Setting up appointments or drawing up contracts with the voices**. Saying things like "I'll only listen to you for an hour in the evenings", or "I can give you my time and attention before work in the mornings, but when I'm at work you must give me space."
- **Scaling back**. Gradually reducing the time and attention the voices receive each day/week.



5 Getting creative

Many people turn to writing, arts, craft and other creative activities as a means of expressing what their voices look like, say, feel or think, and the thoughts, feelings, ideas and sensations that they bring up.

"At times when the voices were at their worst, I usually tended to draw or paint. Or I tried to put into my drawings what they may look like."

"Writing about my experiences has been a powerful way to process and reflect"

"My voices calm down a lot when I am hand sewing ... it is just another way of mark making and getting my emotions (and theirs) out."

6 Connecting with others

Connecting and sharing experiences with other voice-hearers through peer support groups, 1:1 conversations or an online forum can be extremely validating and provide an important source of support.

"Meet-up groups can be useful, and help reduce isolation... It doesn't have to be a mental health space."

"I think trying to be around people that are experiencing similar things helps you not to feel so alone with it. I also think it's important people understand that everyone will cope with their voices differently - there's not one solution that 'fits all' so if something doesn't help you, that's ok - it doesn't mean nothing will help, it's just about finding what works for you as an individual."

For more information about Hearing Voices Groups in your area and peer support online you might try:

UK Hearing Voices Network:
hearing-voices.org

Voice Collective:
voicecollective.co.uk

More ideas on ways to cope with difficult voices are available here:
[understandingvoices.com/coping-with-voices](https://www.understandingvoices.com/coping-with-voices)