



## Hearing Voices

The aim of this leaflet is to provide information about voice-hearing. It outlines what is meant by 'hearing voices' and explores possible reasons why people may experience this. You may find it useful to discuss this information with your case manager, or another member of the Lancashire Early Intervention team.

### **What do we mean by hearing voices?**

The term 'hearing voices' (or 'auditory hallucinations') can be used to describe hearing voices, or sometimes, other sounds or noises, that are not experienced by other people.

There are many different ways to hear voices. Voices can be experienced inside or outside the head. Some people hear voices that are friendly and encouraging, and have experiences which comfort, inspire or make them laugh. Others hear voices that are nasty and critical, and have experiences that are more frightening and confusing. Sometimes the voice can tell the hearer to carry out certain acts.

### **Does this happen to anyone else?**

Research has shown that there are many people who hear voices, some of whom cope with their voices well without any intervention. There are many famous people throughout history who have heard voices. They include Jesus, Ghandi and Winston Churchill.

Although people may think that hearing voices is unusual, various research suggests that this is, in fact, a common psychological phenomenon that may potentially be experienced by anyone.

Research has shown that:-

- ❖ 10 - 25% of people have had such experiences at some point in their lives.
- ❖ 4 - 5% of people currently experience hearing voices. This is over 3 million people in Britain.
- ❖ One third of a sample of people reported having heard a voice speaking their thoughts aloud.
- ❖ 7 out of 10 people in a study reported that they have heard someone call their name when no-one is there.

### **Why does it happen?**

Some people may be more vulnerable to hearing voices than others. Research has suggested that 70 - 77% of people who hear voices do so after experiencing a traumatic event (for example, physical or sexual abuse). So, hearing voices may be part of a coping process. Traumatic / difficult events can leave their mark on us - changing how we feel about ourselves and other people. It's this - the difficult thoughts and feelings we carry with us - that may be linked to the experience of hearing voices.

Other things increasing a person's vulnerability may include biological factors, a family history of mental illness, life events such as bereavement, substance use and sleep deprivation.

Often stress plays a part in triggering voices. This means that any of us could potentially experience hearing voices when we become overwhelmed, stop being able to cope, or begin to rely on ways of coping that are unhelpful.

### **Further information**

Below are some useful websites with information on hearing voices:-

- ❖ [www.voicecollective.co.uk/voices](http://www.voicecollective.co.uk/voices)
- ❖ [www.intervoiceonline.org/2007/9/8/some-interesting-facts-about-the-experience-of-hearing-voices](http://www.intervoiceonline.org/2007/9/8/some-interesting-facts-about-the-experience-of-hearing-voices)
- ❖ [www.hearingvoices.org.uk/info\\_carersleaflet1.htm](http://www.hearingvoices.org.uk/info_carersleaflet1.htm)
- ❖ [www.rethink.org/about\\_mental\\_illness/mental\\_illnesses\\_and\\_disorders/coping\\_with\\_hearing.html](http://www.rethink.org/about_mental_illness/mental_illnesses_and_disorders/coping_with_hearing.html)

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