

Sometimes it's difficult for people to know what to say when someone confides that they are hearing voices, especially if their voices are overwhelming. It's OK to worry about not knowing how to react or saying 'the wrong thing'.

If you support someone who hears voices, you might find these suggestions helpful when it comes to talking about their experiences.

1 Listening and believing

While hearing voices is an unshared experience, and you'll never be able to hear the voices that someone else hears, it is no less real than any other. **Listening to, and believing in, the reality of their voices can be extremely validating.**

"It's important to me that my friends and family recognize that the voices I hear and visions I see are my reality - I'm not making them up; they're not figments of my imagination ... But believing me doesn't mean that you have to believe that the voices are telling the truth."

"I find it hard to talk when people take a hugely different view of my experience to the one I take. A bit of gentle questioning is fine, but it's unhelpful if people don't believe my experience or deny my interpretation."



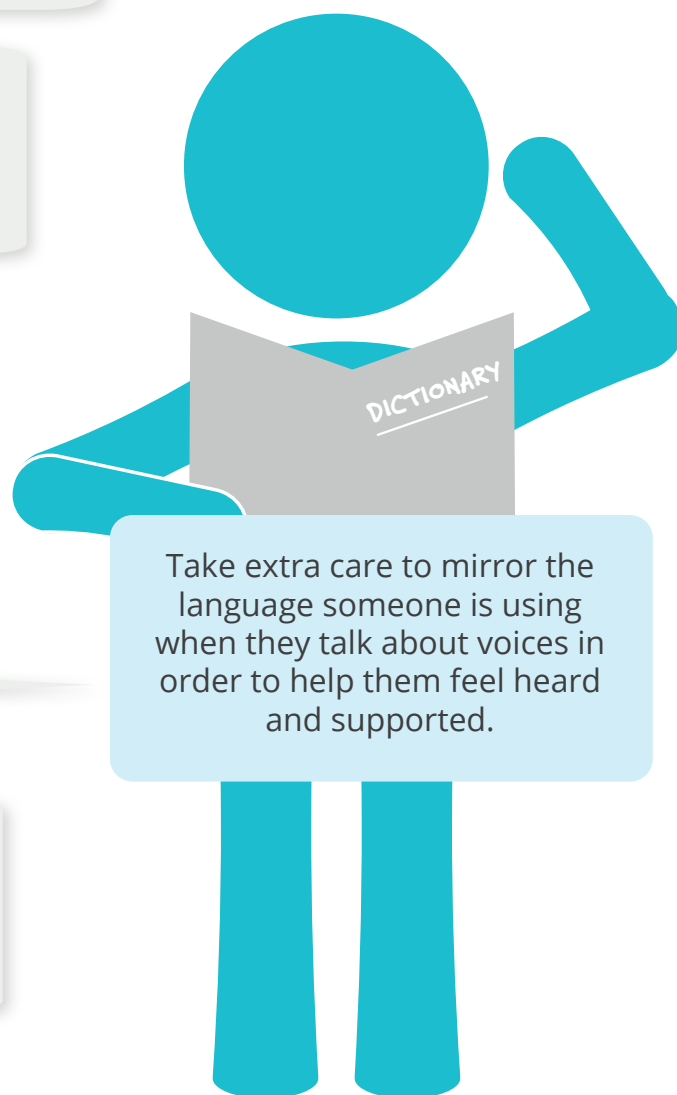
"I find it helpful when my family and friends validate my experiences instead of challenging them."

2 Being mindful of language

It's important to be mindful of the words and phrases used in conversations about hearing voices. Some voice-hearers view their voices as symptoms of an illness, while others see them as communications from spirits, Gods, demons, aliens or other entities.

"It helps if people have an open mind and don't just view it as me being 'ill'."

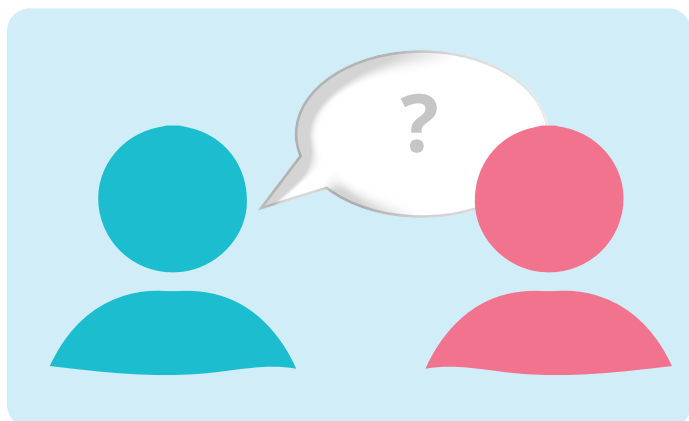
"I found it frustrating that my old CPN called my voices 'intrusive thoughts' - because they seemed to think if I thought this the voices would be easier to ignore. But it felt dismissive of what I was going through."



Take extra care to mirror the language someone is using when they talk about voices in order to help them feel heard and supported.

3 Being curious

Many voice-hearers find it helpful when people **show an interest** in getting to know more about their experiences, and the impact of these. Asking **gentle, open-ended questions** about what it is like and how it feels to hear voices, how voices affect daily life, and how you might provide support can reassure them that you're open to finding out more.

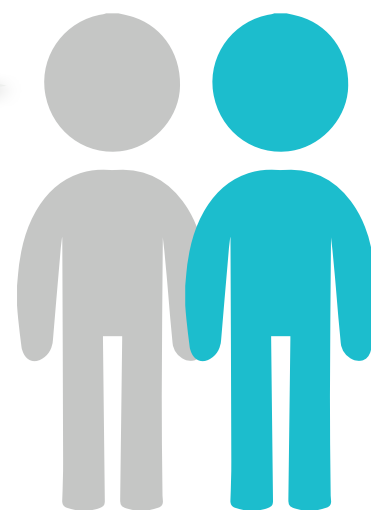


"I like it if people take time to get to know me and my voices. I also like it if people ask me about my feelings, rather than what the voices are saying right now, as it makes it hard to focus on anything if I'm trying to interpret. I don't like it when people tell me what it means, but asking if I've considered a viewpoint can be helpful. Any question is OK if people are genuinely interested and not rude."

4 Just 'being there'

When someone confides in you that they're hearing voices, **it can be hard not to feel that you need to help find a way to fix things**, particularly if that person seems to be suffering. But rather than attempt to challenge the voices or solve their problems, sometimes it is more helpful just to be there for someone, and listen to them.

"To have someone just be beside me and not be scared about saying the wrong thing is nice."



5 Know that things can get better

If someone is struggling with the voices they hear, it can be hard to hold on to the idea that things can get easier. But many people have found different ways of dealing with their experiences. For some, the voices may disappear or stop. For others, the voices may remain but change in a way that makes them less distressing (they may change in tone, character, what they say or how often they say it). Sometimes the voices say similar things, but the person themselves feels more equipped to manage them. Whatever the future holds, it is possible for a person's experience of, and relationship to, voices to change over time.

More ideas on how to talk about voices are available here:

understandingvoices.com/talking-about-voices