# Strategies for Coping with Distressing Voices

## Focusing Techniques
- Accepting that voices are not ‘the’ problem, they are a consequence of a problem. Your job is to find out more.
- Identify your voices - number, gender, age and so on.
- Learn about boundaries to apply to people and your voices (i.e. make a deal with your voices, “be quiet now and I’ll listen later”).
- Listen out for positive voices too - they can be allies.
- Schedule a time to listen to the voices and ask them to leave you alone until that time.
- Tell negative voices that you will only talk with them if they are respectful towards you.
- Voice dialogue - let a trusted family member, friend or mental health worker talk directly to your voices.
- Write down what the voices are saying to you.

## Distraction Techniques
- Cinema.
- Clean or tidy things up.
- Do puzzles or develop a hobby.
- Exercise – walking / running / dance / beach.
- Gardening / striking pot plants.
- Listening to CDs / mp3 player.
- Paint or draw pictures / posters / cards.
- Playing games / cards / computer.
- Reading out aloud or hum a tune to yourself.
- Sewing / knitting / collecting.
- Shopping.
- Sports.
- Telephone a friend.
- Use visual imagery or count to yourself when trying to get to sleep.
- Visit a friend.
- Walk in shallow water.
- Washing.
- Watch TV / video.
- Write letters.

**NOTE:** Distraction techniques are useful when voices are particularly distressing or intrusive but are not recommended as an on-going coping technique.

## Positive Emotional Techniques
- Go for a picnic.
- Listen to energetic music.
- Look at good things achieved list.
- Look at photo albums.
- Look at the list of good things others have said about you.
- Make a list of your assets or strengths.
- Make an emergency comfort bundle (of goodies).
- Read books, love letters, love poems.
- Read joke books / emails.
- Say positive statements to yourself.
- Record positive statements on tape (your voice).
- Watch films – comedy or inspirational.

## Points to Remember to Enable Me to Look After Myself
- Do something nice for ‘me’ each day.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Keep regular appointments with my support network even if I am feeling OK.
- Look up, get perspective, stretch or shift your body.
- Plan my day; ensure I do not have long periods of time with nothing to do.
- Reach out. Talk to someone.
- Take medication as prescribed (in consultation).
- Think about how I am feeling and be realistic about what I can achieve.
- Try to see the grey areas.

## Emotional Focusing
- Discuss feelings with another person.
- List emotional triggers.
- Paint / draw emotions.
- Rainy day letter.
- Write a diary.
- Write poetry / prose regarding feelings.

## General Ideas
- Don’t beat yourself up, we all make mistakes.
- List achievements.
- Make a contract with your voices.
- Positive self talk.
- Self forgiveness (find yourself innocent).
- Talk to the voices, find out how they feel.
- Wear one ear plug.
### Things That May Help Voice Hearers to Cope

- Acupuncture.
- Avoiding street drugs.
- Chanting or singing.
- Distraction e.g. reading, and computer games.
- Focusing on the voices.
- Going to Hearing Voices Groups.
- Having good support around you, good friends, family, nurse, counsellor etc.
- Holidays.
- Humour.
- Identifying when you are most likely to hear the voices.
- Ignoring voices.
- Isolating self.
- Keeping a diary about them.
- Keeping occupied e.g. cooking, house chores.
- Keeping physically active and healthy.
- Listening to music.
- Meditation.
- Money.
- Positive attitudes.
- Praying /speaking to God.
- Religion / Deliverance and Healing.
- Sex.
- Shouting at the voices.
- Sleeping.
- Staff listening to you.
- Talking (to a trusted person).

### Things That May Not Help

- Being over-medicated.
- Being told not to talk about voices.
- Dreams and trying to get to sleep.
- Labelling.
- Lack of sleep.
- Not having information.
- Other people denying the existence of voices.
- Other people denying your explanation of your voices.
- Professionals thinking they know more about your voices than you do.
- Side effects of the medication.
- Thinking negatively.
- Being socially isolated.

### Relaxation Techniques

- Acknowledge fear, worry, and stress and let go consciously.
- Count your breaths.
- Dancing / walking.
- Focus on the position of your body.
- Focus solely on breathing / breathe deeply.
- Give yourself permission to relax.
- Guided fantasy dreamtime.
- Learn (figure 8) Yoga breath.
- Listen to guided relaxation on tape.
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Massage hands, feet, head, etc.
- Relax each muscle individually.
- Swimming / floating.
- Yoga.

### Comforting Techniques

- Buy / pick fresh flowers.
- Change the sheets on your bed.
- Cuddle up to a teddy.
- Eat a favourite food in moderation.
- Have a bubble bath.
- Have a soothing drink.
- Hold a safe comforting object.
- Find a safe space.
- Hug someone.
- Listen to soothing music / favourite soft music.
- Prayer / meditation / creative visualization.
- Put lights / radio on (to sleep).
- Sing favourite songs.
- Sit in a safe place.
- Soak your feet / Radox bath.
- Spray room fragrance.
- Stroke / brush your pet or someone else’s.
- Use perfume / hand cream or take a warm bath.
- Use pot pouri / essential oils.
- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Write a diary or talk about how you feel with another person.
- Zen seeing (with a friend).

### Fascinating Minds

**Peer Support Groups for New Zealanders who Hear Voices or See Visions**

For more information visit [www.hearingvoices.org.nz](http://www.hearingvoices.org.nz)

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