

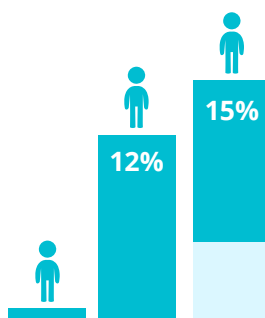
1 Hearing voices doesn't mean you have schizophrenia or psychosis

Voice-hearing is associated with a range of psychiatric diagnoses, including schizophrenia, psychosis, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, dissociative identity disorder, PTSD, anorexia and severe depression. **But hearing voices is not a sign that someone has a mental health problem.** Some voice-hearers live well with their experiences without ever needing psychiatric help.

Have you ever heard someone calling your name only to find that there is nobody there? Or heard whispers as you drift off to sleep?

Hearing voices is much more common than people think. It occurs in lots of different situations including:

- Imaginary friends in childhood
- Bereavement
- As part of spiritual or religious experience
- Extreme physical conditions, prolonged periods of isolation, and sensory or sleep deprivation.



5-15% of adults will experience hearing voices at some point in their lives

Around 12% of children hear voices or have other unusual experiences

Up to 1% of people have voice-hearing experiences that occur at least once a month and no need for psychiatric care

50% of people have unusual perceptual experiences after multiple days of sleep or sensory deprivation

50%

2 Voice-hearing can be a positive experience

Hearing voices is an experience that is very distressing for many people. **But it is a common misconception that voices are always loud, aggressive and command people to do dangerous things.** Some voices are positive, encouraging and supportive, or just neutral and not emotionally charged at all.

Did you know?

Hearing or seeing a dead loved one or spouse is a **common reaction to bereavement**, and can be a source of consolation and support for people who are grieving. A Swedish study of 50 recently bereaved people found that:

"Since age three, I've heard voices, and participated in conversations in my head. I thought everyone did. These were mostly good internal friends, but there were some scary voices as well."

"My voice... tells me positive things - assures me that I am capable of overcoming my fears. He's always telling me he's here beside me."



30% of participants were hearing the voice of their deceased spouse one month after death

6% were still hearing them 12 months later.

3 Hearing voices isn't just about hearing sounds

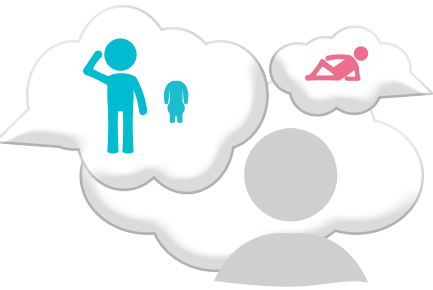
For some people, hearing voices is similar to hearing someone speaking in the same room. Other people experience purely 'thought-like' or 'soundless' voices which don't sound like people talking out loud. Some people see, smell and feel their voices in particular parts of the body. Voices can also be accompanied by other sensations such as feeling hot or tingling in the hands and feet.

"I did not hear the voices aurally. They were much more intimate than that, and inescapable..."

"My body and brain felt like they were on fire when I heard the voices; I had constant tingling sensations throughout my extremities and shock-like sensations in my solar plexus."



Voices often have their own **personalities**. Some people hear voices that are like the voices of people they know or have known; others experience the voices of complete strangers, animals or entities.



"I hear distinct voices. Each voice has their own personality. They often try to tell me what to do or try to interject their own thoughts or feelings about a certain subject or matter...My voices range in age and maturity. Many of them have identified themselves and given themselves names. I often carry on conversations with them. Sometimes these are pleasant other-times they are not."

4 There are lots of different ways of finding meaning in voices

People have lots of different ways of understanding or making sense of voices. While some people view their voices as a symptom of an illness, others see them as unusual but ultimately **meaningful experiences** that have their roots in traumatic life events. For others still, voices are an important part of **spiritual or religious experience**, or linked to **creative processes** such as writing, art and music making.

5 If your voices are distressing, support is available to help you cope

If you are struggling with your voices and finding them hard to manage, you may find the following websites useful:

The Hearing Voices Network: hearing-voices.org

An English organisation offering information, support and understanding to people who hear voices and those who support them.

MIND: tinyurl.com/y26mdury

Information about hearing voices from one of the UK's leading mental health charities.

You could also look at the Coping Strategies section of Understanding Voices: understandingvoices.com/living-with-voices/coping-with-voices.org

Sources:

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